

FOLK FICTION:
YIDDISH AND THE NEGOTIATION OF LITERARY LEGACY
IN GERMANY AFTER 1945

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ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Ruth von Bernuth)

Following the Holocaust, when Eastern European Yiddish-language culture was all but destroyed and millions of Yiddish speakers were murdered, the language took on new significance in German culture. Whether it be as a symbol of proletarian solidarity in East German theater or as part of West German literary engagement with American Jewish culture, Yiddish shows up all over postwar German literature and performance. Building on scholarship from German Studies, Yiddish Studies, and cultural and political history, the following study connects the study of Yiddish in German literature after 1945 both to discourses from the early 20th century and to broader discussions on German identity and literary legacy in the postwar era. I am primarily interested in the reinvention of the folk tradition following the Nazi era and the creation of a usable literary past at a time in which the German political and geographic present was in flux. This dissertation explores these issues by looking at the ways in which German-language authors on both sides of the Berlin Wall, and those writing after its fall, relied on Yiddish to negotiate national literary identities. By looking at the diverse body of texts that do this and the ways in which these works were received, this dissertation demonstrates that the presence of Yiddish language and culture in German literature after 1945 was used to create spaces in which foundational narratives could be reshaped and new identities defined.

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Yiddish in Postwar German Culture: A Historical and Musical Introduction

Yiddish's simultaneous proximity to and distance from the German language have long been at the center of German-language discourse on Yiddish language and culture. It is this ambivalent relationship that at once makes Yiddish or Yiddish-like speech largely comprehensible to German audiences and allows this language to serve as a marker of an exoticized other, both at the hands of Jews and non-Jews. Several scholars have written on the use of Yiddish, *Judendeutsch* or *Jargon*¹ in German literature in the decades and even centuries before 1933. These studies, as well as primary sources from the time, make clear that the degree of difference that separates or familiarity binds German and Yiddish, as perceived by German speakers, is constantly in flux. Matthias Richter, for example, notes that German defenders of Yiddish in the second half of the 19th century touted the language's "essentielle Nähe zur deutschen Sprache und Kultur und die Fülle alter deutscher Ausdrücke, die hier bewahrt seien."² Gabriele von Glasenapp, however, demonstrates that, by the end of

¹ Through the early decades of the twentieth century, Yiddish was often known, even by its own speakers, as either *Judendeutsch* (Judeo-German) or *Jargon*. The use of these blanket terms and that fact that Yiddish was not seen as a "real" language capable of producing academic texts or literature until the 19th century mean that, while these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, the forms this language takes in German literature can vary dramatically. This dissertation considers text that employ language anywhere on this spectrum, but makes clear when the authors are using Yiddish and when they use a stylized German intended to mimic Yiddish; See: "Das Judendeutsch in der deutschen Literatur" by Mark Gelber (1986); *Die Sprache jüdischer Figuren in der deutschen Literatur* by Matthias Richter (1995), *Mauscheln: Ein Wort als Waffe* by Hans-Peter Althaus (2002) and *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany: From the Enlightenment to the Second Empire* (2000) by Jeffrey Grossman.

² Matthias Richter. *Die Sprache jüdischer Figuren in der deutschen Literatur*. Göttingen: Wallenstein Verlag, 1995. 89

the same century, “such a position was no longer tenable.”³ She argues that increasing antisemitism and disillusionment with the possibility of assimilation made arguments about the essential Germanness of Jews more difficult to support. And debates on the relative proximity between German and Yiddish become even more complicated when specific literary genres are taken into account. Increased interest in Eastern European Jewry in the early 20th century, inspired largely by the work of Martin Buber, led German Jewish periodicals to begin including more essays on Yiddish-language culture and the lyrics to Yiddish folksongs. In an article by Moses Calvary that appeared in *Der Jude* in 1916, for example, the author, who insists that Yiddish be seen as its own language rather than a German dialect, writes, “Ursprünglich war das jiddische Volkslied gewiß eine Nuance des deutschen. [...] Hier ist keine eigene Kunstform.”⁴ In the following issue of *Der Jude*, however, Salomon Lehnert argues that it is in fact the Yiddish folksong that best reflects the unique spirit of Eastern European Jewry. Dismissively describing German attempts to appropriate Yiddish culture, he writes, “Ein jiddisches Volkslied, von einer deutschen Konzertsängerin übermittelt, von Studenten an der Biertafel, von deutschen Jungen in einem deutschen Walde gesungen, läßt uns nicht einmal die jüdische Seele ahnen, aus der das Volkslied erwachsen ist.”⁵ It was partially this ambiguity and uncertainty that seems to have inspired Kafka’s interest in Yiddish and shaped his famous 1912 “Einleitungsvortrag über

³ Gabriele von Glasenapp. “German versus *Jargon*: Language and Jewish Identity in German Ghetto Writing.” *Ghetto Writing: Traditional and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Literature from Heine to Hilsenrath*. Eds. Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1999. 62

⁴ Moses Calvary. “Jiddisch.” *Der Jude*. Heft 1 (April 1916). 30

⁵ Salomon Lehnert. “Juedische Volksarbeit.” *Der Jude* Heft 2 (May 1916). 110

Jargon.”⁶ As Yasemin Yildiz notes in her book *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, “Kafka seeks to bring out an anxiety that negates the safe, regulated distance between the audience and ‘Jargon.’ He states that the audience’s anxiety is so powerful that it ‘almost’ manifests itself physically.”⁷

Following the Holocaust, when Eastern European Yiddish-language culture was all but destroyed and millions of Yiddish speakers were murdered, the language took on new significance in German culture. Scholarship on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past, has shaped critical discourse on the presence of Jewish themes in German art and literature over the past decades.⁸ While this has been valuable and while the atrocities committed in the name of the German state during the Second World War have shaped the portrayal of Jews and Jewish themes in postwar German literature, it is crucial that this literature also been seen as part of a tradition that predates 1933. Building on scholarship from German Studies, Yiddish Studies, and cultural and political history, the following study seeks to reintroduce this discourse of proximity, distance, self and other into the discussion surrounding Yiddish language, literature and popular culture in postwar Germany.⁹ Like Uta Poiger’s study of American culture in postwar Germany, this study

⁶ Kafka gave this speech on February 18, 1912, in the Jüdisches Rathaus zu Prag as part of a Yiddish poetry recital by his close friend, Yitzak Löwy. Although the speech is now often called *Rede über die jiddische Sprache*, Kafka refers to the language in question as *der Jargon*, as would have his contemporaries.

⁷ Yasemin Yildiz. *Beyond the Mother Tongue*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012. 53

⁸ See, for example: Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove and Georg Grote, Eds. *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006; Matthias Krauss. *Völkermord statt Holocaust: Jude und Judenbild im Literaturunterricht der DDR: Ein Nachlesebuch*. Schkeuditz: Schkeuditzer Buchverlag, 2012; Pól O’Dochartaigh. *Jews in German Literature since 1945: German-Jewish Literature?* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000.

⁹ This project, which considers texts written between 1943 and 2014, draws on the work of Jeffrey Grossman’s *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany from the Enlightenment to the Second Empire* (2000) and recent projects that touch on the status of Yiddish in Weimar German culture, such as Marline Otte’s work on *Jargon* and Yiddish theaters in the Weimar period in *Jewish Identities in German Popular Entertainment* (2006) and Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov’s edited volume *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin: At the Crossroads of*

posits that the cultural histories of both German states, while shaped by polarizing political pressures of the Cold War, as indeed telling a single story.¹⁰ The appearance of Yiddish in literary culture offers a particular fruitful site for the study of this intertwined history, as a shared past and linguistic proximity to Yiddish did much to shape the reception of this language in both the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Even as contemporary political pressures pulled the East and West German representations of Yiddish and its literary culture in different directions, these two traditions, as this dissertation will show, remained in dialog with each other and together shaped the post-Wall literary landscape of the Berlin Republic.

I will begin with performances of Yiddish folksongs for German audience, a topic that, as shown above, not only inspired debate in the early 20th century, but is also the subject of the only published academic studies of Yiddish-language culture in Germany after 1945.¹¹ Using folksong to introduce the key concepts behind this study and historical background, I will reflect on ways in which a broader and specifically literary perspective helps to reframe the discourse surrounding Yiddish in German culture after 1945. Focusing on the concepts that informed prewar discussions of Yiddish and placing the appearance of Yiddish in literature in the broader narrative of the negotiation of literary legacy following the Second World War, rather than concentrating exclusively on questions of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, will help to reframe the contemporary German discourse on

Diasporic Politics and Culture (2010). This dissertation can also be seen as an attempt to take Jeffrey Shandler's concept of a postvernacular Yiddish, which he develops in *Adventures in Yiddishland* (2006) to a specifically German and largely non-Jewish context.

¹⁰ Uta Poiger. *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

¹¹ This excludes studies of cultural productions in DP camps located in Germany.

Yiddish. This study, which considers not only musical performances, but also theater, radio plays, novels and short stories, demonstrates that Yiddish takes on many different forms in postwar German literary culture and that by focusing exclusively on music we overlook the role played by Yiddish in the renegotiation of literary categories and aesthetic concepts such as the *Volksstück* and the uncanny. Additionally, this broader scope allows for a more nuanced analysis of the role of Yiddish in the shaping of new German national identities following the Second World War and the reunification of Germany.

Historian David Shneer, musicologist Aaron Eckstaedt, and literary scholar Liliane Weissberg have all written on the utilization of Yiddish-language musical performance in the postwar German attempt to come to terms with the Nazi past and in the negotiation of national identities during the Cold War.¹² As valuable as these works are, they are informed by an interest in Yiddish as a symbol of Jewish culture more broadly and in its political use value. Shneer, who has recently begun writing on Dutch-born East German singer Lin Jaldati, for example, puts forth the following argument: “[Jaldati’s] popularity challenges the presumed absence of Jewish culture and memory in East Germany and highlights how Yiddish culture in particular functioned in East Germany’s advertisement of itself as the antifascist alternative to the ‘fascist’ West Germany.”¹³ Eckstaedt, who writes on Klezmer in the Federal Republic, a topic that has received considerable attention in the press as well, argues that this “cheerful” music offers an apolitical form of Jewish culture available for

¹² See, for example: David Shneer’s chapter in *Dislocated Memories* (2014), Aaron Eckstaedt’s *Klaus mit dem Fiedel, Heike mit dem Bass* (2003), and Liliane Weissberg’s chapter in *The New German Jewry in the European Context* (2008).

¹³ David Shneer. “Eberhard Rebling, Lin Jaldati, and Yiddish Music in East Germany, 1949-1962.” *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music, and Postwar German Culture*. Eds. Tina Frühauf and Lily Hirsch. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 162

German consumption.¹⁴ Taking a more critical stance, Liliane Weissberg recently described a 2003 article from *Die Zeit* reporting on a Klezmer concert in Berlin. “The description of a thriving music scene,” she writes, “evokes haunting images from the past. The reader envisions a resurrected Jewish population, one which does not mourn the dead, but celebrates its presence.” Of the musicians themselves, she writes, “They are playing Jews. This role play has become very successful, and gives apparent satisfaction to actors and listeners alike.”¹⁵

But this sort of criticism, concerned almost exclusively with Yiddish as tool of Holocaust commemoration and German self-delusion, says nothing of the broader role played by Yiddish in the construction of a usable literary history in both German states and the reimagining of German literary legacy after reunification. With the exception of Shneer’s work, previous studies on this topic are focused more on the ethics of cultural appropriation, a topic with relevance far beyond the German-Yiddish context, but particularly interesting in relation to writing after mass trauma or genocide. Rather than focusing primarily on the ethics of appropriating Yiddish language and literary traditions into German culture after 1945, however, this dissertation draws on a variety of literary texts to create the first comprehensive study of Yiddish as utilized by German artists and authors to intervene in discourses not only on the German past, but on the German literary present and future.

¹⁴ Aaron Eckstaedt. “Yiddish Folk Music as a Marker of Identity in Post-War Germany.” *European Judaism*. 43.1 (Spring 2010) pp. 37-47 (37)

¹⁵ Liliane Weissberg. “Jewish Studies or Gentile Studies? A Discipline in Search of its Subject?” *The New German Jewry in the European Context*. Ed. Y. Michal Bodemann. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 102

*In ihren Liedern wohnt die Seele des Volkes*¹⁶

In both East and West Germany, the folksong played a central role in the discourse surrounding the revival of older literary and artistic forms in the postwar period. From the early postwar years on, the folksong and *Massenlied* were considered an important part of the “officially nurtured *Erbe*” in the Soviet zone and then in the GDR.¹⁷ Eventually, however, the official stance towards these art forms became more ambivalent because of their potential to harbor subversive messages, a potential seized upon most famously by Wolf Biermann. In the West, the discourse surrounding the *Volkslied* was similarly ambivalent. Although West Germans did not share the enthusiasm of their Eastern counterparts for a revival of the revolutionary folksongs and workers’ ballads, the protest movements of the 1960s brought a renewed interest to the FRG.¹⁸

While East German publications portrayed the enthusiasm in that country for folk and workers’ songs as an integral part of their fight against “westdeutsche[n] Militarismus und Neofaschismus,” the relationship between fascism and folk music was conceived of in quite different terms by West German thinkers. In 1945, Theodor Adorno wrote his essay, “What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts,” in which he reflects on the problematic

¹⁶ This title comes from an East German newspaper article on Lin Jaldati on the occasion of her 75th birthday. *Neue Zeit* Issue 292, p. 20 (Jaldati Archiv, ADK)

¹⁷ David Robb. “The GDR Singebewegung: Metamorphosis and Legacy.” *Monatshefte*. 92.2 (Summer 2000) pp. 199-216 (199)

¹⁸ Interest in both Germanys, while particularly strong in the GDR, was part of an international folk revival. Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan had large German following and a Canadian, Perry Friedman, played a leading role in the East German *Singebewegung*.

characteristics taken on by folksongs and folk music in the 20th century.¹⁹ Adorno is critical of these art forms not simply because they had the potential to be associated with national socialist *völkisch* ideologies, but because this type of music was in fact used to advance these and other exclusionist political goals. Folk music, Adorno writes, “displays an aggressive spirit of community as an end in itself, played up artificially so as not to allow any questioning of its real meaning. The idea of collectivity is made a fetish.” He continues, “The more it pretends to be the expression of ‘we the people,’ the more certain we may be that it is actually dictated by very particularistic clique interests, intolerant, aggressive and greedy for power.”²⁰ This well-founded cynicism toward the very *Liedergut* that the East German leadership was initially so eager to preserve, made it difficult for interested young West Germans in the 1960s to find a body of work suitable for a musical folk revival.

Given this history and the visibility of the concerts, records and radio programs this interest in folk music produced, it not surprising that research into the presence of Yiddish in postwar German culture has focused on music. Shneer and Eckstaedt, as mentioned above, have already pointed to the presence of Yiddish in budding folk music scenes in the early days of the FRG and in the GDR in the 1960s. Shneer describes Yiddish singer Lin Jaldati as an “East Germany cultural ambassador spreading antifascist music.”²¹ Eckstaedt writes of the positive reception of Yiddish folksongs in the FRG beginning in the 60s: “Yiddish song was somehow German [...] and it obviously could never have been part of National Socialist

¹⁹ See: Section by Inge Lammel on “Tradition des Arbeiterliedes” in *Arbeitsheft. Forum* (1972). Or, in the same volume, Winfried Hoffmann’s claim: “Im Gründungsjahr unserer Republik war schon erkennbar, daß die deutsche Volksmusik [...] einer neuen Blütezeit entgegengehen würde.”

²⁰ Theodor Adorno. “What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts.” *Theodor Adorno. Essays on Music*. Ed. Richard Leppert. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002. 382

²¹ Shneer “Eberhard Rebling, Lin Jaldati” 62

propaganda.”²² It seems it is easy enough to negatively define the appeal of Yiddish culture within in the postwar German context, but it is more difficult to articulate what Yiddish offered German audiences other than its inherent connection to Judaism and therefore antifascism. The story of Lin Jaldati and the reception of her Yiddish repertoire begins to answer this question, but it also raises many questions that can only be answered by looking beyond folk music to other forms of literary and artistic production.

Jaldati, born Rebekka Brilleslijper in Amsterdam in 1912, began her artistic career as a dancer with the Dutch national ballet. A boyfriend played a large role in her introduction to Eastern European Jewish culture and she began performing Jewish folkdances in 1935.²³ The following year, she joined the Dutch communist party and soon thereafter met Eberhald Rebling, a German pianist and musicologist living in exile.²⁴ In 1942 both Jaldati, who was Jewish, and Rebling, a political dissident who had refused to comply with conscription orders, went into hiding along with their infant child. Jaldati was found and deported that same year and sent first to Auschwitz and then to Bergen-Belsen.²⁵

After the war, Jaldati, Rebling and their daughter were reunited and, for a time, decided to remain in Holland. After recovering physically from the trauma of the concentration camps, Jaldati began touring across Western Europe, performing Yiddish song and folkdances at displaced person camps and Jewish community centers. It was this circuit that first brought Jaldati to postwar Berlin, where she first performed in 1947 for displaced

²² Eckstaedt “Yiddish Folk Music” 39

²³ Shneer “Eberhard Rebling, Lin Jaldati” 163

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

persons living in Schlachtensee, in the American sector.²⁶ By 1949, however, with DP camps emptying, Jaldati was performing predominantly for communist organizations.²⁷ This same year, Jaldati made her radio debut in East Germany, where she performed on the recurring radio show “Unser Lied – Unser Leben,” which was produced by the folk music division of the *Berliner Rundfunk*.²⁸ And here the musical strand of the history of Yiddish in German arts and literature after 1945 really begins. This was by no means the only venue in which postwar German identity and literary concerns were being negotiated through Yiddish at the time. As the following chapter will demonstrate, both Nelly Sachs’s *Eli: Ein Mysterienspiel vom Leiden Israels* (1943) and Max Frisch’s *Als der Krieg zu Ende war* (1949), both performed in West Germany in 1950, also brought German audiences in contact with Yiddish language and folklore.

But Jaldati’s performance marked the beginning of the East German attempt to appropriate Yiddish-language song as part of its own musical heritage. Her program included prewar songs from the labor movement, children’s songs and songs composed during the Holocaust.²⁹ Three years later, Jaldati performed a similar program at her first live concert in the GDR, at East Berlin’s *Haus Vaterland*. This show, staged on November 9, 1952, the anniversary of Kristallnacht, launched Jaldati’s “illustrious career as a Yiddish chanteuse in East Germany.”³⁰ That same year, Jaldati performed at East Berlin’s *Haus der Deutsch-*

²⁶ Shneer “Eberhard Rebling, Lin Jaldati” 166

²⁷ Shneer “Eberhard Rebling, Lin Jaldati” 168

²⁸ For more information on this program and its production history, see: Bettina Hinterthür. *Noten nach Plan. Die Musikverlage in der SBZ/DDR – Zensursystem, zentrale Planwirtschaft und deutsch-deutsche Beziehungen bis Anfang der 1960er Jahre*. Munich: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006.

²⁹ Lin Jaldati Archiv, Akademie der Künste (Berlin)

³⁰ Shneer “Eberhard Rebling, Lin Jaldati” 162

Sowjetischen Freundschaft House of German-Soviet Friendship) and began directing a number of dance ensembles.³¹ The following year, she was invited to perform in the FRG by the West German communist party. It was the first of many trips she would make to perform Yiddish songs as cultural ambassador for the new socialist German state.

Already Jaldati's early years in postwar Germany raise several important questions about the place of Yiddish in German culture during that time period. The overwhelmingly positive review of Jaldati's concert at the *Haus der Deutsch-Sowjetischer Freundschaft* that ran in the *Berliner Zeitung* says of her repertoire, "Diese Lieder, im Jiddisch, sind Zeugnisse einer reichen Volkskultur."³² Both Jaldati's choice of songs, which included what would become the most famous Yiddish resistance anthem of the Holocaust, *Zog nisht keyn-mol*, and the reviewer's description of the concert as an "Anklage gegen Rassenwahn," are reminders of the distinctly post-Holocaust setting of the event.³³ On the other hand, many of the older folk and children's songs Jaldati regularly performed could easily have appeared in the "jüdische Volkslieder-Abende" targeted at German-speaking Jews in the early 20th century.³⁴ Additionally, interest in Yiddish folksongs as indicators of a rich, exoticized Jewish culture is hardly a postwar phenomenon. Early 20th-century newspapers and journals are full of comments such as "In den jüdischen Liedern, diesen verschollenen Melodien, lebt das ganze Dasein der Juden Osteuropas"³⁵ and "Wir wollen zu den Menschen gehen, die

³¹ *Jaldati Chronik*, Lin Jaldati Archiv, Akademie der Künste (Berlin)

³² "Konzerte der Woche" *Berliner Zeitung*. December 19, 1952. (8: 296) p. 3

³³ This song is sometimes known as *Partisaner Lid* (Partisan Song)

³⁴ These are advertised frequently in Jewish periodicals in the first two decades of the 20th century, particularly in *Ost und West*.

³⁵ *Berliner Volks-Zeitung* 19. November 1912, reproduced in *Ost und West*, Heft 12, December 1912, p. 1171 "Urteile der Presse über die jüdischen Volkslieder-Abende."

allein ein jüdisches Lied singen können, weil Melodie und Inhalt noch selbstverständlicher Ausdruck ihrer Seele ist.”³⁶ And so when the *Berliner Zeitung* reviewer asks, “Worin liegt der Zauber, den [Jaldati] auf ihre Hörer ausübt?” the answer cannot lie in a postwar political motivation alone.

Yiddish Through and Beyond Music

Part of this project is to determine how Yiddish functioned within postwar German texts and performances, given that a German investment in Yiddish was conditioned both by a distinctly German cultural legacy and by political and social conditions specific to postwar German environments. Just as our understanding of the significance of Jaldati’s performance would be less complete without an understanding of the various artistic and literary traditions in which this concert can be placed, so too would it be irresponsible to view Jaldati’s rise to fame in 1952/53 in a political vacuum. While the choice to support Yiddish-language proletarian culture in the new post-Holocaust, self-avowedly antifascist German state may seem like an obvious and convenient public relations strategy, this move appears much more fraught when considering that these same years are generally considered to represent a peak of East German antisemitism, coming on the heels of the murder of several Yiddish-language writers in Russia on Stalin’s orders.³⁷ And yet not only were Jaldati’s early concerts in East

³⁶ Salomon Lehnert “Juedische Volksarbeit” *Der Jude* Heft 2 (May 1916), p. 110

³⁷ As historian Jeffrey Herf writes in “East German Communists and the Jewish Question,” “In 1948 and 1949, Soviet foreign and domestic policy took a decidedly anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish turn away from support for these former ‘victims of fascism’ toward an extensive and anti-Semitic assault on ‘cosmopolitanism’ at home and Zionism abroad.” (15) This led to a series of purges and show trials across the Eastern Bloc lasting until Stalin’s death in 1953. In 1948/49, several members, many of whom were well-known Yiddish writers, of the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were accused of espionage and arrested. On August 12th, 1952, they were murdered on Stalin’s orders. That same year, the show trial of Rudolf Slansky in Prague became one of the

Germany supported by the state, but her West German concerts in these years were sponsored by the communist party in that country.³⁸ It is largely these concerts and those that would follow throughout the 1950s that have led Shneer to convincingly suggest that the role of Jewish culture within the self-proclaimed antifascist culture of the postwar period has often been misrepresented.³⁹

But a broader look at the place of Yiddish in postwar German writing reveals that Yiddish and Yiddish literary culture were used to do more than maintain some sort of virtual connection to a dying culture as a tool of self-serving political or moral posturing. Yiddish folk music was successful in postwar Germany precisely because it was folk music. As much as this is an ideologically driven political and sociological category that needed to be redefined in the post-Nazi era, it is also an aesthetic category that needed to be reworked for postwar revival. My first chapter, “Folkstimlikhkayt and Political Drama: Yiddish in the Postwar German Theater,” will analyze the role played by Yiddish in the renegotiation of the *Volk* as an aesthetic category in both German states by looking at the *Volksstück*, a theatrical genre that traditionally privileges the “folk” both in form and content. Using Nelly Sachs’ *Eli* (1943), Max Frisch’s *Als der Krieg zu Ende war* (1949), Thomas Harlan’s *Ich selbst und kein Engel* (1958), and Rolf Schneider’s *Die Geschichte von Moischele* (1964), this chapter traces the intertwined histories of Yiddish in postwar German drama and of the revival and recreation of the *Volksstück*. By pairing close readings of these texts with reception data and

most visible manifestations of these purges. The East German official response to these show trials and the increasing rhetoric of anti-Zionism and anti-cosmopolitanism in that country made the “winter of 1952-1953 a decisive turning point in the history of the Jewish question in the German Democratic Republic” and hundreds of Jews fled to the West. (Herf 18)

³⁸ *Jaldati Chronik*, Lin Jaldati Archiv, Akademie der Künste (Berlin)

³⁹ Shneer writes, “Jaldati’s ability to popularize Yiddish music with the support of the highest state and SED representatives in East Germany is difficult to explain, especially in light of the almost clichéd view of East Germany as being anti-Semitic and, as such, lacking any kind of Jewish life.” 162

theoretical debates on the *Volksstück* genre, this chapter demonstrates that German-speaking authors relied on Yiddish and its literary culture to rethink a theater form intricately linked to German conceptions of the self and developing ideologies on the relationship between art and social change.

In many ways the debates on the place of protest and *Klassenkampf* within postwar literature and legacy of the political *Volksstück* after 1945 have their echoes in the history of the *Singebewegung*, in which Jaldati played a considerable role. As mentioned above, organized singing of folk songs was a popular and officially encouraged activity in the GDR. Though many political and revolutionary songs from 1848 and the early 20th century were initially very popular, any message that could be construed as supporting regime change became increasingly problematic. After all, the GDR had supposedly eliminated all inequality and the proletarian masses no longer stood in opposition to an unjust ruling class. The largest structural and ideological shift in the *Singebewegung* occurred in 1967, when the East German government decided that the official youth group, the *Freie deutsche Jugend* (FDJ) would take over the *Hootenanny-Klub*, a group that Jaldati had co-founded and that stood at the core of the *Singebewegung*.⁴⁰ As David Robb writes, the official role of folk

⁴⁰ See David Robb. "The GDR Singebewegung." Robb writes, "The beginnings of this story lie in the Hootenanny-Klub. Formed in 1966, it incorporated many of the various musical influences which had been seeping into East Berlin in the period of political thaw since the building of the Wall in 1961. Lutz Kirchenwitz describes the emergence of beat and jazz music and tells how the resident Canadian Perry Friedman introduced the new culture of folk songs from the American civil rights movement. These influences were incorporated into the repertoires of groups hitherto dominated by Brecht/Eisler and international protest songs—the traditional heritage which was nurtured in the schools, workers' choirs, and the army." (199-200) For information on how this group was represented in East German histories, see Heinz Alfred Brockhaus and Konrad Niemann, eds. *Sammelbände zur Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Band I*. Berlin: Verlag Neue Musik, 1969, which states, "Die künstlerische Betätigung der Jugendlichen erhielt in den Jahren 1965/66 noch von einer anderen Seite neue Impulse. Bereits 1960 wurde mit der Bezeichnung *Hootenanny*, im Klub der Jugend und Sportler in Berlin, ein zwangsloses gemeinsames Liedersingen und Improvisieren unter der Leitung des in die DDR übergesiedelten Kanadiers Perry Friedman veranstaltet. Die Hootenanny war ursprünglich als Protest gegen soziale Unterdrückung und Ausbeutung in den USA sowie gegen die dekadenten Produkte und Praktiken der kapitalistischen Vergnügungsindustrie entstanden. 1966 setzte sie sich bei uns eine neue Form des gemeinsamen Singens deutscher und internationaler Kampf- und

music and political song was then summarized as follows: “Die neuen Lieder werden für die Politik von Partei und Regierung geschaffen. Sie sind nicht mehr Kampfmittel einer unterdrückten Klasse gegen eine Klasse von Ausbeutern, sondern Ausdruck der gemeinsamen Interessen aller Werktätigen.”⁴¹ Jaldati’s Yiddish repertoire, however, included a number of Jewish partisan *Kampflieder* that clearly did not reflect this spirit of contentment and inclusion.

The same year that the FDJ took over the Hootenanny-Klub (from then on known as the *Oktoberklub*), the Six-Day War broke out in Israel. Shneer, relying largely on the testimony of Jaldati’s daughter, Jalda Rebling, writes of this period in Jaldati’s career: “But everything changed dramatically after the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and its neighboring states. [...] Jalda remembers that the countercultural music scene was quickly affected.[...] Yiddish was excised from official East German musical culture.”⁴² Similarly, literary scholar Pól Ó Dochartaigh begins his book *The Portrayal of Jews in GDR Prose Fiction* by noting, “Anti-Zionism was an integral part of the SED’s philosophy, as the opposition to all forms of ‘bourgeois nationalism.’ And Marxist atheism of necessity regarded religion, including Jewish religion, as an anachronism.” He then continues, “Each of these policies was given prominence at various stages in the GDR’s development, often in reaction to events elsewhere in the world (such as the Six-Day war in 1967).”⁴³ Of East

Volklieder durch. Auf Grund der veränderten internationalen Situation wurde neue Themen aktuell, wie z.B. Vietnam, Griechenland. In den Hootenannys, die im Berliner Kino ‚International‘ veranstaltet wurden und die man des öfteren als Hootenanny-Werkstatt bezeichnete, interpretierten Lin Jaldati, Christl Schulze, Perry Friedman, Gerry Wolff, Hermann Hähnel und andere Künstler alte und neue Arbeitslieder fanden positive Resonanz.” (297)

⁴¹ Robb “Singebewegung” 200

⁴² David Shneer. “In front of the Iron Curtain: Yiddish in East Germany” *Pakntreger* (Fall 2009) pp. 30-37

⁴³ Pól Ó Dochartaigh. *The Portrayal of Jews in GDR Prose Fiction*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. p. 11

German literature in the 1950s and 1960s Ó Dochartaigh writes, “The dominant theme was antifascism [...] Writers were expected to conform to this norm, and most did.”⁴⁴ Here, Ó Dochartaigh uses “this norm” to refer to the expectation that Jews in East German literature would be portrayed as part of a “simple antifascist mass in which their Jewishness was supposedly irrelevant.”⁴⁵

While it’s clear that these issues had an impact on Jaldati’s career, it is far too simplistic to state that Jewish themes within Jaldati’s explicitly Jewish music were removed in favor of more universal socialist themes or that the political events of 1967 signaled an abrupt end to the use of Yiddish in East German art and literature. Rather than ending her career or putting it on hold, the rejection of Western imperialism, here manifest as anti-Zionism, remained embedded within the East German packaging and marketing of Jaldati’s performances, exactly as it long had. The day after the Six-Day War broke out, the East German *BZ am Abend* wrote a review of Jaldati’s concert at the *Haus der Polnischen Kultur* the previous evening. Though the concert was advertised as a “Gedenkstunde” for Mordechai Gebirtig⁴⁶ (1877-1942), the *BZ* reported, “Doch die israelische Aggression ließ es

⁴⁴ Ó Dochartaigh *Jews in GDR Prose* 16

⁴⁵ Ó Dochartaigh *Jews in GDR Prose* 17

⁴⁶ Through Jaldati’s performances, which frequently featured several songs by the Yiddish poet and songwriter, Mordechai Gebirtig became a prominent figure in the East German discourse on Yiddish literature. Gebirtig was born in Cracow and died in the Nazi ghetto there. He was a socialist and wrote folk songs to appeal to working class audiences. Though his most famous song (which Jaldati performed at a vast majority of her concerts and which lends its name to her autobiography), *‘z brent*, was written in 1938 about a pogrom in Poland, it is frequently misrepresented as a song written during and about the Holocaust. In the 1966/67 program for the East German concert series *Stunde der Musik*, which feature a solo show by Jaldati, in fact, the liner notes state of Gebirtig, “In seinem Liedern besingt er das täglich Leben. Gebirtigs letztes Lied, das aufrüttelnde ‘Es brennt’, geschrieben kurz vor seiner furchtbaren Ermordung im Mai 1942 im Krakauer Getto, ist leider auch heute noch ein Aufschrei, eine ernste Warnung.” (ADK, Akte 73) This mistake is certainly convenient within the East German context, in which it was important that the Eastern Bloc countries be portrayed as supporters of Yiddish-language culture, as opposed not only to Nazi Germany but also to the United States and Israel. I explore this aspect of Cold War politics and their effect on literature in both the second and third chapters, on the GDR and FRG, respectively.

zum aktuellen Ruf werden.”⁴⁷ But this strategic use of Yiddish culture as an antidote to Western Imperialism was hardly new. In fact, Jaldati’s television documentary, produced by DEFA in 1962, the same year she became a member of the *Friedenrat der DDR*, is largely a propaganda piece about the responsibility of socialist nations to stand up against Western warmongers. While Israel’s Jewish imperialism is not mentioned specifically in the film,⁴⁸ Jaldati’s singing is used here as a counterpoint to two common archetypes: the passive Jew and the unrepentant Western imperialist.⁴⁹ Yiddish can thus not simply be lumped into a general discussion of broadly defined Jewish themes within postwar East German culture.

The second chapter, “Stories in Yiddish, Yiddish in Stories: Rethinking the Past in and of Yiddish in the GDR,” provides the first scholarly analysis of Yiddish in East German prose fiction. This chapter looks at texts written between 1962 and 1977 and demonstrates that the Yiddish literary tradition was called upon within East German literary discourse to create a narrative space in which the constrictions often placed on historical fiction, particularly Holocaust fiction, could be broken. This chapter not only considers the way in which a history of Yiddish literature was constructed along ideologically useful lines in the GDR, but how East German authors used a socially constructed image of Yiddish writing to

⁴⁷ Akte 73, Lin Jaldati Archiv, Akademie der Künste (Berlin)

⁴⁸ For more information on the increasingly tense relationship between the GDR and Israel throughout the 1960s, see: Stefan Meining. *Kommunistische Judenpolitik: Die DDR, Die Jude und Israel*. Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 2000. Particularly relevant is the chapter “Geschichte als Waffe: Albert Nordens Propagandakrieg gegen Bonn und Jerusalem (1960-1968).”

⁴⁹ In the film’s second scene, set in a concentration camp barrack, Jaldati interrupts a group of dejected Jewish women singing simply to distract themselves. (The script notes: “[Sie] haben beim Lied das Schwere ihrer Lage einige Minuten vergessen. Jetzt haben keine mehr die Kraft dazu.”) Luckily, “Die Mutige,” Jaldati, arrives and begins singing the famous anthem *Zog nischt keyn-mol* as a call to action. At the final verse of the song, Jaldati switches into German and is shown performing the song on an East German stage. As Jaldati continues, the viewer is shown a montage of photos meant to exemplify the evils of Western capitalism. The screenplay reads, “Dieser Komplex hat die Aufgabe, anhand von Dokumentar-Fotos zu beweisen, daß die Mörder zum Teil noch leben, daß sie im Staatsapparat der Westzonen heute wieder im Amt und 'Würde' sind. Er soll entlarven, daß hinter den eigentlich Mördern die alten Imperialisten mit ihren Interessen stehen und diese Interessen sind nur durch neuen Krieg und neues Morden zu verwirklichen.” (Akte 192, “Drehbuch,” Lin Jaldati Archiv, AdK)

rethink the role of fiction itself and how the past could be narrated in their own literature. Like the chapter that precedes it, this analysis combines close readings from German texts with reception data, including reviews and the paratextual material published alongside translated Yiddish fiction. The central texts considered in this chapter are Johannes Bobrowski's short story *Mäusefest* (1962), Jurek Becker's *Jakob der Lügner* (1969), Fred Wander's novel *Der siebente Brunnen* (1971), and Mischket Liebermann's autobiography *Aus dem Ghetto in die Welt* (1977).

Though Yiddish played a more prominent role in East German culture than in West German culture through the 1970s and was, up until that point often portrayed as an East German import (frequently embodied by Jaldati), recordings of Yiddish songs by West German bands in the late 1970s made Yiddish more visible in the FRG. Since folk music has, up until this point, received scholarly attention to the complete exclusion of Yiddish in other forms of art in postwar Germany, these recordings by the bands Zupfgeigenhansel and Espe have been used to forge a link between emerging West German interest in folk and protest song in the 1960s and 1970s and the popularity of Klezmer music in German beginning in the 1990s.⁵⁰ Aaron Eckstaedt writes that both of these groups, "already well known through their recordings of old German 'Volkslieder,' folk songs, took up Yiddish song as political folklore," referring to Espe's three Yiddish-language albums, released between 1976 and 1979, and Zupfgeigenhansel's *Jiddische Lieder* (1979).⁵¹ This limited

⁵⁰ See Eckstaedt: "Klezmer Music and Yiddish Song in post-war Germany developed in three phases, which are clearly divided through repertoire and style of interpretation: Yiddish song from the 1960s and the 1980s was followed by Klezmer as instrumental music, until Klezmer as World Music become part of the intercultural scene. This corresponds with the way the audience and the musicians attribute meaning to the music: Protest against the fathers generation and coping with the past by singing and hearing Yiddish song in both parts of then divided Germany was followed by the liberation of the 'unpolitical' and cheerful Klezmer as a meeting with the missing Jewish reality in reunited Germany." (37)

⁵¹ Eckstaedt "Yiddish Folk Music" 39

scope has led to the conclusion that the presence of Yiddish in West German literary and artistic culture represented, at best, an attempt to find a usable folk tradition untainted by associations with Nazi racial ideology and, at worst, an attempt to create an illusion of a Jewish cultural presence in the land of those who almost destroyed it.

In the third chapter of this dissertation, in many ways a companion chapter to the second, I argue that several West German writers, beginning in exactly this time period, used Yiddish and Yiddish-inspired language to negotiate the line between the self and the other in much more nuanced and interesting ways. Specifically this chapter, “The Yiddish Uncanny: Relocating the Lost East in the New West,” demonstrates that Yiddish was used in West German prose writing to redefine the *Unheimliche*, or the uncanny, within a specifically postwar literary landscape. Drawing on concepts of the home and the repressed other, Freud’s concept of the uncanny allowed these authors to reflect on how these terms could and should be defined in post-Holocaust West Germany and how prewar anxieties surrounding the proximity and distance between German and Yiddish could be reemployed in the postwar era to help reflect on these same concepts. The central works analyzed in this chapter include three novels and a short story: Jeanette Lander’s *Ein Sommer in der Woche der Itke K.* (1974), Edgar Hilsenrath’s *Der Nazi und der Friseur* (1977), Hermann Kinder’s *Ins Auge* (1987), and Maxim Biller’s *Harlem Holocaust* (1990).⁵²

⁵² It is not surprising that this later period of West German literature produced a far greater amount of literature that evinces an interest in Jewish history and Yiddish. The 1980s saw a boom in interest in Jewish themes in general, and in the Holocaust in particular, in both German states. The difficulty of talking about German-Jewish history and the Holocaust specifically is reflected in the title of Ernestine Schlacht’s monograph on the Holocaust in West German literature, *The Language of Silence* (London: Routledge, 1999). Schlacht points to the increasing diversity of German literature in the time period discussed here on this subject writing, “From the 1980s on, the literature that tries to work through the Holocaust cannot be easily typified.” (16) Understandably scholarly works focused on Jewish themes, understood more broadly, in German-language writing after 1945 focus on Jewish authors writing outside of Germany (Lion Feuchtwanger, Nelly Sachs, Peter Weiss, Erich Fried, Max Frisch). See, for example Pól O’Dochartaigh’s *Jews in German Literature Since 1945: German Jewish Literature*.

In general, the late 1970s and 1980s is considered a period in both German states in which Judaism and Jewish culture and history were discussed more freely and with more enthusiasm. In the East this is attributed to increasing official openness and decreased censorship on the topic and, in the West, this is linked to the screening of the American miniseries *Holocaust* in 1979.⁵³ The use of Yiddish in German popular music, however, remained largely determined by Cold War politics. In coverage of Jaldati's world travels as an East German *Besuchsdiplomat*, which continued throughout her career, in the GDR journal *Die Weltbühne* in 1980, for example, the author of the article "Zurück aus Sofia" proudly reports that Jaldati used her trip to the *Weltparlament der Völker für den Frieden* to bond with a speaker who had lost his legs to an Israel bomb. The two hugged after discussing the damage done to them by Jewish and German fascists, the report states.⁵⁴ Three years later, the program booklet for Jaldati's concert "Scholem sol sajn" at the *Berliner Festtage* attributed the growing interest in Yiddish culture in Germany to the "zweifelloos zunehmende neofaschistische und rassistische Tendenzen in mehreren kapitalistischen Ländern."⁵⁵ In West Germany, commentator Manfred Behrends lamented the limited Yiddish material available in that country, given that even in the FRG performers of Yiddish music often limited themselves to "Gettolieder und Widerstandslieder." He argues, "[Jiddisch] wird so erneut in das Abseits gerückt, in ein neues Getto versteckt."⁵⁶

⁵³ See Liliane Weisberg. "The Sound of Music: Jews and the Study of Jewish Culture in the New Europe." *Comparative Literature* (58: 4) 2006 pp. 403-417.

⁵⁴ "Zurück aus Sofia." *Weltbühne*. 7 October 1980. pp.1292-1294

⁵⁵ Akte 74, Lin Jaldati Archiv, Akademie der Künste (Berlin)

⁵⁶ *Deutschlandfunk "A Jiddisch Weekend"* (Programmheft, 1987), Akte 75. Lin Jaldati Archiv. Akademie der Künste (Berlin)

Given how politically charged the rhetoric surrounding Yiddish was during the Cold War, it is also necessary to consider how this discourse transformed following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. While the post-Wall Klezmer fad has been traced back to West German roots, post-Wall theater productions of partially Yiddish or Yiddish-inspired dramas have come almost exclusively out of formerly East German theaters in Berlin and Dresden. Yet instead of giving rise to two competing modes of representation, the reunification of Germany has produced a culture in which, unlike in either divided German state, authors and artists have begun to write Yiddish back into an imagined, creatively inclusive Germanic literary history.

As the second and third chapters discuss in detail, the imagined space of Yiddish differed drastically in the two German states. Whereas East German authors imagined Yiddish culture to be situated almost exclusively in Eastern Europe, West German authors turned to United States and Israel in imagining a home for Yiddish, kept at safe distance from German territory. But after 1990 Yiddish began to be portrayed as at home in the new German state. The final chapter of this dissertation, “From Imagined Voices to Remembered Texts: The Yiddish Written Word in the New Germany,” traces this development and the increasing emphasis on Yiddish written culture that accompanied it. By analyzing the status of the Yiddish text in Edgar Hilsenrath’s novel *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* (1993), Wolf Biermann’s poem *Große Gesang vom ausgerotteten jüdischen Volk* (1994), Burkhardt Seidemann’s drama *Die Purimspieler* (2002), Michel Bergmann’s novel *Die Teilacher* (2010) and Martin Walser’s extended essay *Shmeckendike Blumen* (2014), this chapter argues that what has been portrayed as a revival of Yiddish culture in Germany can be more

accurately described as an attempt to rewrite German literary history, often to the exclusion of the very discourses and trends described in the first three chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter One

Folkstimlikhkayt and Political Drama: Yiddish in Postwar German Theater

Introduction

Not surprisingly, after the Second World War, Yiddish on the German stage never regained its earlier level of prominence. Yet, despite the fact that the German Jews who had once made up a large portion of the theater audience were either dead or living abroad, Yiddish was not absent from either the East or West German stage. In fact, Yiddish played an interesting role in the development of a political theater in both Germanys during the early decades of the Cold War. In order to use Yiddish as an element in drama, German writers and artists had to develop a strategy and a context of representation that were appropriate in the historical and political circumstances. In both German states this process occurred as part of larger, more general movements, through which artists strove to establish a *neue Dramatik* appropriate for the postwar period. Predictably, Yiddish was sometimes used to distance the art from antisemitism, but the re-appearance of Yiddish on the postwar German stage also reflects more general aesthetic concerns of artists in both Germanys.

In both the East and the West, postwar theater journals teem with debates concerning the establishment of a *neue Dramatik*, untainted by the disastrous abuse of the arts in the Nazi period. These debates, whether focusing on the “notwendige Gesundung [der]

Dramatik” in the East or on the difficulty of salvaging Weimar theater forms in the West, have been well documented by scholars.⁵⁷ The discussion of Yiddish in postwar German performance, however, is largely limited to discussions of the role of Klezmer in contemporary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. This chapter will focus on the role Yiddish played in the broader development of new or revitalized theater aesthetics in the first two decades following the Second World War. The analysis will shed light on the relationships between Cold War politics, dramatic theory, and conceptualizations of the *Volk* and the foreign in divided Germany. Specifically, it will illuminate the role of Yiddish in the shaping of new state identities in divided Germany.

As theater scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte writes in *The Show and the Gaze of the Theater*, “The recourse to foreign theater forms serves, above all [...] the function of changing the underlying theater forms in such a way that they are then able to solve the indigenous problem.”⁵⁸ This chapter will consider the extent to which Yiddish theater was seen and utilized as a *foreign* theater form in the postwar period and how Yiddish theater in postwar Germany complicates Fischer-Lichte’s claim by demonstrating the porousness of the barrier between foreign and domestic and between language and form.

By tracing the appearance of Yiddish in performances on the postwar German stage and the critical reaction to these performances, this chapter will show the diversity of the plays that incorporated Yiddish and the ways in which more general formal or genre concerns affected the representation of Yiddish and the critical reaction it received.

⁵⁷ Helmut Kreuzer and Karl-Wilhelm Schmidt, eds. *Dramaturgien in der DDR (1945-1990)* Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1998. p. 47 (This is a volume of collected articles from East German theater journals); Heiner Teroerde 171

⁵⁸ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and Gaze of the Theater*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 153

This chapter first examines the influence of Yiddish and Yiddish culture in Nelly Sachs' *Eli: Ein Mysterienspiel vom Leiden Israels* (1943) and German reception of performances of this work soon after the end of the war. Here, the focus will be on the representational strategies Sachs employs to depict Yiddish and Yiddish culture and the relationship between these strategies and the genre tradition, originally medieval and revived by the modernists, that the play claims to take part in. The analysis will help to demonstrate the inadequacy of prewar models in re-appropriating Yiddish culture for the postwar German theater. This chapter will then analyze the reception data for the first two plays to either use or somehow incorporate Yiddish on German stages in the postwar era: Max Frisch's *Als der Krieg zu Ende war* (performed 1949-50 in West Germany) and Max Baumann's *Glikl Haml fordert Gerechtigkeit* (performed in 1957 in East Berlin). This will shed light on the assumptions and expectations associated with Yiddish in the postwar imagination and on the role of "authenticity" in German representations of Yiddish and its speakers.⁵⁹

The majority of this chapter will be dedicated to the discussion of the *Volk* and the *Volksstück*, specifically Thomas Christoph Harlan's *Ich selbst und kein Engel* (1958) and Rolf Schneider's *Die Geschichte von Moischele* (written in 1964, published in 1970). In order to fully understand the place of these plays in the postwar German context, it is necessary to first focus on broader cultural debates on the *Volksstück* in both Germanys. Just as both German states needed to reevaluate how Yiddish should be represented on stage and the relationship between German and Yiddish cultures in the aftermath of the Nazi tragedy,

⁵⁹ This dissertation uses the terms "authenticity" and "authentic" to convey perceived "Echtheit, Wahrhaftigkeit, Ursprünglichkeit und Unmittelbarkeit." (Knaller, *Ein Wort aus der Fremde* 7) Here "authenticity" here is more akin to what Katrin Sieg calls naturalistic representation (as opposed to masquerade) in the theater than to the 'authenticity' of aesthetic theorists. (*Ethnic Drag* 11) Sieg uses the term "authenticity" not to refer to a general aesthetic principle, but instead to refer specifically to the ability or desire of a stage production to represent foreign cultures as mimetically as possible, rather than through an intentionally unrealistic mechanism such as caricature. (11)

so too did they need to reevaluate the genre of the Volksstück, given its association with the *völkisch* nationalism of the Third Reich. Close analysis of the plays themselves will show that both plays help locate Eastern European Jewry and Yiddish in relation to the German present in order to help define the *Volk* both as an aesthetic and a political category.

This chapter ends with a brief discussion of Walter Kempowski's radio play *Moin Vadder läbt*, which will focus on the early stages of the shift that, beginning in the 1980s, reincorporated Yiddish into a specifically German cultural historical narrative. This shift is also reflected in German novels of the time period and that issue will be discussed in much greater detail in the chapters that follow.

Prewar Models and Previous Scholarship

Existing scholarship about Yiddish on the postwar German stage focuses almost exclusively on the emergence of a Klezmer scene in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. Scholars argue that this movement represents a striving towards a “virtual Judaism” as simply a feature of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.⁶⁰ This chapter, in contrast, focuses not on the extent to which performances of Yiddish or Yiddish-inspired art allow postwar Germans to identify with Jewry but on the ways in which postwar German authors use Yiddish to explore topics critical to developing a new *Dramatik* after the war and the relationship between this *Dramatik* and national identity in divided Germany.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Liliana Weisberg's essay “Jewish Studies or Gentile Studies” in *The New German Jewry and the European Context*, in which she describes German performances of Klezmer and its reception in the German media and notes that the performers are not Jews, but “young Germans who have become the new ‘auserwählte Folk.’” She writes that they are “not just playing music. They are playing Jews. This role play has become very successful, and gives apparent satisfaction to actors and listeners alike.” (Weisberg in Bodemann 102) See also: Ruth Gruber's *Virtually Jewish*.

In order to understand the development of this Dramatik and its incorporation of Yiddish, it is important to be aware of the prewar traditions and the extent to which these could or could not be salvaged following World War II. Scholars who focus on the use of Yiddish (or, more frequently, imitations of Yiddish) on the German stage focus predominantly on the use of mock Jewish dialects either to ridicule their speakers or to stigmatize certain behaviors and thereby encourage assimilation. Additionally, these studies focus almost exclusively on prewar Germany. These scholars include Matthias Richter whose *Die Sprache jüdischer Figuren in der deutschen Literatur* describes the tendency of Jewish characters in German literature from the 18th through the early 20th centuries to speak an “artifiziellen Literaturjiddisch” denoting low social status, and Jeffrey Grossman, whose *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany: From the Enlightenment to the Second Empire* argues that Yiddish in German theater in the 18th and 19th centuries tended to use “Yiddish as means for unmasking the ‘essential’ Jewish nature underlying the acculturated Jew.”⁶¹

Studies of Yiddish on the German stage in the early 20th century are complicated by the popularity of *Jargontheater* and the critically acclaimed guest performances of Yiddish language art theater troupes from Eastern Europe.⁶² The *Jargon* theaters, in which most of the actors and producers were Jewish, presented a predominantly bourgeois audience of Jews and non-Jews with burlesque-style comedies performed in a mix of Yiddish and other

⁶¹ Matthias Richter. *Die Sprache jüdischer Figuren in der deutschen Literatur (1750-1933): Studien zu Form und Funktion*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 1995. 93; Grossman 139

⁶² With the influx of Eastern European Jews fleeing persecution in Russia beginning in the late 19th century, several small theaters showing exclusively Yiddish-language plays appeared in Berlin’s *Scheunenviertel*. With the famous exception of Franz Kafka, however, these theaters received very little attention from German speakers.

dialects.⁶³ While the historian Marline Otte argues that the popularity of these theaters among Jews and non-Jews alike represents a progressive social climate in which the “question of assimilated German-Jewish identity [was brought] to the forefront of public attention,” other scholars have pointed out that some contemporary critics “saw the phenomenon of *Mauscheln* (speaking German with a Yiddish accent) as sufficient evidence of an antisemitic propensity.”⁶⁴

For a variety of reasons, interest in Yiddish theater perceived as authentic increased among German audiences after the First World War.⁶⁵ In order to accommodate a broader audience, Yiddish theater troupes from Vilna and Moscow began presenting performances in Berlin in both Yiddish and German.⁶⁶ At the same time, avant-garde movements within Eastern European Yiddish theater culture were expanding the types of performances touring troupes in Berlin had to offer.⁶⁷ German Jewish intellectuals and artists, including Alfred Döblin, Max Reinhardt and Arnold Zweig, were impressed by modern Yiddish theater, which many found to be aesthetically more palatable than the traditional Yiddish theater they considered to be of “rudimentary quality.”⁶⁸ One of the main draws of this new theater was that, for many German-Jewish intellectuals, it represented a supposedly authentic Jewish

⁶³ Marline Otte. *Jewish Identities in German Popular Entertainment, 1890-1933*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 129

⁶⁴ David Brenner. *German-Jewish Popular Culture Before the Holocaust: Kafka's Kitsch*. New York: Routledge, 2008. 18

⁶⁵ These include the exposure of German soldiers to Yiddish theater while serving in the East, where it was often the only local theater comprehensible to them, and the increasing exposure of young German-Jewish intellectuals to Zionist ideas.

⁶⁶ Peter Sprengel. *Scheunenviertel Theater: jüdische Schauspieltruppen und jiddische Dramatik in Berlin (1900-1918)*. Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1995. 119

⁶⁷ David Brenner 23

⁶⁸ Michael Brenner. *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany*. New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1996. 191

culture.⁶⁹ The most famous play by a German author to incorporate Yiddish during the Weimar era was Walter Mehring's *Der Kaufmann von Berlin*, which premiered at his theater on Berlin's Nollendorfplatz in 1929. The bilingual play, which is roughly based on Sholem Aleichem's *200,000*, culminates in the staging of the pogrom that took place in the Scheuenviertel in 1923.⁷⁰ Most German-Jewish theater critics "felt hurt by Mehring's overt depiction of the antagonism between German Jews and East European Jews."⁷¹ Although Yiddish theater had been celebrated as an expression of authentic Eastern European culture, many critics "thought [Yiddish dialogue] inappropriate when integrated into a German play written by a German-Jewish author for a German audience."⁷²

German playwrights and theater directors who interested in bringing Yiddish to the stage after World War II could not rely on prewar models. Some of the previous representational strategies could be easily interpreted as anti-Semitic and others, particularly those that had arisen in the modernist era, failed to gain traction in the postwar era for more complicated reasons. The history of these modernist representations of Yiddish and Yiddish culture on the German stage is particularly important in understanding why it was difficult for Nelly Sachs' *Eli* to be staged satisfactorily for postwar audiences.

⁶⁹ Alfred Döblin famously called the work of the Vilna Troupe as "spontaneous cultural achievements of a vital people." (Otte 130)

⁷⁰ Jeannette R. Malkin and Freddie Rokem. *Jews and the Making of Modern German Theater*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010. 88

⁷¹ Michael Brenner 194

⁷² Ibid

Nelly Sachs' *Eli*

In 1943 Nelly Sachs, who was living in exile in Sweden, wrote what is widely considered to be the first Holocaust drama: *Eli: Ein Mysterienspiel vom Leiden Israels*.⁷³ In this work we already see Yiddish used in German-language drama to explore the ramifications of the near destruction of Eastern European Jewry on postwar German identity. Although Sachs' work set the stage for postwar dramatists struggling with the problem of Holocaust representation in the theater, in many ways her use of Yiddish and Yiddish culture placed her at the end of a prewar generation, rather than at the beginning of a new era in German theater. Sachs' drama evinces traces of the modernist interest in Hasidism, mysticism and language and is highly influenced by expressionist theater, both of which point clearly to prewar German traditions. Additionally, some aspects of Sachs' work that have previously been associated with Sachs' interest in Yiddish are more accurately read as remnants of her appreciation of the German Romantics. This portion of the chapter will close readings of Sachs' text to show how Sachs uses both distinctly (Christian) German literary traditions and direct translations from Yiddish to create a hybrid text that inspired many postwar misinterpretations.

Formally, Sachs draws on primarily on two related traditions, the medieval *Mysterienspiel* and German Expressionist drama, the latter itself indebted to the former. The *Mysterienspiel* grew out of Christian liturgy and presented spectators with scenes from the life of Jesus, based on scripture, but often also accompanied by additional scenes for narrative clarity or even humor. Sachs, of course, is drawing on a different body of texts than

⁷³ Nelly Sachs. *Das Leiden Israels*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962.

were the writers of medieval religious dramas. Sachs not only combines a medieval and distinctly Christian form with text taken directly from Jewish prayer and Yiddish folksong, but also draws on intervening centuries of German-language literary tradition.

Sachs' lyric drama, which is structured like an Expressionist *Szenendrama*, begins in the rubble of a small, Polish town, where surviving Jews have gathered. The first *Bild* depicts a conversation between a washerwoman (*die Wäscherin*) and a baker's wife (*die Bäckerin*), who introduce the story of the title character, Eli. They explain that Eli, upon seeing his parents being carted away for deportation, runs out of the house after them and blows towards the heavens with his shofar, the ram's horn pipe traditionally played on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. He thereby attracts the attention of a Nazi soldier who strikes him dead. From the two women's conversation, the audience also learns that Eli's grandfather, Samuel, has survived the war but has been unable to speak since witnessing the murder of his grandson. The baker's wife confides in her friend telling her that she still hears her dead husband's footsteps. In response, the washerwoman suggests that the baker's wife talk to Michael, a local man known to have the "Balschemblick."⁷⁴

Michael first appears on stage in the fourth *Bild*, which is set in his workshop. Surrounded by a chorus of disembodied voices, Michael thinks of Eli and becomes determined to find Eli's killer. Michael, the character most concretely associated with Hassidism, is lead by divine force to an unnamed neighboring country where he finds Eli's killer, who is known only as "*der Mann*." The killer's child asks Michael if she may play

⁷⁴ Sachs 10. This refers to the Ba'al Shem Tov, the revered founder of Hasidism. While the term *ba'al shem tov* ("master of the good name") was used historically to refer to several Kabbalistic leaders, it is used now primarily to refer to Israel ben Eliezer (circa 1700-1760). These men were believed to possess the ability to use the name of God to conjure magical results, including distance vision. For more, see Moshe Rosman's *Founder of Hasidism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

Eli's horn, which Michael has brought with him. The killer refuses to let the child play the horn and both die.

The entire play is written in German and, although Ehrhard Bahr has argued that the rhythm of the speech in the market scenes in the Polish town is meant to call to mind Yiddish syntax, the lyric language of the play seems more influenced by German romantic medieval revival than by the Yiddish language.⁷⁵ The play, for example, opens with the lines spoken by the washerwoman, who narrates her own actions. "Komm von der Bleiche, der Bleiche/hab' Sterbewäsche gewaschen/dem Eli das Hemd gewaschen/Blut herausgewaschen, Schweiß herausgewaschen."⁷⁶ Like the language that follows, there is nothing distinctly Yiddish about the rhythm or syntax here. The repetition and alliteration is much more reminiscent of old Germanic poetic forms, such as the *Stabreim*, used by German Romantics to mimic medieval German verse.⁷⁷ Sachs follows no identifiable or regular meter or verse form, yet her language has an unmistakable rhythmic quality. In this way, Sachs' lyric is similar to that of the German romantic and neoromantic Volkslied.⁷⁸ The strong influence of this tradition in Sachs' work should not be particularly surprising. Before Sachs developed an interest in the Jewish mysticism, her intellectual development was marked by a strong interest in German romantic poetry, particularly that of Hölderlin. Although scholars know

⁷⁵ Ehrhard Bahr. *Nelly Sachs*. Munich: Beck, 1980. 171

⁷⁶ Sachs 7

⁷⁷ Notably, Richard Wagner played a large role in reviving the *Stabreim* in German verse. As David Levin has written, this was the "innovative archaism that would allow Wagner to return language to its roots." See: David J. Levin. *Richard Wagner, Fritz Lang, and the Nibelungen: The Dramaturgy of Disavowal*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. 45

⁷⁸ The strong influence of this tradition in Sachs' work should not be particularly surprising. Before Sachs developed an interest in the Jewish mysticism, her intellectual development was marked by a strong interest in German romantic poetry, particularly that of Hölderlin. Although scholars know relatively little about Sachs' intellectual influences during her earlier years, it is clear that her friendship with Max Hermann, then a professor of romanticism at the University of Berlin, and her attendance of his lectures on romantic poetry left a large mark. See: Bahr 37.

relatively little about Sachs' intellectual influences during her earlier years, it is clear that her friendship with Max Hermann, then a professor of romanticism at the University of Berlin, played a guiding role while Sachs remained in Berlin.

That Sachs' choice of this type of meter was likely influenced by a familiarity with romantic traditions, of course, does not preclude the possibility that this language is also closely tied to the thematic exploration of Judaism and Hasidism. After the shofar is blown in celebration of the New Year, for example, a synagogue visitor (*Erster Beter*) exclaims, "Die Luft is neu-/fort ist der Brandgeruch/fort ist der Blutgeruch-/fort ist der Qualgeruch-/Der Luft ist neu!"⁷⁹ Directly after the rhythmic blows of the shofar, the renewal heralded by the horn is verbalized by the rhythmic, alliterative German verse. Instead of mimicking Jewish (or Yiddish) forms in order to capture the lost culture of the *shtetl*, Sachs intentionally presents Eastern European Yiddish-speaking *shtetl* life through a historically Christian genre using a lyric style associated not with Yiddish revival, but with Germanic medieval revival.

While the influence of Sachs' interest in Yiddish and Yiddish-language culture is thus not seen in the rhythm or meter of her verse, Sachs' play does include German translations of verses of a Yiddish folk song throughout the second *Bild*. Over the course of this scene, a young girl (*Großeres Mädchen*) sings the entirety of the Yiddish folksong "A mol iz geven a mayse" translated into German. She begins, "Er war einmal eine Märe, die Märe ist gar nicht fröhlich/Die Märe hebt an mit Singen/von einem jüdischen König."⁸⁰ Anyone familiar with the famous Yiddish folksong would immediately recognize the text as borrowed. The song continues, "Es war einmal ein König/der König hatte eine Königin/die Königin hatte einen

⁷⁹ Sachs 32

⁸⁰ Sachs 16

Wingert/Ljulinke, mein Kind.” The young girl sings four verses, each of which is a direct translation from the Yiddish, with only the word ‘Ljulinke’ to indicate a non-German source. Linguistically, however, the song more clearly reflects the influence of the medievalist revival of the neo-romantics than of Yiddish. Sachs’ use of the antiquated word *Märe* is particularly telling, as is the use of the verb *verderben* to describe the death of the queen in the final verse. The use of the word *Wingert* also adds to the tone Sachs is striving for in this translation. The original Yiddish is *wayngortn*, which would have sounded much more familiar to modern German audiences than the outdated term *Wingert* (preserved today only in the *Rheinfränkisch* and *Oberhessisch* dialects⁸¹). Additionally, none of the Yiddish words derived from Hebrew (*mayse*, *meylekh*, *malke*) are preserved in the translation. The result is a song that, while immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with Yiddish folk songs, could easily be disguised as a ballad of the medievalist revival. While Sachs’ is calling up a literary and religious culture foreign to the vast majority of postwar Germans, she is doing so in a way that utilizes romantic modes of nostalgia to tie Yiddish to a collective German past.

Clearly, Sachs’ nods to Yiddish language and culture are not meant to be mimetic representations of Eastern European Jewish language. Instead, Sachs is more interested in Yiddish as the language of Hassidism, a religious movement Sachs became interested in because of Martin Buber’s writings on the relationship between spoken language and mystical experience in the Hassidic tradition.⁸² It was thus more important to Sachs to imbue

⁸¹ Grimms Wörterbuch online

⁸² Sachs, who grew up in a secular family, discovered the writings of Martin Buber during her final years in Berlin. Bahr writes, “Da konnte Nelly Sachs auf den Chassidismus als eine lebendige Welt des Glaubens zurückgreifen, die ihre das Schreiben und damit das Überleben ermöglichte.” (Bahr 45)

“‘jedes Alltagswort’ mit ‘göttlicher Ausstrahlung,’” rather than to present a linguistically accurate representation of the Hassidic vernacular, Yiddish.⁸³

Both the form and genre of Sachs’ drama warrant attention and help make clear the stark contrast between Sachs’ work and the plays at the center of this chapter. Sachs chose to call *Eli* a *Mysterienspiel*, placing her work in the centuries old tradition of Christian religious dramas intended to support religious doctrine, but also within the German-language expressionist tradition, which drew heavily from the *Mysterienspiel*.⁸⁴ Specifically, Sachs’ work displays a clear influence by writers who, as the First World War drew to a close, began to combine the form of the *Mysterienspiel* “mit aktuellen Zeitbezügen.”⁸⁵ Sachs’ interest in the *Mysterienspiel* tradition, including its modern, secular incarnation, fits well with her interest in Buber’s views on Hassidic literature. In both, Sachs displays her belief that traditional, religious forms can be appropriated into modern, secular aesthetics. More generally, it perhaps reflects an expressionist desire to find pseudo-religious meaning in the observable world. Sachs’ drama thus seems to speak more to the concerns and tastes of prewar German culture than to the postwar generation.⁸⁶

This can perhaps help to explain why Sachs’ was so unhappy with the first postwar staging of her work as an opera, which she felt sorely misrepresented her play.⁸⁷ Instead of representing a universal form of mysticism that allowed for *Gottesnähe* through language and music, Michael was generally read as dramatic, vengeful hero. In the case of the 1958 West

⁸³ Bahr 17

⁸⁴ Peter Sprengel. *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Literatur: 1900-1918*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2006. 484

⁸⁵ Sprengel 484

⁸⁶ A 1993 article in *Die Zeit* describes the piece as “mehr oder weniger expressionistisch.”

⁸⁷ Irena Huml. “*Lichtersprache aus den Rissen*”: *Nelly Sachs: Werk und Wirkung*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008. 216

German production of *Eli* as a radio play arranged by Alfred Andersch, Sachs' Mysterienspiel was read as a Jewish play for a Jewish audience and German audiences considered "zufällige Zuhörer."⁸⁸ Rather than being read as a play that combined German literary traditions with translations of Yiddish song and Hebrew prayer, creating an end product that should have offered non-Jewish German audiences plenty with which to identify, *Eli* was seen as a foreign drama.⁸⁹ *Eli* never found a particularly receptive audience, perhaps owing in part to the contemporary belief that German companies weren't up for the challenges set forth by the play, and scholars still regard it as one of Sachs' lesser works.⁹⁰

Finding an audience

The first postwar German-language play performed in Germany to feature a Yiddish speaker on stage was Swiss playwright Max Frisch's *Als der Krieg zu Ende war*, which was performed in 1949 in Baden-Baden and Stuttgart and in 1950 in Hamburg.⁹¹ This drama takes place shortly after the end of the war in Berlin and tells the story of Agnes, a German woman whose husband has recently returned from his post in Poland, and Stepan, a Russian officer who has moved into their apartment. Agnes and Stepan fall in love, but have no way to communicate with each other, except for through translations provided by Jehuda, a "Ghettojude." Of course, he is not only a *Ghettojude* in the prewar sense, but also a survivor

⁸⁸ See: "Totenklage um ein Volk" in *Die Zeit* Oct. 6, 1961, n. 41

⁸⁹ For example, the German translations of the *Shema* prayer

⁹⁰ See: "Theater" in *Die Zeit* March 23, 1962, n. 12. This article cites reviews of the the staging of *Eli* from the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* and the *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten* and notes "Die Fälle mehren sich, in denen ehrgeizige Bühne heiklen Aufgaben, die sich sich selber stellen, künstlerisch nicht gewachsen sind."

⁹¹ DP camps had performances of Yiddish-language theater for camp residents in the immediate aftermath of the war.

of the Warsaw Ghetto, where Agnes' husband had been stationed. Frisch was clearly aware that in order to use Yiddish or faux-Yiddish on the German stage, writers, directors and actors had to be cautious not to fall into prewar models of representation that could be construed as antisemitic. Frisch writes in the notes to his drama, "Die Rolle des Jehude Karp ist in yiddischer Sprache geschrieben [...] Wenn kein Darsteller verfügbar ist, der ein wirkliches Yiddisch sprechen kann, wird es ratsam sein, auf dieses besondere Idiom zu verzichten; auf gar keinen Fall darf es durch sogenanntes 'Jüdeln' ersetzt werden."⁹² While this gives the impression that anything other than an "authentic" Yiddish would be offensive, Jehuda must speak a Yiddish that is entirely comprehensible to a German audience. This is, after all, his role within the play as well. What results is a Yiddish with almost all of the Hebrew-derived vocabulary removed. As linguist Hans Peter Althaus writes of the rare appearance of *Hebraismen* in the text, "Wo sie auftreten, werden sie noch einmal paraphrasiert."⁹³ While lines such as "mir sennen gute Menschen" or "Ober natirlech!" are more typical for Jehuda, he occasionally uses Hebrew-derived words in statements such as, "mir wellen no Scholem," only to then add, "dos is Friedn."⁹⁴

The play was reviewed in the *Der Spiegel* and in *Die Zeit*, although neither mentions the linguistic representation of the *Ghettojude*. The review in *Die Zeit* by Wolfgang A. Peters notes that the "Charakterstudie als Ghettojude" was "ergreifend," and the review in *Der Spiegel* makes no mention of the character or the Warsaw Ghetto, but does note, "Diese Handlung ist fürs deutsche Publikum nicht gerade behaglich. Die Erinnerungen an Russen, die den Frauen weniger zart entgegenkamen, sind, wie auch Frisch nicht verschweigt, noch

⁹² Max Frisch. *Als der Krieg zu Ende war: Schauspiel*. Basel: Schwabe, 1949.

⁹³ Hans Peter Althaus. "Jiddisch als Stilmittel" in *Zeitschrift der deutschen Philologie Sonderheft* 1981. 230

⁹⁴ Frisch 30; 20

zu frisch.”⁹⁵ Both Frisch’s notes on the character’s speech quoted in the last paragraph and the lack of response in the media are telling. It seems that work was performed in an era when there was little concern in the general public for if or how the issue of Yiddish on the postwar German stage was handled. It seems that wider interest in this issue could only be stirred when Yiddish was coopted as tool of German identity formation during the Cold War.

In 1957 a Yiddish-language drama was featured in East Berlin’s annual *Festtagen*. For this festival, the Jewish State Theater of Warsaw performed the play *Glikl Hameln fordert Gerechtigkeit* entirely in Yiddish. The East German media celebrated the performance as further proof of the GDR’s identity as the better, antifascist Germany. Additionally, the reviews suggest that the East German expected a type of “Yiddish” similar to that in *Als der Krieg zu Ende war* and that reviewers were aware that there were still prejudices against the language in the population. For example, the author of a review in *Neues Deutschland* notes that he would like to add “ein Wort zur dieser Sprache, dem Jiddischen,” and writes, “Sie hat Anspruch auf Interesse und Sympathie. Sie ist ja keineswegs, wie manche meinen, ein ‘verdorbens’ Deutsch.”⁹⁶

The German-born Jewish author of the play, Max Baumann, along with the star Ida Kaminska, reworked as a murder mystery the Yiddish-language diary of the early modern German-Jewish woman Glikl Hameln, which had been popularized after Bertha Pappenheim translated it into German in 1910. In the play, Glikl’s husband is murdered and Glikl, played by a star of the Warsaw Yiddish stage, Kaminska, must solve the case. The East German reviews comment that this choice of play was appropriate because of its German setting.

⁹⁵ “Uniformen bedeuten nichts.“ *Der Spiegel*. April 6, 1950. pp. 37-38

⁹⁶ *Neues Deutschland*. 6 October 1957 (12:23) p. 4

“Das Stück,” writes the reviewer for *Neues Deutschland*, “hat uns nämlich Besonderes zu sagen. Der Autor Max Baumann ist selbst deutscher Herkunft, und die Handlung, die in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts spielt, hat Hamburg zum Spielplatz.”⁹⁷ Interestingly, this play, a Polish production, is one of the very few examples of postwar German literature before the 1980s that situates the cultural history of Yiddish within the history of German culture.

The review from the *Berliner Zeitung* is much less invested in instilling in its readers a new appreciation for the Yiddish language. Instead, the reviewer describes Yiddish as, “diese seltsame beim Mittelhochdeutschen stehengebliebene und mit hebräischen und anderen Zutaten durchsetzte Sprache.”⁹⁸ The same reviewer seems surprised that, “ohne Eingewöhnung,” it is difficult for the “ungeübtes Ohr” to follow the language, noting too, “[dass] die sprachliche Verständigung schwieriger war als gedacht.”⁹⁹ This attitude, which assumes that Yiddish is simply a German *Jargon* and therefore almost automatically comprehensible to the German ear likely comes, at least in part, from the fact that, for so many years, stage Yiddish, as opposed to actual spoken Yiddish, was just that.

But far more important to the East Germans than measuring the linguistic proximity of the two languages was the insistence on the appropriate political perspective. Drawing

⁹⁷ *Neues Deutschland* 6 October 1957 (12:23) – Although the newspaper coverage makes so much of the fact that the author of the play of “German heritage,” the truth is that there were two authors. One, Max Baumann, was a German-speaking lawyer in Danzig who wrote the early drafts of the play in German. These were then transformed into popular Yiddish-language play by the director and actress Ida Kaminska. Evidence for this can be found in the Israeli program of the play (Harvard Libraries) and in the work of Polish scholar Mieczyslaw Abramowicz. However, Baumann is frequently cited as the sole author of the play that this remains uncontested by sources such as the YIVO Encyclopedia. What is unfortunately overlooked by histories that ignore the multilingual story of the text’s production is exactly how intertwined the German and Yiddish literary histories remained until just before the Second World War.

⁹⁸ *Berliner Zeitung* 4 October 1957 (13:23) p. 3

⁹⁹ *Ibid*

exclusively on a plot analysis, the reviewer for *Neues Deutschland* notes, “[Es] wird deutlich, daß die Anklage sich in erster Linie gegen einen gesellschaftlichen Zustand richtet, nicht gegen die Menschen eines Volkes.”¹⁰⁰ The review assures the reader that the Jewish Poles understand that East Germany has no connection to the Nazi past by writing “Die Gäste aus Warschau sehen in uns ein Deutschland, das mit den Fortsetzern der mittelalterlichen Pogrome, mit den Judenschlächtern von Auschwitz und anderwärts, nichts gemein hat.”¹⁰¹ The article then asks, “Was aber mögen sie empfinden, so nahe dem anderen Teil von Deutschland, wo die Kumpane jener Mörder Ministersessel innehaben?”¹⁰² The aforementioned article from the *Berliner Zeitung* comes to a similar conclusion about the presence of the Yiddish theater in the East, rather than in the West. “Die Verfolgungen haben ja mit Hitler begonnen,” the reviewer begins, “und wenn man nur über die Grenze nach Westen blickt, so wird es offenbar, daß sie nicht einmal mit Hitler endeten.”¹⁰³ If the play was in any way intended as a snub (or accusation of fascism) towards the West, it was not taken as such. The review that appeared in the *Die Zeit* writes that the play, “verzichtet aber auf jede Anklage, so daß wohl die Wahl gerade dieses Stückes als eine noble Geste der Besucher aus Warschau verstanden werden darf.”¹⁰⁴

The next dramatic performance featuring Yiddish certainly did contain an *Anklage*, although the accused was not the German people, but the bourgeoisie. This play, *Ich selbst und kein Engel* was the first partially Yiddish-language drama by an author living in German

¹⁰⁰ *Neues Deutschland* 6 October 1957 (12:23) p. 4

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ *Berliner Zeitung* 4 October 1957 (13:23) p. 3

¹⁰⁴ “Das Theater im Osten.” *Die Zeit*. 24 October 1957

performed in that country. It was written by Thomas Christoph Harlan, the son of Veit Harlan, the director of the notorious anti-Semitic 1940 film *Jud Süß* (1940). *Ich selbst* was staged in West Berlin in 1958 and 1959 and at East Berlin's Berliner Ensemble in 1959. Formally and stylistically, Harlan alludes frequently to Bertolt Brecht's epic or dialectical theater. The piece is also very much in keeping with the Volksstück tradition, relying on dialect and folksong, staging the bulk of the drama as a local performance by kibbutz residents, and including a thematic focus on the *Volk*. In order to analyze Harlan's play and subsequent portrayals of Yiddish in German theater in a meaningful way, it is important to retrace the discussion in the East and West on Brecht's dramatic theories and the status of the Volksstück in the 15 years following the Second World War.

Building new theaters, defining the *Volk*

As both German states tried to set up a new theater culture in the years following the end of the Second World War, theater directors and dramaturges had to consider to what extent the German stage could continue to rely on prewar traditions and to what extent new models needed to be developed. By the late 1950s, the two German states had made "two very different attempts to translate pre-war German theater to the contemporary situation."¹⁰⁵ While theater directors, writers and dramaturges in the East were concerned primarily with a specific form of reeducation and that would help viewers develop class consciousness and a strong identification with a specific form of antifascism, Western theater during the first decade and a half of the postwar period tended to stress an ahistorical "essential humanity in

¹⁰⁵ C.D. Innes. *Modern German Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. 15

its spectators.”¹⁰⁶ Regardless of their goals, both states laid claim to certain aspects of the German dramatic tradition and strategically disavowed others. Both states stressed the “Pflege des ‘kulturellen Erbes’” as a means of signifying “die Wiedergeburt eines ‘besseren Deutschland,’” but also deemed certain aspects of the prewar theater unsuitable for their purposes.¹⁰⁷ The focus of this chapter is primarily on the renovation and reception of three particular, though related, traditions in the German theater. These are the Volksstück, Brecht’s epic or dialectical theater and the use of Yiddish or Yiddish-like language on the German stage.

In Brecht’s 1940 *Anmerkungen zum Volksstück* he criticizes the Volksstück as it has been written and performed in the past. “Um in dem Stück zu spielen,” he writes, “muß man nur unnatürlich sprechen können und sich auf der Bühne in schlichter Eitelkeit benehmen.”¹⁰⁸ Brecht argues for a new, political model of the Volksstück and of *Volkstümlichkeit*, which he had already begun to outline in *Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus* (1938). In this essay, Brecht writes, “Gegen die zunehmenden Barbarei gibt es nur einen Bundesgenossen: das Volk [... Es ist notwendig], sich an das Volk zu wenden, und nötiger denn je, seine Sprache zu sprechen.”¹⁰⁹ To contrast his own use of the term *volkstümlich* to the way in which it had been used previously, Brecht writes that, for him, the term, “bezieht sich auf das Volk, das an der Entwicklung nicht nur voll teilnimmt, sondern sie geradezu usurpiert, forciert bestimmt. Wir haben ein Volk vor Augen, das Geschichte macht, das die

¹⁰⁶ John Rouse. *Brecht and the West German Theater. The Practice and Politics of Interpretation*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989. 84

¹⁰⁷ Peter Simhandl. *Theatergeschichte in einem Band*. Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 2007. 260

¹⁰⁸ Bertolt Brecht. *Anmerkungen zum Volksstück* in *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967) 293

¹⁰⁹ Brecht. *Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus* in *Gesammelte Werke* 408

Welt und sich selbst verändert. Wir haben ein kämpfendes Volk vor Augen und also einen kämpferischen Begriff *volkstümlich*.”¹¹⁰ Speaking specifically for the relevance of this discussion to his theater, Brecht writes, “*Volkstümlich heißt*: den breiten Massen verständlich, ihre Ausdrucksform aufnehmend und bereichernd / ihren Standpunkt einnehmend, befestigend und korrigierend.” He continues this list, “den fortschrittlichsten Teil des Volkes so vertretend, daß er die Führung übernehmen kann, also auch den andern Teilen des Volkes verständlich / anknüpfend an die Traditionen, sie weiterführend.”¹¹¹

Because of Brecht’s politics and the East German tendency to stage more dramas concerned with *das Volk* as an agent of political power, rather than with the individual as was common in the West, critical engagement with Brecht’s writing on the Volksstück and on the genre in general occurred much earlier in the East than in the West. As Peter Simhandl writes of the first decades of West German theater, “[e]ine Auseinandersetzung mit der politischen und sozialen Wirklichkeit fand nur selten statt.”¹¹² He explains that, during this period, classical German dramas and imported poetic and absurdist dramas, which preferred the individual over the social as focal point, dominated the stage. He writes that, while Brecht was of course well known and often discussed in the West, “West German theatre neatly separated Brecht’s means from his ends.”¹¹³ John Rouse, author of *Brecht and the West German Theater* argues that although much of Brecht’s terminology was adopted by West German dramaturges, Brecht’s language was coopted into a theater that did not stress critical perspective on existing social structures, but instead suggested that, “one must first correct

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Simhandl 291

¹¹³ Rouse 83

oneself; social correction, if it needs to be considered at all, will simply follow—of itself, somehow.”¹¹⁴ It was not until the middle of the 1960s, with the advent of the *kritisches Volksstück*, that the West German intelligentsia began to engage critically with this tradition. Even then, this tradition is generally seen by scholars, beginning with Theodor Adorno, as owing much more to the tradition founded by Ödön von Horváth than the work of Brecht.¹¹⁵

The Brechtian tradition, however, remained the center of the East German discussion on the *Volksstück*, although it was not taken up uncritically. Brecht’s work was seen as adaptable to the East German goal of creating a *Dramatik* that could, “zum ersten Mal in der deutschen Geschichte” be a “*Dramatik des Volkes*.”¹¹⁶ There seems to have been very little concern in the East that the *Volksstück* tradition was too tainted by nationalist associations. Instead, discussion of the *Volksstück* and of Brecht’s interpretation of its revival as a progressive political tool centered around East German concern that Brecht’s revolutionary model was not appropriate for the realized *Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Staat*.

Although much of his rhetoric was picked up by East German playwrights in the early years of the GDR, Brecht’s vision of a revolutionary, dialectical theater was not universally accepted in the GDR, breaking as it did from the official preference for socialist realism. The *Volksstück*, even in Brecht’s conception, also posed a problem for the GDR, where, theoretically, the *Volk* was now the ruling class. Under these circumstances, Ulrich Profitlich writes in *Dramatik der DDR*, “drohen *Volksstück* und *Volkstümlichkeit* zu tautologischen Wendungen zu verkümmern, sie verlieren an kulturgeschichtlicher Spezifika oder erfahren

¹¹⁴ Rouse 84

¹¹⁵ Theodor Adorno. “Reflexion zum *Volksstück*.” *Noten zur Literatur*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974.

¹¹⁶ From Wilfried Adlin’s 1958 “Zu einigen Problemen und Stück zeitgenössischer Dramatik” (Kreuzer und Schmidt 221)

eine grenzenlose weltliterarische Dimension.”¹¹⁷ There were however, as Profitlich also discusses, public discussions among playwrights and critics in the leading theater journals of the GDR on the role of *Volk* and *Volkstümlichkeit* in the new socialist Germany and the connection between these traditions and Brecht’s vision for an epic, dialectical theater.

These discussions began in earnest after Brecht’s *Mutter Courage* was performed in East Berlin in 1949. The debate that ensued touches on many topics central to the construction of a new, East German theater, two of which are relevant here. The first is simply the question of whether or not epic theater had a place on the East German stage and the second is the relationship between *Volkstheater* and epic theater. Two key voices in this debate were those of Fritz Erpenbeck, then the editor and chief of *Theater der Zeit* and soon to be *Leiter der Hauptabteilung Darstellende Kunst und Musik* of the East German *Ministerrat*, and Herbert Ihering, the lead dramaturge at the *Deutsches Theater*. Erpenbeck’s review of *Courage*, which sparked many responses, asks, “Wo verliert sich, trotz fortschrittlichen Willens und höchsten, formalen Könnens, der Weg in eine volksfremde Dekadenz - wo führt, bei fortschrittlichem Willen und höchstem, formalem Können, der Weg zur Volkstümlichkeit, zur dringend notwendigem Gesundung unserer Dramatik?”¹¹⁸ Erpenbeck is also of the opinion that *Courage* fails to live up to the goals of the epic theater, although he acknowledges that it draws many stylistic elements from this tradition, including the staging of songs. Importantly, Erpenbeck was also very clear that, in his opinion, epic theater had no place on the East German stage. As he wrote years later, “Ich habe meinen Standpunkt seit 1945 oft dargelegt und begründet [...] Ich lehne das Epische Theater als

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Kreuzer and Schmidt 47

gangbaren Weg in die Zukunft ab.”¹¹⁹ Key elements of Erpenbeck’s critique are that he associates Brechtian theater with decadence and that he sees this style as antithetical to the type of *volkstümliche* theater that the GDR needs.

In his response to Erpenbeck, Ihering speaks directly to this criticism, writing, “Die Rückbesinnung auf die epischen Grundelemente der Dichtung ist im Falle Brecht die Rückerinnerung an Volkstümlichkeit und Schlichtheit.”¹²⁰ He also notes, “In jedem Volkstheater wird gesungen,” responding to Erpenbeck’s criticism that the songs in *Mutter Courage* “die Handlung erweichen.”¹²¹ Ihering argues that East Germany must establish a *Volkskultur* untainted by the assumption that this is necessarily lowbrow culture and believes that Brecht has helped pave the way to do so. Of course, when another respondent to Erpenbeck notes that *Mutter Courage* reflects the “realen plebejische Tradition,” he is correct in noting that the *Volk* directly depicted in the content of Brecht’s play is not a proletarian *Volk*.¹²² This distinction between the proletarian and the plebian remains central in the discussions surrounding the Volksstück in the GDR for the next two decades and is key to understanding the staging of the Yiddish folk.

Peter Hacks was one of the first, and certainly one of the most well known, East German playwrights to talk about this problem directly and to attempt to conceptualize how the Volksstück tradition might be revived in a form suitable to the East German context. In his first article relevant to this tradition, he seems to believe there is a place for the plebian position in the theater of the GDR. In his *Einige Gemeinplätze über das Stückschreiben* in

¹¹⁹ Kreuzer and Schmidt 164

¹²⁰ Kreuzer and Schmidt 63

¹²¹ Kreuzer and Schmidt 63

¹²² Kreuzer and Schmidt 68

Neue Deutsche Literatur (1956), he writes that, “Die Geisteshaltung von konsequent ihrer gesellschaftlichen Lage gemäß handelnden Unteren beliebiger Art nennt man, spätestens seit Hans Mayer, plebejisch. [...] Das fortschrittliche Theaterstück, mithin, ist rationalistisch und plebejisch.”¹²³ Hacks continues, “Wenn gilt, daß fortschrittliche Kunst plebejisch und rationalistisch sei, gilt, für die Jetztzeit spezifiziert: sie ist proletarisch und dialektisch. Beide Wurzeln erfordern, in allen Künsten, ein bestimmtes Maß an epischen Zügen.”¹²⁴ The following year in his article *Das realistische Theaterstück*, however, Hacks offers a self-correction. Hacks explains that he had written in support of a “Geisteshaltung,” which he had referred to as “the plebian” and that he had conflated this mentality with present day proletarian mentality. Speaking of himself in the third person, he writes, “Er hat da formal nicht unrecht, aber er hat jenen Begriff des Plebejischen nicht genau untersucht und ihn deshalb für die besonderen Zwecke der Gegenwart nicht entscheiden genug ausgeschlossen [...] Plebejisches Verhalten, historisch begriffen, ist kleinbürgerliches Verhalten.”¹²⁵ He concludes from this that the art form traditionally known as a Volksstück is not a viable category within socialism because the “proletarische Volksstück ist das realistische Theaterstück.”¹²⁶ Toeing the party line, Hacks implies that there is no longer a need or desire for a specific genre of theater for of or the *Volk*, because all socialist realist theater is of and for the Volk.

¹²³ Kreuzer and Schmidt 259. Hacks defines rationalism as the “Geisteshaltung der Vernünftigen, also derer, die die Welt nicht als vernünftig, sonder als erklärbar ansehen.”

¹²⁴ Kreuzer and Schmidt 261

¹²⁵ Kreuzer and Schmidt 267

¹²⁶ Kreuzer and Schmidt 269

Clearly, however, Hacks remained interested in the staging of the *Volk* in a more traditional sense. It was in fact Hacks' own *Moritz Tassow*, written in 1961 and first performed in 1965, which, according to Profitlich, realized "in theoretischer, dramenpraktischer und inszenatorischer Hinsicht das Brechtsche Volksstümlichkeitskonzept in einem singulären Akt."¹²⁷ Unlike Brecht's *Mutter Courage* or *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*, Hacks' play "variiert das Herr-Knecht-Verhältnis in der Konfrontation zwischen dem plebejischen Genussmenschen Tassow und dem proletarischen Praktiker Mattukat."¹²⁸ Hacks may have realized Brecht's *Volksstümlichkeit* concept, but he did so in a way that pleased the East German authorities because he placed an identifiable proletarian figure on the stage, rather than relying on a dialectical relationship between form and content to convey a Marxist position to the audience. Rather than correcting their own worldview through a distanced critique of characters such as Courage, spectators were instead presented with a proletarian figure with whom they could directly identify and a plebian figure as a counter-example.

Ich selbst und kein Engel

In 1958 Thomas Christoph Harlan's play *Ich selbst und kein Engel* was performed by his West Berlin theater troupe, *Junges Ensemble*. Harlan had been inspired to write the play on a 1953 trip to Israel with his friend Klaus Kinski. The trip had begun with the goal of

¹²⁷ Ulrich Profitlich, ed. *Dramatik der DDR*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987. 383

¹²⁸ Profitlich 382

producing a documentary film on the revival of Hebrew.¹²⁹ This film project didn't work out, but Harlan became interested in Jewish resistance movements (and the connection between the resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto and against the British mandatory power in Palestine, which he viewed as anti-imperialist). He began writing *Ich selbst und kein Engel* the same year. Harlan intended to write the play from a Marxist perspective, although he later said in his autobiography, "Natürlich ist der Versuch von *Ich selbst und kein Engel*, den Widerstand der jüdischen Kampforganisation im Warschauer Ghetto in einen Widerstand der Roten umzudeuten, grundsätzlich [...] eine Fälschung."¹³⁰

The play uses a strategy clearly borrowed from Brechtian dramaturgy to tell the story of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising: Within his play there is a play performed an Israeli amateur theater troupe.¹³¹ The actress cast as the female lead, and the play's only fluent Yiddish-speaker, Cipe Lincovsky, an actress of Polish descent from the Buenos Aires Yiddish theater, was recruited by Harlan and brought to Berlin for the role. The play's simultaneous claims to authentic content and epic form make both difficult to achieve. However, these goals are themselves telling, as is the way they help shape the depiction of the Volk and proletarian-plebian dichotomy.

Using German, Yiddish and mixtures of the two, along with folksongs, Harlan draws directly from the Volksstück tradition. More importantly, the Volk is thematized through the

¹²⁹ Since Harlan and Kinski started their project generations after Hebrew had been revived as a modern language, it is not entirely surprising that this project failed and the film was never made.

¹³⁰ Thomas Christoph Harlan. *Ich selbst und kein Engel: Dramatische Chronik aus dem Warschauer Ghetto*. Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1961. 68

¹³¹ In addition to hiring a former assistant to Brecht as his director and staging his play in Brecht's own Berliner Ensemble, Harlan leaves several indications in his script that they play was written with Brechtian staging in mind. These include notes that indicate that each scene is to be accompanied by a projection of text onto the stage that announces the action to follow and that all set changes should be carried out by the actors themselves, making the mechanisms of the performance visible.

play. Using original song, projected titles, transparent staging technologies, and the play-within-the-play device, he also draws consciously from Brecht's concept of the epic theater. Here the simultaneous desires for an "authentic" and, to a certain extent ethnographic, theater and an epic theater are incompatible. This connects directly to larger concerns within the postwar East German theater community, such as which prewar theater forms were salvageable and whether or not revolutionary theater could "remain true to its original intentions if used to affirm rather critically change social conditions."¹³² Harlan, a West German communist, almost certainly did not write his play to affirm postwar social and political structures, nor was he beholden to the East German preference for socialist realism. Rather, the insistence on realism in Harlan's play almost certainly comes from the Yiddish subject matter. Postwar German authors, well aware of the long history of antisemitic caricatures and German-speaking actors masquerading as Yiddish speakers on the German stage, needed not only an appropriate theater form to present the past, but a new, politically acceptable way to represent Eastern European Jewry.

The play begins with a *Rahmenerzählung*, in which members of a leftist kibbutz in Israel discuss their plans to put on a play based on the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in hopes of teaching the compatriots and government officials a lesson. *Ich selbst* was written in German, but performed in an odd mix of German and Yiddish. Taking a cue from Brecht, Harlan begins each scene with a heading to be projected onto the stage. The heading for the introductory scene reads, "In Anspielung auf gegenwärtige Verhältnisse und drohende Kriege beschließen Arbeiter des sozialistischen Kibbuz 'Ghettokämpfer' die Aufführung eines Theaterstückes über Kampf und Untergang des Warschauer Ghettos." They do this, the

¹³² David Bathrick. "The Dialectics of Legitimation: Brecht in the GDR." *New German Critique*. (Spring 1974) pp. 90-103.

audience reads, “in der begründeten Hoffnung, ihre Landsleute -- und die Regierung -- eines Besseres zu belehren.”¹³³ Brecht may have implemented this strategy to develop the *Verfremdungseffekt* so key to his aesthetic, but the technique seems to have the opposite effect when employed here by Harlan. The audience isn’t merely told what to expect with regard to the content of the coming scene, but instructed on what their own role is to be. The message the Israeli spectators are meant to derive from the coming play within the play is the same message the actual German spectators are meant to take away.

Each kibbutz resident has a role to play in the play within a play, which portrays the uprising as experienced by some of the actors themselves. Only Jewish characters are directly represented in this internal play. Nazi cruelty is staged only by kibbutz residents playing ghetto prisoners masquerading as guards. The real enacted conflict exists between members of the *Judenrat* and other prisoners of the ghetto. The audience is exposed to more than a story about an oppressed people rising up against an unjust foreign regime, they are told a story of a group of righteous individuals who must fight against their unrighteous peers. In the frame story, too, one group of Israelis seeks to educate another. The piece therefore lent itself easily to East German critics’ understanding of the piece as about the German-German conflict, rather than about a German-Jewish one.

Even before the troupe made a guest appearance in East Berlin, the show made headlines in both halves of the city. Already eager to claim the piece as part of its own anti-fascist tradition, the East Berlin newspaper the *Berliner Zeitung* first called attention to the play in an article titled *Dürfen Sie uns näherkommen?*¹³⁴ The article presents the play as a

¹³³ Harlan 9

¹³⁴ Arnolt Bronnen. “Dürfen sie uns näher kommen?” *Berliner Zeitung*. 17 December 1958 (14:29) p. 3 - It is ironic that Bronnen, formerly a close friend of Josef Goebbels, who, despite his paternal Jewish lineage, fought

warning against the dangers of West German apathy. The author of the article, however, is hopeful that the presence of this type of theater in West Berlin represents, “einen Durchbruch zu dem, was die Vorbedingung jedes Näherkommens, jeder Einheit ist: Bereitschaft zur ehrlichen und kompromißlosen Abrechnung mit den Fehlern, Lastern und Verbrechen unserer nationalen Vergangenheit.” Only a month later, however, the East German *Neues Deutschland* reported, with a disappointment that surely wasn't sincere, that a performance of the *Ich selbst* in West Berlin had been interrupted by a fascist group armed with stink bombs who called out anti-Semitic slurs during the performance.¹³⁵ “Nur unter der Regie Brandts können sich solche nazistischen Elemente in Westberlin wieder offen hervortun,” the article claims. The stink bombs and the larger scandal surrounding the play were not set off simply by antisemitism, but by Harlan's public plea for West Germany to prosecute two men who had not been held accountable for all of their crimes at Nuremberg, Heinz Jost and Franz Alfred Six.¹³⁶

In the West, the play was reviewed in *Die Zeit* and was described there as being one of the very earliest theater pieces by a German author to bring a Holocaust drama to the German stage. “Sein Verdienst bleibt es,” the article states of Harlan, “daß er sich eines Themas annahm, das unserer Bühne sonst nur von außen zukam – durch den Anne-Frank-Stoff.”¹³⁷ The article also offers the following praise of the playwright: “Harlan hat sich

successfully to have himself considered Aryan by the Nazi regime. Bronnen later turned to Communism and settled in the GDR, where his friend and colleague Brecht remained an important ally.

¹³⁵ “Antisemitische Ausschreitungen.” *Neues Deutschland* 28 January 1959 (14:2) p. 3

¹³⁶ Heinz Jost, had served in the SS as the head of the foreign news service and later lead the *Einsatzgruppe A* in Riga and in 1959 worked in real estate in Düsseldorf. Franz Alfred Six, had been head of the domestic *Sicherheitsdienst* and later lead the SD's *Einsatzgruppe B*. Six was sentenced to 20 years at Nuremberg, but was released in 1952. In 1959 Six worked for Porsche.

¹³⁷ “Sind die Henker noch immer unter uns?” *Die Zeit*. 23 January 1959. <http://www.zeit.de/1959/04/sind-die-henker-noch-immer-unter-uns>. Accessed 4.8.2013.

bewundernswert ins Jüdische eingefühlt, und sein Text zeigt große Meisterschaft in der Handhabung des Jiddischen als Fremdsprache.” Although this praise is undeserved (Harlan did not write the play in Yiddish), it points to what must have been a key element in the play’s success in West Berlin. After all, as the *Zeit* reviewer writes, “die Aufführung ist bei allem guten Willen doch keineswegs gut.”¹³⁸ Harlan’s play was considered unimpressive and out of place on the largely apolitical West German stage, but its content and the proximity it offered audiences to Yiddish offered something appealingly unique.¹³⁹

There can be little doubt that Harlan’s play fits Erika Fischer-Lichte’s definition of theater, taken from Max Hermann, as a “[Spiel], in dem Alle Teilnehmer sind, - Teilnehmer und Zuschauer.”¹⁴⁰ In the case of *Ich selbst*, Harlan, by employing many techniques of the epic theater, makes clear that the role of the audience remains a central concern. Within the play itself, of course, the relationship between play and spectator, including the possibility of theater as an agent of social change, is already thematized. East German critics were less interested in the interaction of the action on stage and the audience as an aesthetic concern. Instead, their reviews focus on creating a distinction between the appropriate Eastern audience and the inappropriate Western audience. The importance of this relationship is

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ Most histories of the West German political theater trace the earnest beginnings of this theater to the period 1963-65, which saw the successful staging of Hochhut’s *Der Stellvertreter* (1963), Walser’s *Der schwarze Schwan* (1964), Kipphardt’s *In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer* (1964), and Weiss’ *Die Ermittlung* (1965) by Erwin Piscator at West Berlin’s Freie Volksbühne. (Teroerde 173; Ismayr 76). Even plays written earlier, such as Borchert’s *Draußen vor der Tür*, failed to reach broad audiences until the 1960s or, in the case of Zuckmayer’s *Des Teufels General*, was celebrated for troubling reasons. Teroerde notes that the latter was popular in the West “anscheinend aber weniger wegen der Sabotageakte gegen die Rüstungsindustrie - diese wurde oft als unmoralisch erfahren - als vielmehr wegen des zelebrierten Militarismus.” (172) Even though West German drama took up the theme of the crimes of the *Vätergeneration* in the 1960s, it remained difficult to stage anything not inline with the staunch West German anti-Communism until the following decade. (Teroerde 175)

¹⁴⁰ Erika Fischer-Lichte *Theaterwissenschaft: Eine Einführung*. Stuttgart: UTB, 2009. 24

highlighted by the fact that stories of the West German stink-bombers become not only the central part of the play's East German reviews, but also in the marketing of the published script to East German audiences. The play, when published for the first time by the East Berlin Henschelverlag, included, for example, a note on the book jacket explaining, "Seine Uraufführung in der Westberliner Kongreßhalle gab 1959 den einen Anlass zu ernster Prüfung der Gegenwart am Vergangenen, den anderen zu faschistischen Wutgeheul."

The fact that the interruption at one West Berlin performance by antisemitic protesters sparked East German interest in the play speaks to the importance of this play not only as a piece of literature, but as an event. Fischer-Lichte sees this *Ereignishaftigkeit* as intimately tied to the ability of the audience to be transformed through a *Schwellenerfahrung* sparked by their role in the performance.¹⁴¹ She writes, "[Die Zuschauer] erleben die Aufführung als einen ästhetischen und zugleich als einen sozialen, ja politischen Prozess [...] Ihre Wahrnehmung folgt sowohl der Ordnung der Präsenz als auch der Ordnung der Repräsentation."¹⁴² When these binaries of subject and object and of presence and representation disappear, Fischer-Lichte explains, the space between the polar opposites creates the *Schwelle* occupied by the viewer.

A key to Brechtian dramaturgy is the creation of space in which the viewers are confronted not only with the realization that what is present in front of them is not identical to that which is being represented, as Fischer-Lichte describes, but also with the realization that what is being represented on stage does not reflect an essential truth, but rather a single, mutable option. Harlan employs several techniques that Brecht argued could produce exactly

¹⁴¹ Fischer-Lichte *Theaterwissenschaft* 59

¹⁴² Ibid 60

this effect, including the projections of the headings on the stage and the use of the play-within-a-play format. These strategies, however, are undermined by the portrayal of the female lead, Bluma, through the Polish-Argentine Yiddish-speaking actress Lincovsky. Here the opposite effect is achieved; The distance between what is present on stage and what is being represented on stage is reduced to a minimum. Lincovsky's performance is celebrated because it is perceived as authentic. She is lauded not because of what she represents on the stage, but because of her mere presence on stage.

Lincovsky's performance was in fact one of the few aspects of the performance praised in the review in *Die Zeit*. The review notes, "in diesem jiddisch akzentuierten Drama ist sie allein ganz glaubwürdig."¹⁴³ The same review suggests that the play as whole was not seen as a play meant to explore possibilities, but rather as a factual representation of the past. The author of the review is particularly critical of the political leanings of the ghetto prisoners and asks, "In der Tat mußten die Sowjets den Juden als einzige Alternative zur SS erscheinen. Aber sollte sich keiner der Verfolgten Gedanken darüber gemacht haben, daß wohl auch mit der Roten Armee die Freiheit nicht kommen werde?" Here it becomes clear that viewer expectations for authenticity as based, at least partially, on Cold War politics.

Lincovsky was an even bigger hit in the East, where she returned on two separate tours after her performance in *Ich selbst*. After the play ran in East Berlin, Lincovsky toured the country, giving solo performances in Berlin, Leipzig, Görlitz and Dresden.¹⁴⁴ In reviews of these performances, she is almost always linked her to her performance in the play "dessen

¹⁴³ *Die Zeit* "Sind die Henker noch immer unter uns?"

¹⁴⁴ *Berliner Zeitung* 2 April 1961 (17:9) p. 6

Aufführung damals von faschistischen Elementen gestört wurde.”¹⁴⁵ By 1961, Lincovsky had made three trips to East Germany and the *Berliner Zeitung* happily reported, “Lincovsky freut sich, wieder in Deutschland, wo sie bereits zum dritten Mal weilt, zu sein.”¹⁴⁶ Of course, the article makes clear, this applies exclusively to the East. Lincovsky was celebrated for her performance in *Ich selbst* for believably portraying a Yiddish speaker and singer with leftist political leanings. Her tours through East Germany were successful because she proves herself to be just that. It is her very presence on the East Germany stage that makes her notable, not what the artwork she embodies is able to represent.

The final instance in which Harlan’s use of Yiddish seems to inhibit the work’s potential as a piece of epic theater is the appearance of song in the drama. Fischer-Lichte opens *Inszenierung von Authentizität* by noting, “Es besteht heute weitgehend Konsens, daß sich das Selbstverständnis einer Kultur nicht nur in Texten und Monumenten formuliert, sondern auch – zum Teil sogar vorrangig – in theatralen Prozessen.” Fischer-Lichte adds, “In Ritualen, Zeremonien, Festen, Spielen, Wettkämpfen, Liedvorträgen u.a. stellt eine Kultur ihre Selbstverständnis vor ihren Mitgliedern und anderen dar und aus.”¹⁴⁷ Early in Harlan’s play, the performance of songs is reminiscent of a Brechtian use of song, but the songs are ultimately employed in an appropriation of ethnographic material as a tool of self-identity formation. What makes Harlan’s use of song in this way interesting and relevant to the German Cold War competition for the appropriation of Yiddish is that the self-understandings of two cultures are being projected simultaneously. In keeping with the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte, Christian Horn, Isabel Pflug, and Matthias Warstat, eds. *Inszenierung von Authentizität*. Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2007. 9

pseudo-documentarian nature of the performance, song is used on one hand to present the authentic culture of a foreign people. In the play's most emotionally charged scene, the cast joins together to perform *Zog nit keyn mol*, a Yiddish resistance song, also known as the Partisan Song, written in the Vilna Ghetto in 1943. This performance not only serves to highlight the authenticity claims made by the play, but its live performance in East Germany also plays into dominant narratives of East German national identity as the heir to the tradition of antifascist resistance.

The play leaves little doubt that the audience members are meant to identify, emotional and politically, with the characters on stage as they perform the Partisan Song. In fact, some viewers would have already been familiar with the song, as it appears as the only Yiddish text in the popular *Die Zeit der Gemeinsamkeit* (1949), by East German author Stephan Hermlin, an author Alan Nothnagle describes in *Building the East German Myth* as having played a key role in building the East German "antifascist myth."¹⁴⁸ Even if viewers weren't already familiar with the Partisan Song as an example of Yiddish proletarian folksong that could be claimed as part of the antifascist tradition shared by the GDR, the play itself sets the viewer up to identify emotionally with the performers of Yiddish folksong. First of all, Yiddish folksong is always associated with resistance in the play. A young girl named Meisje Grün, one of the most positive figures in the play, and one of the few prisoners to survive and escape (to the kibbutz where the story is now being performed as a play), is the first to be associated with this type of song, specifically in connection with her attempts

¹⁴⁸ Alan Nothnagle. *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999. (107) Interestingly, Hermlin's life was itself a sort of performance. Having built up his credentials as a leading antifascist writer, Hermlin was later found out to be a fraud. He had crafted a narrative of his own life that included time spent in a concentration camp, a father killed in the Nazi gas chambers, a brother killed in battle against the Nazis, and time spent fighting in the Spanish Civil War and the French resistance. In 1996, it became clear that these stories were false.

to rally troupes for the resistance. For example, Meisje performs “zugunsten der jüdischen Widerstandsbewegung ein Bettellied” for her friend Dovidl.¹⁴⁹ Meisje’s ability to spread support for the resistance through folksong is seen again when, finally realizing that he can no longer in good conscious continue to work as a Jewish police office in the ghetto, Mandelzweig tears off his badge and boots and begins to sing a song he learned from Meisje. A fellow police officer looks on and cries, “Er muß rot sein!”¹⁵⁰ Finally, the uprising itself is staged through the performance of the Partisan Song. In the scene that precedes this, titled “Anordnung von oben,” the Judenrat and meets with its leader, Jakob, who declares “Jeder Widerstand is sinnlos” and orders the “sofortige Verhaftung der Arbeiterführer.”¹⁵¹ In the following scene, “Anordnung von Unten,” the “Arbeiter” at the barricades sing the Partisan Song in Yiddish.

Harlan’s play uses two groups of Jews to represent the plebian (the suppressed members of Judenrat who are only interested in working within the existing system for their own gain) and the proletariat (the resistance fighters). This dichotomy is similar to what Peter Hacks would stage six years later. Harlan not only predates Hacks, but also places Yiddish within the proletarian tradition, with which audience members are expected to identify. ‘Authenticity’ is thereby also firmly placed in the proletarian camp. The piece may have failed as a work of epic theater, but it represents an understudied contribution to both the Eastern and Western attempts to redefine and stage the *Volk* and shows Yiddish to be both a tool of self-identity formation in the East and of theatrical re-politicization in the West.

¹⁴⁹ Harlan 27

¹⁵⁰ Harlan 73

¹⁵¹ Harlan 75-76

The 1960s and the attempt at a *folkstik*

In the early 1960s, East German playwright Rolf Schneider, who was also editor of the cultural-political magazine *Aufbau*, was at work on his play *Die Geschichte von Moischele*, which was originally set to premier in 1964 at East Berlin's *Volksbühne*. In the end, the play was never performed. The goal of the piece, as Schneider writes in the introduction to the play as published in 1970, was “die Tradition des jüdischen Volksstückes für unsere Zeit und unser Theater fruchtbar zu machen.”¹⁵² This portion of the chapter explores how the terms *Volk* and *Volksstück* define themselves over the course of Schneider's play and then discusses the ways in which such a project, given the sociopolitical climate at the time, was destined to fail.

As described previously in this chapter, the East German reworking of Brecht's concept of *Volksstümlichkeit* and its connection to epic theater culminated in a form of *Volksstück* that came closer to meeting the demands of socialist realism by staging characters that could be said to directly represent the proletariat. Ulrich Profitlich writes that, during the 1960s, “[der] groß[e] proletarisch[e] Held, der ungebrochen und vorbildhaft seinen Weg geht,” became a staple of the *Volksstück* in the GDR.¹⁵³ To the extent that the *Volksstück* serves a social criticism function, the object of this criticism is no longer the domestic *Volk*. In this sense, the trajectory of the *Volksstück* in the East is the exact opposite of its counterpart in the West.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Rolf Schneider. *Stücke*. East Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1970. 207

¹⁵³ Profitlich 384

¹⁵⁴ It was during this same time period in the West that the *Volksstück* was finally revived, in the form of the *Kritische Volksstück*. This genre, whose leading author was Franz Xaver Kroetz, drew heavily on the tradition

In *Die Geschichte von Moischele* we see a piece of theater that, through its performance of two plays and presentation of two *Völker* is able to simultaneously contain an East German moral that celebrates the birth of a powerful proletariat and a storyline that seems to lend itself more easily to the West German tradition of the *Anti-Volksstück*. Schneider's play is divided into two parts. As he notes in the introduction to the published play, "Der vorliegende Teil gewährt Einblick in die Dramaturgie und Erzählart des Stückes. Die Fortsetzung wollte von den Schwierigkeiten der Wandlungen seiner beiden Hauptpersonen in einer schwierigen Zeit erzählen."¹⁵⁵ The first part, a monologue in a mock-Yiddish by a Jewish bookseller with hair locks, a yarmulke, and a caftan, supposedly models the Yiddish theatrical tradition, which, as becomes clear in the second part of the play, has no place in the GDR.

The performer playing the Yiddish-speaking storyteller begins, "Ach will ajch erzahlen e Geschichte. Tommer [=vielleicht] ihr kennt se."¹⁵⁶ This story, he explains, "hot se beschrieben sech der Rolf Schneider, e Goj." He then adds "*beiseite*," "E Hahn, wos kräj, un e Goj, wos schmußt jiddisch, sollen sein Kapore far mech."¹⁵⁷ This is presumably intended as a moment of self-congratulation, comic relief, and direct connection with the audience. If Schneider is a goy who speaks Yiddish, he certainly isn't one who speaks it well. The phrase in Yiddish to be or become a *kapore* for someone implies that you are head over heels in love with them, willing be to their *kapore-hindl*, the chicken slaughtered in a

of the modern *Volksstück* founded by Ödön von Harváth. This development in West German literature was praised by Theodor Adorno in his essay "Reflexion über das Volksstück," published in *Noten zur Literatur*.

¹⁵⁵ Schneider 207

¹⁵⁶ Schneider 209

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

traditional Yom Kippur ritual. This ritual is featured in many juicy Yiddish expressions and it seems almost certain that this was not what Schneider was looking for. Schneider continues in his grammatically and idiomatically poor Yiddish, “Nebbich: se hot sech genannen de Geschichte fan Masichele.”¹⁵⁸ The story he then tells describes a wandering Jew, Moischele, who goes from his small shtetl into the big city, where he is mistreated and generally finds life difficult. Eventually Moischele goes back to his shtetl, where he is greeted and comforted by the sight of the Bethaus. The storyteller concludes, “*Is nu farbaj, Lajt, hat sech gewessen. Un hajt? Sollte ihr aich sahen nu, was nebbich is unser Stickl,*” *Nebekh* or, as it is transliterated here, *nebbich*, means ‘alas’ or ‘poor guy’, and is first applied to the person of Moischele and then to the *Stickl*, meant to explore the possibility of reviving the Yiddish *folkshtik* in the GDR, itself.¹⁵⁹

The body of the play, the portion in German introduced by the Yiddish storyteller, takes place during the Holocaust and in its immediate aftermath and begins in an Eastern European town as Jewish families are being forced into train cars for deportation. A woman and her father, the mother and grandfather of the main character Moische, watch through the window as their neighbors are collected. Moische’s grandfather, Mendel, and his mother, Rahel, discuss the town’s various inhabitants as they pass by. Here, we are first introduced to the only positively portrayed Jewish character, Berkowitz, a convinced communist destined to die in a ghetto uprising. He, according to Rahel, is the source of the rumors Rahel has heard about a ghetto to which Jews are being taken. He is the source of truth. When Rahel passes this along to her father, he rejects the information, which he believes has come from

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

¹⁵⁹ Schneider 212

an irreputable source. Mendel says of Berkowitz, “Nebbich [...] Er hat in Breslau revoltiert mit den Gojim [...] Er hat keinen Schabbes mehr begangen, wo er zurück war. Er ißt nicht kosher.”¹⁶⁰ Mendel represents the world of practicing, Eastern European Jewry, which is portrayed as apolitical, narrow minded, and naïve. Because he is the character whose speech is the most colored by Yiddish, the language is also associated with this conservative, unrealistic worldview.

Even as the Nazis are rounding up the townspeople, Mendel insists his family set up for Shabbat as usual, and he tells the story of a famous Rebbe who stopped a pogrom by keeping the Sabbath. When the Nazis arrive at their door and Mendel continues to speak, he is told, “Mauschel nicht, Alter, komm.” When Mendel refused to follow orders and instead begins to pray, he is shot. This is by no means portrayed as the death of a sympathetic martyr, but instead as the death of a foolish old man who believed that belief that religious (Yiddish) folktales can provide a defense in the face of social injustice.

Moische’s mother is killed in transport and Moische arrives in the ghetto as an orphan. Once there, Moische lives with Berkowitz, other supporters of the coming uprising, and Joseph, a non-Jewish German anarchist who has become politically apathetic. From this point on, the play follows the chiastic fates of Moische and Joseph. The two are among the few to survive the uprising, but the experience affects them in drastically different ways. While Moische is left embittered, Joseph’s belief in revolution is reignited. As Moische’s outlook becomes more and more resigned and hopeless, Joseph becomes a positive, revolutionary force, eventually able to help build the new Germany.

¹⁶⁰ Schneider 214

In Moische's downfall, the parallels between Moische and the Moischele of the *Vorspiel* become clearer. In the *Vorspiel*, Moischele gives up on life in the metropolis and returns to the shtetl, "wo sein Sipp noch wohnt."¹⁶¹ Over and over, the storyteller makes remarks on Moischele's inflexible nature, all slight variations of, "er war wer er war, denn ein Jüd ist ein Jüd."¹⁶² The Jewish *Volk*, as portrayed here, is not the politically conscious *Volk* that East German Volksstücke typically presented. Although there is a brief nod to the association of Yiddish song with the working class seen in *Ich selbst*,¹⁶³ the louder message is that the Yiddish brand of the Volksstück, and even of *Volk*, has no place in the GDR. This message seems to be confirmed in the fact that Schneider never found an appropriate ending to the play and it therefore was never staged.¹⁶⁴

The center of the chiasma, structurally placed at the center of the 12-act play, is the attempted revolt in the ghetto. This turn is represented most clearly in a shift in narration. At the beginning of the act, Moische narrates the hope of the revolution; at the end, Joseph narrates what happened and the change it engendered in his political outlook.¹⁶⁵ While Joseph sets himself up to become a hero that the East German stage could embrace, the first words out of Moische's mouth when he next appears on stage are, "Heil Hitler."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Schneider 212

¹⁶² Schneider 211

¹⁶³ In the ghetto, Moische also encounters a young girl, Janina, whose family is about to be deported to Auschwitz. She sings him a folksong with the requisite Yiddish flavoring words (Schneider 236-237). Janina; "Unser Dienstmädchen hat ein Lied gesungen, in Posen. Meine Eltern wollten's nicht, daß ich zu ihr in die Küche geht, ich bin aber immer gegangen." (Schneider 236)

¹⁶⁴ *Berliner Zeitung*, 5 August 1965 (21:213) p. 6

¹⁶⁵ Schneider 239, 244.

¹⁶⁶ Schneider, Akt 7

After the war ends, both characters find themselves in the Soviet occupied zone, where Joseph is rehabilitated and takes part in the building of a new Germany. Moische, on the other hand, slips into the world of black market trading and is arrested. Moische, the passive victim of the Holocaust, has only been made cynical. His song “Rebellieren ist Scheiß, Lieben ist ein Scheiß [...] Bloß Findigsein ist kein Scheiß,”¹⁶⁷ calls Mutter Courage and the plebian position clearly to mind. Suggesting that Moische’s attitude comes not only from his persecution, but from inherent cultural problems, Moische even uses Yiddish sayings to express his complete apathy: “Bei uns sagen sie: Es gibt zwei Dinge, auf die ein Jud täglich wartet: auf die Post und aufn Messias.”¹⁶⁸ This can be read as an accusation towards Yiddish culture not only because it is one of the few points in the texts in which Moische uses Yiddish-accented German, but also because of the way in which Joseph’s counter argument calls the refrain of the *Vorspiel* to mind. Trying to help Moische, and representing his counterpart, Joseph insists, “Wirklich, Moische: du mußt dich ändern”¹⁶⁹ and “Ein Jud soll nicht mehr verlassen sein, sondern ein Mensch.”¹⁷⁰

In a *Berliner Zeitung* article from 1964 describing the upcoming theater season, Party Secretary and dramaturge for the Maxim Gorki Theater and the Volksbühne, Fritz Rödel, describes *Moischele* as a story that “erzählt vom schweren Weg eines jüdischen Jungen, der als Kind unter den Faschisten leiden mußte und dem in den erste Jahren unseres Aufbaus viele Konflikte zu bestehen aufgegeben werden, bis er wieder zu sich selbst findet.”¹⁷¹ If this

¹⁶⁷ Schneider 252

¹⁶⁸ Schneider 275

¹⁶⁹ Schneider 275

¹⁷⁰ Schneider 260

¹⁷¹ *Berliner Zeitung* 26 March 1964 (20:86) p. 6

were Schneider's intention, it did not come to fruition. Moische's failure, and the failure of the project as a whole, suggests that, at this point, there was not in fact a place in East German culture for the revival of Yiddish folk theater. Given the broader trajectory of the Volksstück tradition in East Germany and the plebian position already mapped onto Yiddish culture, this is not surprising. Schneider's attempt, in fact, seems to be the last to attempt to bring Yiddish folk culture to the East German dramatic stage until shortly before the fall of the wall.

Beginning the of Re-location Yiddish in the 1980s

Looking at the use of the Yiddish folk tradition in both *Ich selbst und kein Engel* and *Die Geschichte von Moischele*, we see both of the ways in which East Germany was able to appropriate Yiddish as a proletarian language and culture and the ways in which this culture was excluded from the heroic proletarian *Volk* hero of the reinvented Volksstück. The use of Yiddish (and then lack thereof) on the German stage following the Second World War demonstrates that Yiddish, while perhaps incorporated into a universal proletarian folk to a certain extent, was otherwise very much associated with a geographic and cultural other. This pattern is clearly reflected in prose literature as well.

As the chapters on East and West German novels will discuss in detail, the treatment of Yiddish in the art of both German states underwent a major shift between the 1980s and early 1990s. Instead of being portrayed almost exclusively as representative of the other, Yiddish began to be incorporated into German art in ways that stressed the origins of Yiddish

in present-day Germany and re-located the imagined home of Yiddish from the Eastern European shtetl to Germany itself.

In the history of Yiddish in German performance, this shift is best reflected in critical reaction to Walter Kempowski's 1980 radio play *Moin Vaddr läbt*. This polyvocal *Hörspiel* thematizes the lost *Vätergeneration* and the linguistic loss this engendered. *Moin Vaddr* is constructed as an amalgam of song, dialog and monolog, throughout which the voices of children imagining the past, the return, or simply the existence of absent fathers.

Kempowski's play is written and read in a fictional language constructed out of the words, tones, and melodies of Germanic languages and dialects. There are direct references to Jews and the Holocaust, for example when the primary narrator says, "de Blick ze Bodan, wi frihar de Juddan asse noche Starn drogge" and in that sense clearly acknowledges that the loss of German or European Jewry is part of the same narrative as the loss of the *Vätergeneration*. There is nothing in the language of the text, however, that is undeniably Yiddish. No Hebrew-derived words or Yiddishized Slavic elements are to be found. This is, of course, not to suggest that Yiddish is excluded from the text. While we may not be able to point to any individual word or sound as Yiddish, many could be Yiddish, just as they could be borrowed from any of several Germanic languages and dialects.

Interestingly, however, reception of Kempowski's *Hörspiel* reflects an eagerness on the part of critics to read a clear Yiddish component into the piece. In 1981, when *Moin Vaddr läbt* was awarded the *Hörspielpreis der Kriegsblinden*, the jury cited the "Verwebung von Opfer und Täter" in explaining their decision.¹⁷² Similarly, the review in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* says of Kempowski, "Er erfindet sich eine künstliche Mundart, ein

¹⁷² Klaus Wagner. "Suche nach dem Vater." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. March 26, 1981. p. 25

wunderliches, aber auch verständliches Amalgam aus Schlesisch und ostpreußischem Platt, vor allem aber aus dem gleichfalls vom Aussterben bedrohten Jiddisch.”¹⁷³ The review then describes Yiddish as a “Restidiom eines von Deutschen fast ausgelöschten Volkteils.” Here, it becomes important to not rely exclusively on the reception, but to return to the text itself. Here, we see that Yiddish, in the mind of the review, does retain some of its otherness. The structure of Kempowski’s text, however, challenges the division between self and other in the German-Yiddish context.

In the chapters that follow, the construction and deconstruction of this division in the postwar German novel will be discussed in detail. In these novels, theater and performance are constantly referenced and thematized. The cultural position of Yiddish in dramatic performance, specifically, is therefore critical in understanding the presentation of Yiddish in the work discussed in the next two chapters on East and West German novels, which reflect not only on the status of Yiddish, but specifically on the status of Yiddish performance.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

Chapter Two

Stories in Yiddish, Yiddish in Stories: Rethinking the Past in and of Yiddish in the GDR

Aus dem Ghetto in die [sozialistische] Welt

As with all of the authors discussed in this dissertation, the writers whose work is analyzed in this chapter did not write *in* Yiddish. Even East German authors Fred Wander and Mischket Liebermann (and American-West German author Jeannette Lander, discussed in the following chapter), who spoke Yiddish, wrote in German in a way that incorporated pieces of Yiddish rendered comprehensible to a German-speaking readership. But these authors did write *through* Yiddish, at once adhering to and questioning a certain postwar brand of Yiddishism that strived to allow for a kind of survival of Yiddish narrative tradition in the absence of Yiddish-speaking readers and often of Yiddish-speaking writers as well.

My focus here is closely related to one of Jeffrey Shandler's lines of inquiry in his *Adventures in Yiddishland*, in which he asks, "What, if anything, remains of the meta-meaning of Yiddish after the text has been rendered in another language?"¹⁷⁴ Since this chapter has its focus in original postwar writings, rather than in works of translations, my central question is a variation on Shandler's. This chapter explores the ways in which

¹⁷⁴ Shandler *Adventures* 104

authors with, to quote Shandler again, “an affective or ideological relationship with Yiddish,”¹⁷⁵ used this relationship to create an alternative space in which their literature could challenge the dominant historical narratives in the GDR, while at the same time undermining any attempt to celebrate the GDR as the home of a revival of Yiddish storytelling.

This chapter will begin by looking at Mischket Liebermann’s 1977 autobiography *Aus dem Ghetto in die Welt* as exemplary of the type of discourse surrounding Yiddish literary culture in East Germany. Then, following a broader introduction to this discourse, this chapter will explore the place of Yiddish language in the work of three East German prose texts and analyze the ways in which these texts employ the language, in some cases specifically referring to Yiddish literary legacy, in order to challenge dominant East German narratives of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Using Johannes Bobrowski’s short story *Mäusefest* (1962), Jurek Becker’s novel *Jakob der Lügner* (1969), and Fred Wander’s novel *Der siebente Brunnen* (1971), this chapter demonstrates the ways in which East German writers turned to a language, the discursive image of which was at once carefully constructed and full of contradictions, not only to expand the field of *what* or *who* was narrated into the German past, but, perhaps more importantly, *how*.

Liebermann’s book in some ways provides both a foreword and an afterword to the three central texts analyzed in this chapter. The story Liebermann narrates begins decades earlier than any of the texts discussed here. It thus offers a unique look at the way in which Yiddish was portrayed in relation both to pre-War Germany and the early

¹⁷⁵ Shandler *Adventures* 4

Soviet Union, rather than exclusively to the experience of Nazi occupation or life and death in the concentration camps. As her autobiography focuses largely on her career in Yiddish theater, Liebermann's text also thematizes literary culture more explicitly than the other texts. On the other hand, as a book written years after any of the others in this chapter, *Aus dem Ghetto* also demonstrates that, despite the criticism towards dominant historical narratives waged by Bobrowski, Becker and Wander, the ultimate tension between Yiddish as a ghetto language and Yiddish as a language capable of producing politically progressive art remained relatively stable.

Liebermann's early biography is summarized as follows in the review of her book that appeared in *Neues Deutschland*: "Ein junges Mädchen bricht aus einer strenggläubigen jüdischen Umwelt aus [und] wird zum allgemeinen Entsetzen Schauspielerin."¹⁷⁶ Liebermann did indeed grow up in an ultraorthodox household in Berlin's *Scheunenviertel* and in a family unsupportive of her desire to become an actress. With the help of Alexander Granach, Liebermann begins what is to become a successful career, first in Berlin and then on the Yiddish-language stage in Minsk. What makes Liebermann's story and its reception in the GDR interesting is that Liebermann, in her journey to socialist enlightenment, left one explicitly Jewish milieu to enter another. In contrast to the association between Yiddish language culture and religious Judaism seen for example in *Die Geschichte von Moischele* (see Chapter One), Liebermann's autobiography juxtaposes a progressive Yiddish-speaking creative Jewish culture in Eastern Europe with a stagnant, helpless Jewry in the West.

¹⁷⁶ *Neues Deutschland* 9 March 1977 (32:58) p.4

Although Yiddish is initially associated with her overbearing Hasidic father (“Wir durften zu Hause nicht einmal Deutsch sprechen.”¹⁷⁷), it is ultimately portrayed as a secular, artistic language of the proletariat. It is both the language of the “Ghetto im Ghetto,”¹⁷⁸ and the language and that allows for her successful escape. Even before she travels to the Soviet Union, it is through Yiddish literature that she becomes involved in modernist theater, after being cast in Sholem Asch’s *Bronx Express* in Max Reinhardt’s theater in Berlin.¹⁷⁹

The opposition between religious Judaism and socialist politics, or anti-capitalism and anti-fascism more broadly, seen throughout East German discourse is readily apparent in Liebermann’s text. She writes, for example, “Eine sozialistische Welt hätte auch mit einem Rabbiner etwas anzufangen gewußt. [...] Ich kann mir gut vorstellen, daß mein Vater ein würdiger Kämpfer der Friedensbewegung geworden wäre. Vielleicht hätte er sogar den Rabbiner-Beruf ganz an den Nagel gehängt. Bestimmt sogar.”¹⁸⁰ Liebermann also quotes her father as saying, “Arm und reich hat’s schon immer gegeben. Wir können daran nichts ändern. Wenigstens vor Gott sind wir alle gleich” and, most damningly, recommending, “Abwarten und zu Gott beten, daß er Hitler zu sich nimmt.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Mischket Liebermann. *Aus dem Ghetto, in die Welt*. Berlin: Verlag der Nationen, 1977. 8

¹⁷⁸ This description by Liebermann, referring to the double burdens of poverty and religious orthodoxy, is still included as part of the recommended curriculum on the *Scheunenviertel* provided by the Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg.

¹⁷⁹ Liebermann 64

¹⁸⁰ Liebermann 27

¹⁸¹ Liebermann 81; 131

While previous studies on Jewish themes in East German literature have focused on the *Judenbild* constructed in this literature and the resulting hierarchy of victimhood in the East German imagination that assigns the inherently passive Jewish victim much less value than the political freedom fighter, Liebermann complicates this dichotomy.¹⁸² Although she does not question “[die] staatstragenden Idiologem[e] wie Antifaschismus und Atheismus,” the opposition she provides to the foolish, religious Jew is not only made up of the traditional *Widerstandskämpfer*, but also Yiddish-speaking artists.¹⁸³ Among the role models Liebermann holds up as counterpoints to her father are the greats of the Soviet Yiddish theater and literary scenes, including Maks Erik, Moyshe Kulbak, Solomon Mikhoels and Moyshe Rafalskii.¹⁸⁴

Though Liebermann’s text does not depart radically from East German norms in many ways, including the author’s caution to avoid sounding overly sympathetic to the plight of Jews during the Second World War or to portray the Soviet Union as antisemitic, it is also exceptional in its portrayal of Yiddish as a revolutionary language,

¹⁸² See, for example, Jung’s chapter cited below, in which the author writes that, “Der Völkermord an den Juden – ganz abgesehen von sonstigen Opfergruppen wie Homosexuelle, Behinderte und Sinti und Roma – konnte aus diesem Blickwinkel auf Geschichte nur Rand-, aber nicht HAUPTERSCHEINUNG sein.” Here, Jung also notes that Jewish figures rarely appear in East German World War Two narratives and when they do, they appear as a “Ikone ausschließlich passive Opfertums. See also: O’Doherty’s discussion of the victim hierarchy in *Writers and Themes*.

¹⁸³ Thomas Jung. “Aus den Schatten der Vergangenheit treten: das Schreiben jüdischer Autoren aus der DDR vor und nach der Wende.” *Wendezeichen?: Neue Sichtweisen auf die Literatur der DDR*. Eds. Roswitha Skare and Rainer B. Hoppe. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999. p. 66

¹⁸⁴ A reader of Liebermann’s text without outside knowledge would have no way of knowing that all of these men were murdered by the Soviet government; Maks Erik (1898-1937), born Zalmen Merkin, was a Yiddish literary critic. See: YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe; Moyshe Kulbak (1896-1937) was a Yiddish and Hebrew author and literary critic. His novel, *Zelmenyaner*, is considered to be a crowning achievement of Soviet Yiddish writing. See: YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe; Solomon Mikhoels (1890-1948) was a leading actor with the Moscow State Yiddish Theater and, beginning in 1929, the theater’s artistic director. See: Jeffrey Veidlinger *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000; Moyshe Rafalskii (1889-1937), was a Yiddish actor and the artistic director of the Belorussian State Jewish Theater in Minsk. See: Avraham Greenbaum. “The Belorussian State Jewish Theater in the Interwar Period.” *Jews in Eastern Europe* (42.1) Fall 2000, pp. 56-75.

as opposed to ethnographic and inherently conservative.¹⁸⁵ Following a more detailed introduction to the image of Yiddish and Yiddish literary tradition in East German culture, this chapter will present and analyze the work of three authors who used and played with these images to challenge not only the assumed “geschichtspolitische Inkompatibilität”¹⁸⁶ of the Holocaust within the East German master narrative, but also, perhaps more counter-intuitively, to challenge the East German attempt to appropriate Yiddish literary legacy into its own.

Yiddish Fiction and Fictions of Yiddish

The close symbolic association of postvernacular Yiddish with a particular time and geographic location has been discussed by Shandler and plays a central role in the chapter of this dissertation on the appearance of Yiddish in West German literature.¹⁸⁷ Not surprisingly, the map imagined by West German texts placing Yiddish in the United States, Israel, and finally West Germany, has little in common with the equivalent map imagined by East German writing. In the GDR the past and future of Yiddish are placed squarely in Eastern Europe. Although there is an insistence, often seen in journalistic texts or in the forwards written to accompany prewar translations of Yiddish literature,

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, her description of her own treatment of a group of Jews who appear at Soviet prisoner of war camp during the war. Because Liebermann has already encountered a Romanian Jew would had joined the Wehrmacht using false papers, she is careful not to give any kind of “special treatment” to this group and send them to perform forced labor. (Liebermann 277-9) See Footnote 184; The closest the text gets to any kind of accusation is, “the ethnographic tradition of Goset,” a statement made in reference to “der Personenkult um Stalin.” (Liebermann 163)

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Schmidt “‘Unsere Geschichte’? Probleme der Holocaust-Darstellung unter DDR-Bedingungen: Peter Edel, Fred Wander, Jurek Becker (Teil II)” *Monatshefte* 98:3 (Fall 2006) pp. 403-425

¹⁸⁷ See, for example, Shandler’s monograph *Shtetl*: “After the Holocaust, equating the *shtetl* with Yiddish became even more prominent, epitomizing signal shifts in the language’s use as a postvernacular.” 48

that Yiddish culture is well supported and continues to develop in Eastern Europe, East German novels using Yiddish are deal almost exclusively with the Second World War.¹⁸⁸ This is often done in a way in which Yiddish serves as a metonym for all that was lost in the Holocaust and in which the totality of what Yiddish stands for is reduced to a very limited vision of what made up historical breadth of Yiddish culture. Shandler, for example, has already described the ethnographic function Yiddish literature often takes on in translation.¹⁸⁹ Unfortunately, the obvious limitations of reading Sholem Aleichem's satirical stories or of the Hassidic legends, often translated into both German and English as works of ethnography, has frequently been overlooked. In East Germany, as it was in prewar Germany and the United States, Yiddish was often used as a symbol of the traditional or the connector to an authentic Jewish past.¹⁹⁰ The idea of Yiddish literature, however, is in fact quite modern. And this is key to understanding the texts discussed in this chapter, and it is important to reflect here on what it meant, both to Yiddish writers themselves and within East German discourse, to use Yiddish as a literary medium.

¹⁸⁸ The views expressed in this article, translated from Yiddish and printed in *Die Weltbühne* in 1970 are typical: "Wahr ist allerdings auch, daß im heutigen New York der empörende Versuch gemacht wird, ein neues Judenghetto zu schaffen und in besonderen Stadtbezirken die mittelalterlichen Lebensformne mindestens teilweise zu konservieren. Während die Sowjetmacht die Juden aus dem Ghetto herausgeführt hat, treibt der Kapitalismus sie wieder herein." (Weltbühne – 10. Feb. 70 25:6 172). A similar position is taken in the afterword to the collection of translations *Rabbi Chanina*: "die Juden, die sich vor den Mördern nach Israel retten konnten, leben heute dort unter anderen Bedingungen. Das Jiddisch wird nur noch in der Sowjetunion, in Polen und in Rumänien gepflegt." (240)

¹⁸⁹ Shandler *Adventures* 105

¹⁹⁰ described extensively by Shandler in *Adventures*

Yiddishism, or the “Yiddish language and culture movement,” as Emanuel Goldsmith has written, “is a modern expression of Judaism.”¹⁹¹ The movement came into being in the late 19th century “as a result of the revolutionary upheavals in the life of the Jewish people and the consequent redefinitions of its selfhood which began with the emergence of Hasidism or Jewish pietism, on the one hand, and Haskalah or Jewish enlightenment, on the other” during the century prior and was heavily influenced by modern secular nationalism.¹⁹² Although both of these movements, like the postvernacular incarnations of Yiddish culture to come, called up a “populism and awareness of the folk aspects of Jewish culture,” this was certainly not the be all, end all of either movement and, in the case of the Haskalah, was simply a means to a very different end.¹⁹³ To be counted among these “folk aspects” is the Yiddish language itself. While the Hassidim saw in Yiddish a holy language, the proponents of the Haskalah, called maskilim, saw in Yiddish folk-literature a tool through which to better the masses according to their own enlightened ideals. There is thus something disingenuous about the publication, as occurred in East Germany, of medieval tales, Hassidic legends and the works of maskilim and their descends reproduced side by side, all advertised as organic products of the Eastern European Jewish folk.¹⁹⁴

This illusion, however, is not simply a matter of ignorance; it is an illusion imbedded within Yiddish literature itself. Yiddish literary scholar Don Miron has argued

¹⁹¹ Emanuel Goldsmith. “Yiddishism and Judaism.” *The Politics of Yiddish*. Ed. Dov Ber Kerler. Walnut Creek: Alta Mira, 1998. 11

¹⁹² Ibid 11-12

¹⁹³ Ibid

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, my discussion of *Rabbi Chanina* below.

convincingly that the maskilic writer Sholem Aleichem (the pen name of Shalom Rabinovitz; 1859-1916), among the most widely read and translated Yiddish authors, including in East Germany, is largely responsible for this phenomenon. Miron argues that Sholem Aleichem, in the reviews of contemporary Yiddish fiction in which he championed realistic depictions of Jewish poverty and rejected works that failed to comply as illegitimate, established the idea of “‘the great tradition’ in Yiddish fiction.”¹⁹⁵ Miron describes this contribution as “a ‘conservative’ revolution, i.e., his revolutionary idea was that there existed in Yiddish something worth conserving, prolonging, developing.”¹⁹⁶ This, in turn, gave rise to the “grandfather myth, the semblance of tradition.”¹⁹⁷

As suggested above, however, modern Yiddish literature began decidedly not as a the artistic production of a provincial proletariat, but of an educated elite using the folk language in hopes of educating their audience, largely through mockery, and changing their ways. Maskilic writers adhered to what Miron calls an “aesthetics of ugliness, [...] the notion that Yiddish was a language most fit for parody.”¹⁹⁸ Modern Yiddish literature grew out of the desire to correct the masses, not to speak for them. Yet this is frequently overlooked in post-WWII Germany, especially in East Germany, where there was a strong desire to see in the Yiddish classics a celebrations of the oppressed proletariat.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Dan Miron. *A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996. 29

¹⁹⁶ Miron 32

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

¹⁹⁸ Miron 67

¹⁹⁹ This is also seen in Yiddish-language Marxist criticism, including the translated essay by the Yiddish writer Perez Markish that appeared in the *Berliner Zeitung* in 1959 in honor of Sholem Aleichem’s 100th birthday. The translation reads, “Tewje ist Scholom-Alejchem, ist seine Menschenwürde, sein

And in the post-Holocaust, socialist East German state, these texts were made to speak for and in memorial to this group.

In 1962 a well-received volume of collected Yiddish stories in translation was released in East Germany under the title *Die Heimfahrt des Rabbi Chanina und andere Erzählungen aus dem Jiddischen*.²⁰⁰ A newspaper review of this collection states, “Natürlich gab es auch die andern Juden, denen die kapitalistische Welt des Westens die Möglichkeit bot, reich zu werden und andere Menschen auszubeuten. Aber ihnen steht die große Zahl der frommen Juden gegenüber, für die das Denkmal dieser Geschichtensammlung errichtet ist.”²⁰¹ The 1984 afterword to a re-publication of Sholem Aleichem’s *Tejwe der Milchmann* goes so far as to claim, “Durch seine Werke [...] erhält die mit der blutigen faschistischen ‘Neuordnung Europas’ untergegangene ostjüdische Welt Gestalt und Gesicht.”²⁰² Yiddish fiction, in the postwar East German imagination, takes on the documentary, ethnographic quality described by Shandler. What general East German discourses also evinces, however, is the commitment to a vision of Yiddish literature in which the lineage myth founded by Sholem Aleichem is not simply supported, but compressed into a single point, such that individual texts belong not to a particular time and place, but simply to Yiddish. This is best demonstrated by the aforementioned *Rabbi Chanina* (1962), in which medieval texts are published next to the

Schwanenlied, seine Anklage wider eine Welt. Und dies Lied ist so offen und klar, weil Scholom-Aleichem dafür den tiefen Odem wirklich des Volkes fand, weil er eben dessen Leid und Kummer zum Ausdruck brachte.“ 27 February 1959, n. 49

²⁰⁰ Rudolf Hirsch, Ed. *Die Heimfahrt des Rabbi Chanina und andere Erzählungen aus dem Jiddischen*. Berlin: Union Verlag, 1962.

²⁰¹ *Neue Zeit* review of *Rabbi Chanina* 3 March 1963 (19:53) p.9

²⁰² “Nachwort” in Sholem Aleichem. *Tewje, der Milchmann*. Trans. Anatoli L. Kaplan. Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam, 1984. 176

writing of modernist Sholem Asch, with no reflection on the disparity between these sources, the afterword notes that the stories in the collection come “[a]us einer Welt, die fast völlig zerstört, verbrannt und vergast ist. [...] Es ist die Welt der ostjüdischen Menschen.”²⁰³ The texts analyzed here are not only remarkable because they challenge specific East German political and aesthetic conventions, but also because they problematize the status of Yiddish storytelling in the postwar era in general.

Mäusefest

Johannes Bobrowski’s short story *Mäusefest* (1962) describes the brief encounter between a Polish Jew, Moise, and a young German soldier on the eve of the Second World War. The soldier walks into Moise’s small home, interrupting his conversation with the moon about the mice scampering across his floorboards. The story is only a few pages in length and the two human figures exchange few words. The soldier, the reader is told, reacts without surprise upon his noticing that Moise speaks German, although the narrative leaves it ambiguous if Moise actually does. The soldier then leaves Moise, who is reminded by the moon that Moise must know what is coming. “Ich hab gehört,” Moise responds.²⁰⁴ The narrator then describes Moise as he appears to meld into the wall against which he leans: “Wo Moise lehnt, ganz weiß, daß man denkt, er werde immer mehr eins mit der Wand. Mit jedem Wort, das er sagt.”²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Hirsch 237

²⁰⁴ Johannes Bobrowski. *Die Erzählungen*. Berlin: Union Verlag, 1979. 63

²⁰⁵ Bobrowski *Erzählungen* 63

It is possible, as has been done, to read Bobrowski's short story as yet another example of East German literature exemplifying Jewish passivity.²⁰⁶ Alternatively, Sabine Egger reads *Mäusefest* as a story about perception and ethics. In her chapter on Bobrowski Egger writes, "'Mäusefest' points to the perpetrators' faulty perceptions of reality. While it stresses the responsibility of the individual to make a choice between good and evil, both characters function primarily as metaphors of 'their people,' their collective suffering or collective guilt respectively."²⁰⁷ But I would argue that at the center of story stands neither (failed) heroism nor guilt. Instead, it is a story about the difficulty of narrating the past. Although in one sense the story is not principally about what has happened but about what is going to happen, Bobrowski's language reveals his concern with this problem.

Bobrowski makes it clear that the reader hears Moise as a German listener, embodied dually by the soldier and the reader. Before the soldier enters, Moise and moon speak in standard German. The perspective shifts as the soldier's entrance is narrated. "Aber jetzt sitzt da der alte Jude auf seinem Stühlchen," the reader is told.²⁰⁸ "Wenn Se mechten hereintreten, Herr Leitnantleben, sagt Moise," the narrator continues. Suddenly, Moise speaks an approximation of Yiddish. Of this line and the two other uttered by Moise in the soldier's present, Ekkehard W. Haring writes, "Bobrowski legt

²⁰⁶ In John Wiczorek's article on the depiction of Jews in Bobrowski's prose, for example, he notes the general passivity of Jewish figures and writes, "This is expressed most clearly in 'Mäusefest.'" John P. Wiczorek. "Questioning Philosemitism: The Depiction of Jews in the Prose of Johannes Bobrowski." *German Life and Letters* 44:2 (January 1991) 127

²⁰⁷ Sabine Egger. "The 'Good German' between Silence and Artistic Deconstruction of an Inhumane World: Johannes Bobrowski's 'Mäusefest' and 'Der Tänzer Malige.'" *Representing the "Good German" in Literature and Culture after 1945*. Eds. Pól Ó Dochartaigh and Christiane Schönefeld. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 2013.

²⁰⁸ Bobrowski *Erzählungen* 59

Moise sogar drei gesprochene Sätze in den Mund. Doch klingt das imitierte Jiddisch nicht überzeugend und darf wohl eher als Simulakrum Bobrowskis betrachtet werden.”²⁰⁹ Haring concludes from this, “Dieses kleine Detail macht deutlich, was für die Darstellung der meisten jüdischen Figuren gilt: Bobrowski hat keine wirklichen Erfahrungen mit Ostjuden.”²¹⁰ Representations of Yiddish in German texts by German-speaking authors are rarely directly mimetic of Yiddish speech or, to use Haring’s word, convincing. Concern for this type of naturalism or authenticity in an instance when the lack thereof should come as no surprise reflects both the ethnographic expectations projected on texts featuring Yiddish and its speakers and also an anxiety in postwar German culture surrounding the potential of such depictions to come across as parody.

Importantly, Bobrowski’s “Yiddish” dialog itself does not point to an attempt at mimesis, at least not of Yiddish. Instead, through its reliance on vowel shifts from German and the use of the suffix *-leben*, Moise’s speech reflects the language of antisemitic German cartoons more than it reflects spoken Yiddish.²¹¹ Even Moise’s name, a mix between the Yiddish *Moishe* and the German *Mose*, reflects a similar level of mediation between the reader and the narrated events. But this does not make *Mäusefest* itself antisemitic or parodic. Instead, Bobrowski uses this type of language to point to all that separates Moise and the reader, creating a tension that makes the difficulty of narration palpable.

²⁰⁹ Ekkehard W. Haring. “Figuren des Jüdischen in Bobrowskis Dichtung. Poetisches Idiom oder gefälschtes Kaddisch?” *Johannes Bobrowski: Leben und Werk*. Eds. Dietmar Albrecht, Andreas Degen, Helmut Peitsch and Klaus Völkler. Munich: Martin Meidenbauer, 2004. 233

²¹⁰ Ibid

²¹¹ See: Julia Schäfer. *Vermessen – gezeichnet – verlacht. Judenbilder in populären Zeitschriften 1918-1933*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2005. “Kombinationen mit dem Suffix *-leben* [...] sind überwiegend antisemitischen Ursprungs und haben diskriminierende Absicht.” 85

After Moise first speaks, the narrator says of the soldier, “Er wundert sich gar nicht, daß der Jude Deutsch kann.”²¹² Yet it is unclear if Moise does or does not speak German. But it is unclear as to whether Moise speaks German or if his Yiddish is somehow, either by Moise himself or by the mediation of narration, comprehensible to his audience. And it is this ambiguity, the soldier’s presumption, and the fact that the text the reader sees on the page is in fact only a slightly altered German, that make this exchange interesting. The post-Holocaust reader, for whom this dialogue is heavily mediated, is told the story of the lost East through a voice that is self-consciously German. Though not explicitly, Gerhard Wolf, writing in the GDR a few years after the publication of *Mäusefest*, confirms this claim when he writes of the end of the story, “es sind Moises Gedanken, Gedanken des Autors, die eine kleine Veränderung andeuten: ‘Ich weiß, sagt Moise.’”²¹³ The conflation of the author’s voice with Moise’s own only confirms that the voice of the mediated narrative, either of survival or of loss, speaks a different language than those within the world represented by the story.

Of the Yiddish/German homophone Moise/Mäuse, Thomas Taterka writes, “Die Homophonie ist nicht schmückendes Beiwerk, sondern Funktionsträger. Sie stiftet Bedeutung. Sie ist nicht aufgefunden, sie ist hergestellt.”²¹⁴ But the reading of the narrated world based on signifiers that exist in the mediating language, here German, is not limited to this single example. Like the homophone, the image of Yiddish and

²¹² Bobrowski *Erzählungen* 61

²¹³ Gerhard Wolf. “Johannes Bobrowski.” *Schriftsteller der Gegenwart*. Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1967. 93

²¹⁴ Thomas Taterka. “Weltuntergang. Zu Johannes Bobrowski’s Erzählung *Mäusefest*.” *Johannes Bobrowski: Leben und Werk*. Eds. Dietmar Albrecht, Andreas Degen, Helmut Peitsch and Klaus Völkler. Munich: Martin Meidenbauer, 2004. pp. 240-256. (240)

Eastern European Jewry is *hergestellt*, it creates meaning for German readers by means comprehensible to them. While Bobrowski's short story does not directly thematize Yiddish storytelling and the possibility of its revival after the war in the way that Becker's and Wander's novels do, it demonstrates that the issues of perspective and distance as they related to the ability to capture an essence of the Yiddish literary voice in postwar German had already been introduced into the literary discourse of the GDR before these novels were written.

Jakob der Lügner

Jurek Becker's most famous novel, *Jakob der Lügner* (1969), tells the story of Jakob Hein and his fellow prisoners at a fictional concentration camp in Eastern Europe. The novel's narrator, a survivor of the camp, pieces his telling together from his own experiences and from the narrative unloaded by Jakob as the prisoners were deported from the camp. The story, which the narrator stress is but *a* story, begins when Jakob, who has been sent to a camp administrative building for supposedly staying out past curfew, overhears a German radio broadcaster announce that the Red Army is outside of Bezanika, a town he knows cannot be far off. The next day, Jakob tries to use this good news to deter a friend from stealing potatoes and likely being caught and killed. When the friend, Mischa, doesn't react as expected, Jakob decides to raise Mischa's spirits by announcing that he has radio. And here Jakob's sustained fictions begin.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ My use of the term fiction is similar to that of Dorit Cohn in *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). In this work, Cohn distinguishes herself from writers such as E.L. Doctorow and Hayden White who have attempted to erase the division between fiction and nonfiction by subsuming both into the category of narrative. Cohn is instead interested in a more specific definition of

Becker's novel always plays a central role in the narratives crafted by literary scholars and historians tracing the depiction of Jewish themes in East German discourse. Indeed, Pól O'Dachartaigh and Thomas Schmidt have already pointed to *Jakob* as a deviation from East German literary norms not only in content, but also in form. This new form is often attributed to supposed similarities between Becker's literary style and the aesthetics of classic Yiddish fiction based on the assumption that the primary utility of Yiddish literature was to insert humor or hope into the lives of the downtrodden. Indeed, hope is at the center of almost all critical readings of the novel.²¹⁶ In this section I provide an alternative reading of Becker's novel that seeks to draw attention away from readings of the novel as a celebration of hope and towards an understanding of the text as a reflection on fictionality itself. This reading will also correct faulty assumptions that Becker's style is based on Yiddish writing not by rejecting any relationship between the two, but by analyzing the way in which Becker employs Sholem Aleichem as a symbolic figure within the text, rather than as a literary model for the novel itself.

Becker, in fact, even rejected the assumption that he modeled *Jakob* on Yiddish-language writing in his essay on his relationship to Judaism, *Mein Judentum*. He writes that many reviewers placed *Jakob* in the "Erzähltradition Scholem Alejchems."²¹⁷

"Tatsache ist," Becker responds to these critics, "daß ich zum ersten Mal Scholem

fiction, which she describes using the phrase "nonreferential narrative." For Cohn, the term nonreferential "[f]irst and foremost [...] signifies that a work of fiction itself creates the world to which it refers by referring to it." (13)

²¹⁶ See, for example, Marcel Reich-Ranicki's review "Das Prinzip Radio" or Thomas Schmidt's reading of the story as replacing the traditional hero of East German Holocaust narratives, the Red Army or the resistance fighter, with the hope provided by storytelling.

²¹⁷ Jurek Becker. "Mein Judentum" *Jakob der Lügner*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000. 297

Alejchem las, nachdem ich das Musical ‘Der Fiedler auf dem Dach’ gesehen hatte.”²¹⁸

(It is impossible that Becker saw this play before writing several drafts of the novel and highly unlikely he had any access to it before completing his manuscript. The play did not debut in East Germany until after the book was published and the film came out even later.²¹⁹) It is easy to see why Becker, who is described by Marcel Reich-Ranicki as “ein polnischer Jude und ein deutscher Erzähler,” may have been fed up with attempts to place him in an Eastern European, rather than the German, literary tradition, given the reviews described below and the fact that his novel was first published with illustrations by Marc Chagall. But the fact remains that Becker, in the very same essay, writes that while he lacks a “Zugehörigkeitsgefühl zu einer Religionsgemeinschaft,” he is more connected to Judaism than any other religious culture in way that he describes as “literarisch.”²²⁰

More importantly, Becker cannot honestly claim a complete lack of awareness of Sholem Aleichem’s legacy as he composed his novel as the Yiddish writer is mentioned more than once in the course of *Jakob*, as will be discussed in much greater detail below.

Although the novel was a critical success in the GDR, its deviation from the preferred narrative did not go unnoticed.²²¹ “Was für einen Lügner ist dieser Jakob?” asks the review of the novel that appeared in *Neues Deutschland*. The answer: “Jakob Heym ist objektiv ein tragikomischer Lügner, denn er meint, die Lebenshoffnung der Menschen sei zunächst allein schon mit erfundenen Schlachten, Ortsnamen,

²¹⁸ Ibid

²¹⁹ The play was performed in West Germany a few months before Becker submitted his final manuscript, but Becker’s access to West Germany was very limited until the novel became successful in that country.

²²⁰ Ibid

²²¹ The same article that discusses *Jakob*’s political shortcomings also announces, “Jurek Beckers Buch kann sich zweifellos mit den besten Werken unserer antifaschistischen Literatur über die faschistische Schreckenszeit [...] messen.“ (Wahrheitserpichter Lügner, Neues Deutschland 1969)

Vormarschtempo aufrechtzuerhalten.”²²² While the author of this review is willing to concede that these types of facts might be important “in kriegserfüllten Zeiten und Situationen für die gerecht Kämpfenden,” he then writes, “die mächtigste moralische Reserve ist doch letztlich das Vertrauen aus Klassenposition und politischen Bewußtsein. Dem einsteigen Kleingewerbetreibenden Jakob Heym fehlt solches.”²²³ West German reviews, however, laud the hope Jakob creates as a powerful alternative to other attempts at resistance. Jakob, Wolfgang Werth writes in *Der Monat*, for example, like his “literarische Vorfahren” makes “das beste aus dem Schlimmen, indem [er] mit Witz und Einbildungskraft das Glück [...] herbeianimier[te].”²²⁴ These ancestors, according to the article, are all figures from Yiddish literature: “Tewje, der Milchmann, Menachem Mendel, der Spekulant, Fischke, der Krumme und die vielen anderen liebenswert-komischen Helden der ostjüdischen Literatur.”²²⁵ Marcel Reich-Ranicki’s review in *Die Zeit*, which announces its interest in hope with its title “Das Prinzip Radio,” does not explicitly mention Yiddish authors or their characters. The review, however, ends with the proclamation, “Dieser junge Schriftsteller ist vom Geschlecht der traurigen Humoristen.”²²⁶ This is immediately preceded by a short paragraph reading, “Dieses Buch kennt weder Haß noch Groll, es ist weder aggressiv noch zornig, vielmehr erstaunlich sanft. Aber es wirkt niemals besänftigend: Beckers Gelassenheit hat nichts

²²² Werner Neubert. “Wahrheitserpichter Lügner“ *Neues Deutschland* (24:132) p. 4 (Beilage) May 1969

²²³ Ibid

²²⁴ Wolfgang Werth. “Das imaginäre Radio.” *Der Monat* 23:268 (January 1971) p. 92

²²⁵ Ibid

²²⁶ Marcel Reich-Ranicki. “Das Prinzip Radio.” *Die Zeit*. 20 November 1970.

mit lauwarmer Versöhnlichkeit zu tun.”²²⁷ Reich-Ranicki’s review at once implicitly echoes comparisons made between Becker’s novel and Yiddish classics, and introduces a key concept that other authors overlook in their unnuanced attention to hope, the absolute lack of *Versöhnlichkeit* offered by the novel.²²⁸

The simultaneous attention among East Germans critics to hope and the continuance of tradition suggest the focus on a hope that extends beyond the figures within the text to the readers themselves. The same belief, that the hope of supposedly passive Jews might transcend the fact that they died a supposedly apolitical death, that makes the story more difficult to subsume into the standard DDR narrative of political resistance and Jewish victimhood also makes the story easier to subsume into the DDR narrative of the Eastern European rescue and revival of Yiddish culture. But Becker’s reflections on storytelling, and on the specifically Yiddish storytelling tradition, are not primarily about the power of narrative to instill hope in its audience through deceit, but about fiction as fiction.

Scholars have long lauded Becker for the contribution *Jakob der Lügner* made to the subversion of dominant narratives of the Second World War within East German discourse that insisted the Nazi genocide be subsumed into a Marxist view of history and created a hierarchy of victimhood in which the memory of the supposedly passive Jew

²²⁷ Ibid

²²⁸ Reich-Ranicki’s description of Becker’s tone is reminiscent of postwar German attempts to characterize class Yiddish literature. See, for example, the afterword of the translated collection *Des Rebben Pfeifenrohr. Humoristischen Erzählungen aus dem Jiddischen* (East Germany, 1983). The reader of Yiddish literature, the afterword states, “sieht sich einem Humor gegenüber, der aus der Tragik geboren wurde.“ And the softness Reich-Ranicki describes finds its echo in the following comment about the *Ostjuden* in the same afterword: “Ihr Spott richtete sich gegen das eigene Ich, er ist gutmütig und ehrlich, mitunter traurig und demütig.” (Mendele Moicher Sforim, Scholem Alejchem, Jizchok Leib Perez. *Des Rebben Pfeifenrohr. Humoristischen Erzählungen aus dem Jiddischen*. Ed. Ingetraud Skirecki. Berlin: Eulenspiegel Verlag, 1983. 131)

necessarily be overshadowed by the celebration of the political resistance fighter. Schmidt, for example, writes that Becker found “aufwendige narrative Strategien, um dem Holocaust seine historische Autonomie zu garantieren und ihn vor den Annektion durch ‘unsere Geschichte’ zu bewahren.”²²⁹ While the novel certainly challenges political and aesthetic norms of East German Holocaust literature, it is less directly invested in the separation or removal of the Holocaust from dominant paradigms than reflecting on the nature of narratives and the worlds created therein.

In one of the novel’s central scenes, Jakob actually becomes the radio he has been pretending to own. The reader’s attention is called to this scene not only by Jakob’s apparent transformation into the radio itself, but also by the effect Jakob’s description of these events has on the nameless narrator. Upon hearing of the radio programming, including interviews with Winston Churchill, that Jakob creates for Lina, the young girl he cares for after her parents are deported from the ghetto, the narrator is moved not by Jakob’s ability to deceive (he does not), but his ability to create fictional worlds. Jakob tells the narrator that he wanted Lina, who saw through the performances but said nothing, to find out. Jakob notes, “Alle anderen wären über die Wahrheit entsetzt gewesen, sie hat sich hinterher gefreut.”²³⁰ Hearing of Jakob’s impressive performances, the narrator replies, “Wenn ich damals gewußt hätte, was du alles kannst, ich wäre zu dir gekommen und hätte dich gebeten, mir einen Baum zu zeigen.”²³¹ Here the narrator refers back to the novel’s opening lines, “Ich höre schon alle sagen, ein ‘Baum,’ was ist das schon, ein Stamm, Blätter, Wurzeln, Käferchen in der Rinde und eine manierlich

²²⁹ Schmidt, Part II 405

²³⁰ Becker 165

²³¹ Ibid

ausgebildete Krone, wenn's hochkommt, na und?"²³² The narrator, fascinated by trees and unable to justify this in a way that satisfies his listeners, struggles not only because he is unsure to what exactly to which referent the signifier 'tree' refers, but also because, as the reader quickly learns, there are no trees in the ghetto. For the narrator, Jakob remains the hero of his story not for the fleeting hope his stories provided, but for his ability to create alternative worlds. While the narrator at first remains bound and limited by the bareness of the world into which he has been confined, unable to refer meaningfully to anything outside, Jakob is able to capitalize on the power of language to create fictions, which according to John Searle, rests on the ability to refer to referents that do not in fact exist.²³³

And here we must consider Becker's thematization of fictionality has to do with Yiddish literature. In a text that has so much invested in fiction and fictionality, it is remarkable that only one author is ever mentioned by name. Reflecting on his fake interview with Winston Churchill, Jakob thinks, "Ein bißchen mager das Interview [. . .] und auch ein bißchen über Linas Kopf hinweg, aber man ist, das ändert sich leider nie, kein Scholem Alejchem an Erfindungsgabe."²³⁴ As mentioned above, Becker shies away from claiming Scholem Aleichem as a literary influence, but cites him here as Jakob's ideal. What is crucial here, however, is not simply that Jakob sees himself as aspiring to emulate the Yiddish literary tradition, but what exactly he values in this tradition. Unlike the demonstrated trend in postwar discourse to associate Aleichem with ethnographic

²³² Becker 9

²³³ See Thomas G. Pavel's discussion of Searle and his claim, "It is after all an odd, peculiar and amazing fact about human language that it allows for the possibility of fiction at all," in Thomas G. Pavel. *Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. p. 27

²³⁴ Becker 171

mimesis of Eastern European Jewish life, Jakob is able to see him for what he is, a writer of creative fiction. And yet, as described in the introduction to this chapter, Sholem Aleichem did not merely create worlds, as Jakob does, he constructed a literary tradition and with it a useable past. Storytelling is often about looking backward, about making an interpretation of the past viable for the present. This, of course, is what had always been going on in East Germany, but to thematize this aspect so clearly highlights how these narratives are manufactured from a particular historic perspective, that they are part of a particular constructed narrative and that alternative narratives can therefore be crafted as well.

The potential powers of storytelling, and its limits, come up again and again in the novel. Both in Jakob's claim that he wants Lina to see through his stories and in the narrator's statement early in the novel, "Ich habe tausendmal versucht, diese verfluchte Geschichte loszuwerden," the reader is given to understand that there is pleasure not only in being told fictions, but also in telling them.²³⁵ The narrator's story, like Becker's, is not framed as a memoir. "Ich erzähle eine Geschichte," the narrator notes, "nicht seine Geschichte."²³⁶ So independent is the narrator's story from the, in the realm of the narrative, historical protagonist Jakob, that the narrator hints the possibility that his narrative might exist even if Jakob never had. Though he originally suggests that Jakob stands out as the man without whom this story could never have happened, he quickly adds, "Aber sogar da kann man geteilter Meinung sein."²³⁷ Although the narrator corroborates his story by saying that he has used everything Jakob told him and even by

²³⁵ Becker 11

²³⁶ Becker 46

²³⁷ Becker 12

describing a research trip to visit a former camp guard in West Germany, he has no illusions that his story, too, is another fiction.

Even the narrator's statement "ich bin dabei gewesen" is made not to assert his story's accuracy or authenticity, but to distance himself and Jakob from the postwar readership.²³⁸ He says of Jakob, "Er hat zu mir gesprochen, aber ich rede zu euch, das ist ein großer Unterschied, denn ich bin dabei gewesen."²³⁹ This instance, that a story's audience plays a large role in the shaping of the narrative, has implications for those who chose to read *Jakob* as a novel announcing the survival of the Yiddish literary tradition and its continuance in the GDR. Even if this storytelling tradition continued after the war, the implication seems to be, it couldn't survive in its original form without its prewar readership. And yet it is no mistake that Sholem Aleichem is held up by Jakob as the ideal narrator. In addition to the Jakob's comments on Sholem Aleichem described above, the giant of Yiddish fiction also comes up in a telling scene in which Jakob's self-perceived lack of creativity leaves him coveting scraps of a Nazi newspaper. At one point in the story, Jakob notices a German camp guard entering an outhouse with a newspaper only to emerge empty handed. Thinking the newspaper, knowing it is likely filled with "erlogenen Berichten," might at least provide material for future stories, he decides to sneak into the outhouse.²⁴⁰ "Hätte mich meine Mutter mit einem klügeren Kopf geboren, phantasiebegabt wie Scholem Alejchem, was rede ich, die Hälfte würde schon genügen," the narrator reports Jakob to be thinking as he plans the move, "dann

²³⁸ Becker 46

²³⁹ Ibid

²⁴⁰ Becker 105

hätte ich solchen Mundraub nicht nötig.”²⁴¹ Jakob regrets his inability to craft an entirely new story not only because the task he has now given himself is dangerous, but because any story he might now craft will be limited by the constructed Nazi narrative of the war.

But this escape from pre-constructed narratives is exactly what the narrator achieves. And it is this way that the novel leaves its mark on East German literary history. The narrator holds Jakob up as a hero, even after Jakob has been revealed as a fraud shortly before the prisoners of the ghetto are deported, not because he appreciated the fleeting hope offered by lies before he learned the truth, but because he saw value in Jakob’s stories as works of fiction. Neither is the novel a celebration of hope nor does it justify the hope critics found in heralding the novel as a Yiddish-East German hybrid. Rather, the novel is the celebration of the creative force of storytelling. The fact that the type of storytelling that Jakob aspires to, and that the novel itself achieves, is associated with the Yiddish tradition does not mean that Becker’s work is to simply be categorized as part of that tradition, as it was both explicitly and implicitly in its packaging, but that, for Becker, like many of the authors discussed in this dissertation, Yiddish writing was seen not primarily as an ethnographic craft or a means to atonement, but as an alternative aesthetic model that allowed for a way out of constrictive literary and political norms.

Der siebente Brunnen

As shown above, Yiddish storytelling, embodied by Sholem Aleichem, receives high praise from Becker’s Jakob for the level of freedom from the actual world he

²⁴¹ Becker 106

ascribes to it. However, instead of reflecting on the way this giant of Yiddish literature figures within Becker's text, criticism has focus on the status of hope in the novel and the way in which this supposedly connects Becker to the Yiddish literary tradition.

Similarly, readings of Fred Wander's *Der siebente Brunnen* (1971) and the relationship between this work and Yiddish tradition have been misguided. What's more, the fact that his novel utilizes the Yiddish language more heavily than any other piece of postwar German writing has been completely ignored. While scholarship has focused on what has been read as Wander's attention to the humanizing quality of language and have read the novel as an affirmation or even performance of the type of redemption alluded to in the book's title, the book is better understood as a eulogy to Yiddish storytelling and a critique of the type of mythic, redemptive narratives endorsed by the East German state.

Der siebente Brunnen, while itself a poetic work of fiction, follows, at least geographically, Wander's own story of persecution and survival. Wander, born Fritz Rosenblatt in 1917 in Vienna, was originally interned in France before being deported East, where he spent time in several concentration camps, including Auschwitz, before being liberated from Buchenwald. The novel is narrated in the first person and is constructed from a series of scenes from the lives and deaths of the men surrounding him. Like *Jakob der Lügner*, *Der siebente Brunnen* is a novel that reflects directly on the act of storytelling itself. Central to the narration is the figure Mendel Teichmann, whose death is announced in the first line of the novel, and from whom, the reader is told, the narrator was to learn how to tell a story.

In what is perhaps the most frequently quoted line in analyses or reviews of the novel, the narrator says of the cruelty and barbarism that filled the camps, "Und Mendel

sah es und schaute sie an, [...] versuchte zu verstehen, versuchte, für jeden Schlag [...] und für die geilen Witze angesichts unseres Todes versuchte Mendel eine Formel zu finden, ein erlösendes Wort.”²⁴² Given the thematization of language or storytelling as a tool of resistance, it is not surprising that elements of the novel proved problematic for East German critics. Accordingly, the scheduled filming of an adaptation of the novel was called off because the protagonists were seen as too passive.²⁴³ On the other hand, there were ways in which the novel was read as conforming to East German norms. The review of the novel in the *Berliner Zeitung*, for example, at once praises Wander’s poetic depiction of the trauma of the Holocaust while at the same time simply relegating him to a line of East German authors – “Bruno Apitz, Peter Edel oder Eva Lippold” – who had done the same before him.²⁴⁴

Attitudes in East Germany towards the depiction of religious Judaism are similarly ambiguous.²⁴⁵ While instructions for the planned film adaption included the note that “im Sinnen der Balance von Nationalem und Sozialem,” the “jüdisch Rituelles”

²⁴² Fred Wander. *Der siebente Brunnen*. Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006. 14

²⁴³ Elisabeth Debazi. *Zeugnis – Erinnerung – Verfremdung. Literarische Darstellung und Reflexion von Holocausterfahrung*. Marburg: Tectum, 2008. 98

²⁴⁴ Werner Liersch. “Poetisches Zeugnis.” *Berliner Zeitung*. 21 October 1971 (27:29) p. 6

²⁴⁵ This is by no means limited to discussions surrounding Wander’s novel, but is rather a general phenomenon. Although there are instances in which orthodox Judaism is ridiculed, for example one in *Die Weltbühne* stating that, referring to Hasidic neighborhoods in New York City, “Wahr ist allerdings auch, daß im heutigen New York der empörende Versuch gemacht wird, ein neues Judenghetto zu schaffen und in besonderen Stadtbezirken die mittelalterlichen Lebensformen mindestens teilweise zu konservieren,” it is clear that there was East German interest in appropriating, at least partially, literary traditions associated with religious Judaism. In addition to political speeches in which “Judenpogrome” and “religiöse Exzesse” are named side by side as the twin evils ended by the Russian Revolution, East Germany produced multiple collections of translated stories celebrating the religious life of pre-revolution Eastern European Jewry.

was not to be overly emphasized,²⁴⁶ the book review in the *Berliner Zeitung* suggests that the mystical Jewish element of the novel was actually less difficult to square with accepted narratives as might be assumed. This review, for example, describes the figures that populate Wander's novel as "Menschen, die allein ihrer Rasse wegen verfolgt werden und deren Weltvorstellungen mehr als verschieden sind." For this reason, the review continues, they have difficulty "dem Grauen der Konzentrationslager den bewußten Widerstands- und Überlebenswillen entgegenzusetzen, wie er für die politischen Häftlinge charakteristisch war."²⁴⁷ Although these men lose a great deal, the reviewer adds, those who survive develop "die Fähigkeit, das Leben gesellschaftlich zu sehen, die Kraft zu Solidarität und Disziplin, der Mut, sich mit ihren Mitteln zu behaupten."²⁴⁸

This type of redemptive reading of the novel seen in the secular press actually stands in contrast to the review of the novel that appeared in the *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der jüdischen Gemeinde von Berlin und des Verbandes der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*. Wander's novel, Renate Kirschner writes in her review, does not attest to the personal growth of the survivors, but to the necessity of remembrance. Wander's poetic description of life in the concentration camp, Kirschner states, serves, "um deutlich zu machen, wie es möglich war, über Mord und Entmenschlichung zu triumphieren, als Mahnung und Verpflichtung für die

²⁴⁶ Eberhard Görner. "Der siebente Brunnen von Fred Wander. Die Geschichte eines Films, der nicht gedreht wurde." *Fred Wander – Leben und Werk*. Eds. Walter Grünzweig and Ursula Seeber. Bonn: Weidle Verlag, 2005. 54

²⁴⁷ Liersch

²⁴⁸ Ibid

Lebenden, den Millionen Ermordeter, Erschlagener zum Gedenken.”²⁴⁹ Both this review and the essay by Christa Wolf included in the 1985 edition of the novel reference the particularities of Wander’s poetic language and its aptness for the task at hand. Neither, however, goes into any kind of detail. Kirschner, for example, writes, “Fred Wander hat die dieser poetische Verdichtung des von ihm gewählten Themas entsprechende Sprache gefunden, die es nicht nur meisterhaft versteht, die einzelnen Sprachporträts der Häftlinge nachzuzeichnen, sondern auch durch ihre Schlichtheit besticht.”²⁵⁰ Wolf similarly notes, “[Wander findet] die Kraft [...], zu sprechen; [er findet] eine Sprache [...] für Unaussprechbares: Er übertrifft das Dokument.”²⁵¹ Both critics point to the power of Wander’s language to move beyond the mimetic or the documentarian, but stop short of analyzing the structure of this multilingual, polyvocal novel. In Wolf’s case, the lack of attention to the plurality of voices in the novel and ultimate conflation of Wander’s, Mendel Teichmann’s and the narrator’s voices, leads to a reading of the novel that some ways appears to be a compromise between the position taken in the *Berliner Zeitung* and that taken in the Jewish *Nachrichtenblatt*. Wolf ends her essay by ascribing the narrator’s statement, “für die geilen Witze angesichts unseres Todes versuchte Mendel eine Formel zu finden, ein erlösendes Wort” to Wander himself.²⁵² In doing so, she maintains a redemptive readings of the text, but describes a redemption possible for Wander’s readers through literature, rather than for survivor’s through suffering.

²⁴⁹ *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der Jüdischen Gemeinde von Berlin und des Verbandes der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*. March 1972

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*

²⁵¹ Christa Wolf in Fred Wander. *Der siebente Brunnen*. Darmstadt: Neuwied, 1985. 189

²⁵² C. Wolf in Wander (1985) 197

It seems that none of Wander's contemporary critics knew how to approach the fact that large portions of the novel are written in Yiddish. Beyond illusions to Wander's "Sprachporträts," this fact is never really discussed. Although later critics may have enjoyed greater freedom to engage with Jewish themes in Wander's text more directly than their predecessors in the GDR and have written more explicitly about his use of Yiddish, they often do so in a way that impoverishes their analyses of the work. Elizabeth H. Debazi, for example, has argued in her monograph *Zeugnis – Erinnerung – Verfremdung*, that Wander's novel is best understood as the heir of the Hasidic storytelling tradition.²⁵³ Debazi writes, "Obwohl kein gläubiger aber dennoch bekennender Jude, sieht Wander seine Erzählweise in der Tradition des Chassidismus verwurzelt."²⁵⁴ But Debazi not only cites Wander's own identification with the Hasidic tradition, his understanding of which echoes common East German tropes, but herself argues that the novel itself reflects a familiarity with this tradition.²⁵⁵ In his novel, Debazi writes, "übernimmt Wander mit der chassidischen Erzähltradition nicht nur den historiographischen, sondern auch den legendenhaften Charakter dieser Art des Erzählens."²⁵⁶ Debazi's insistence that Wander's novel fulfils these two requirements by containing "Anekdoten aus dem jüdischen Leben" and the word "Zaddikim" only underlines how broad her genre requirements are.²⁵⁷ Andrea Reiter's *Narrating the*

²⁵³ Debazi

²⁵⁴ Debazi 113

²⁵⁵ See, for example, Wander's description of Hasidism cited in Debazi: "Den Chassidismus sieht Wander als eine von ihre versteinerten Dogmen und Ritualen befreite Religion, als eine ‚*Religion der Bedürfnislosigkeit und der Freude*‘ an." (113)

²⁵⁶ Ibid

²⁵⁷ Debazi 115

Holocaust does *Der siebente Brunnen* a similar, but more extreme, disservice by arguing that Wander's novel is to be read as a continuation of the Jewish mystical tradition not only in literary style, but also in substance. Reiter claims that the novel affirms its epigraph by demonstrating the purifying and regenerative power of the concentration camp. "Man is purified in the concentration camp," Reiter writes, "so that he can contribute in turn to the purification of coming generations."²⁵⁸ Responding to potential critics, she continues, "Only at first sight does the metaphor seem inappropriate to the Judaeocide of the recent past."²⁵⁹

A more palatable and nuanced analysis of *Der siebente Brunnen* is provided by Thomas Schmidt in his article '*Unsere Geschichte*'? *Probleme der Holocaust-Darstellung unter DDR-Bedingungen*. Schmidt writes of the novel, "Nirgends wird der drohende Tod zugunsten eines religiösen oder politischen Dogmas instrumentalisiert" and thus distances himself from critics who have read the novel mystically, either according to a Jewish tradition or a communist one.²⁶⁰ However, Schmidt remains invested in the idea that Wander's novel itself performs a type of revival. He writes, "Zwar beansprucht der Erzähler nicht die messianische Kraft Teichmanns," and continues, "Doch er bindet die humanisierende und hoffnungsspendende Kraft des Erzählen in die jüdische Tradition zurück, deren Weiterbestehen der Text damit im Angesicht ihrer geplanten Vernichtung zugleich bezeugt."²⁶¹ But, as I will demonstrate in the coming pages, Wander's novel does not present itself as a revival of any kind, nor

²⁵⁸ Andrea Reiter. *Narrating the Holocaust*. New York: Continuum, 2000. 59-60

²⁵⁹ Reiter 60

²⁶⁰ Schmidt 98

²⁶¹ Schmidt 97

does the text provide substantive evidence that it should be seen as a revival of a traditional Jewish form, rather than as a distinctively East German creation that employs Yiddish in a novel way.

Wander's novel begins with the introduction of Mendel Teichmann, a figure, the reader is told, whose death is imminent. This "Zauberer" is described as "groß, hager und innerlich brennend," standing in front of a congregation.²⁶² This audience, made up of "Juden aus Warschau, Sosnowiec und Krakau, fasziniert vom Wort," have not gathered to pray or connect to a deity, but to hear Teichmann tell stories of the "verlorene schöne Welt."²⁶³ The stories told are not of miracles worked by rabbis, as is the case in Rolf Schneider's depiction of Eastern European Jews in *Die Geschichte von Moischele* described in my previous chapter, but instead call up "die Lieblichkeit eines jüdischen Mädchens, Duft von süßem Palästinawein und Rosinenkuchen."²⁶⁴ In this way, Teichmann's stories are no unlike Jakob's, in their ability to fictional worlds, or re-create worlds that have become fictional. And additional crucial similarity between *Der siebente Brunnen* and *Jakob der Lügner* is the thematization of the narrator's position relative to an original storyteller and the novel's audience. Wander's narrator, for example, wonders, "Doch wie soll ich es wiedergeben – verglichen mit dem Glanz und der Kraft seiner Rede, kann mein Bericht nur Gestammel sein."²⁶⁵ Following the death of the original storyteller, both Wander's and Becker's narrators perceive themselves as struggling to fulfill their roles. This struggle reflects the mediated nature of survival

²⁶² Wander 8

²⁶³ Wander 7

²⁶⁴ Ibid

²⁶⁵ Wander 8

stories, told by those who survived for those who were not there. It is the same problem that Bobrowski highlights in the narrative strategy he employs in *Mäusefest* and the problem that Becker's narrator attempts to skirt by reminding the reader that he is not telling Jakob's story, but merely a story.

The task that Teichmann sets out for himself, and by extension for the narrator, is indeed a tall order. Teichmann, as is often quoted in secondary literature, aimed to find "ein erlösendes Wort" as a counterbalance to "jeden Schlag, [...] jede Demütigung, und [...] das Lachen angesichts unserer Martern, [...] die geilen Witze angesichts unseres Todes."²⁶⁶ It is clear that, as has already been pointed out by several of the critics cited above, narration is not only about bearing witness in this text. Narration may have a humanizing quality, an ability to make active subjects of passive victims, but the novel ultimately makes no claim for language as a redemptive or salvational force. The narrator says of Teichmann, "Er starb einen sinnlosen, unwürdigen Tod, laßt mich darüber schweigen." He continues, "Vergessen sind seine Verse, seine Asche liegt über polnischen Wäldern und Äckern verstreut. Mendel Teichmann, der mich lehren wollte, wie man eine Geschichte erzählt."²⁶⁷ Teichmann's Yiddish verses are lost, as are the many stories of the Yiddish speaking men of whom the narrator simply says "Wir kannten alle seine Geschichte" without reproducing any of them for the reader.²⁶⁸ The narrator cannot and does not give meaning to the events he narrates nor does his own narration perform any type of revival. Wander's Yiddish is not the language of salvation,

²⁶⁶ Wander 14

²⁶⁷ Wander 16

²⁶⁸ See, for example, Wander 45, 58-59

but a language in which alternatives can be imagined. It is a language, in other words, of fiction.

Describing a man named Tschukran's reponse to the physical abuse he has just endured at the hands of camp guard, the narrator reports, "Dicke Tränen der Wut und Ohnmacht rollten über sein gedunsenes Clownsgesicht. [...] Aufrecht stand er da, unser stärkster Mann, ein Hüne noch, während wir alle schon Muselmänner waren."²⁶⁹ Then Tschukran begins to speak, his Yiddish transcribed by the narrator. "Far vos schlogt er Jiden? Vos macht asa alte Mann? Far vos sitzt er nit in der Hejm un trinkt Kawe? [...] Gott soll ihm helfen, as er soll bald sterben. Vos weyniger Leben, wejniger Schuld."²⁷⁰ It is in Yiddish that Tschukran can imagine an alternative world in which the guard, instead of beating up Jews in the camp, sits at home and drinks coffee. And it is in Yiddish that he is able to call attention to the postwar fantasy of dissipated guilt. Yiddish, it seems, provides a space in a novel in which fictions can be both created and disrupted. In another scene in which Yiddish is prominently featured, for example, the narrator describes carrying a sick man, Modche Rabinowicz, back into the barracks. Earlier that morning, he states, Rabinowicz had left the barracks singing in Yiddish and gleefully announcing that they would soon return home. "Kinderlach, hot Modche Rabinowicz geriefen, ojfgeregt," the text states, "schier nit vin Sinnen, as mir welln sejn in der Hejm, wird Maminju bentschen Licht [...] Men wird gedenken dem Tog, as dos

²⁶⁹ Wander 25

²⁷⁰ Ibid "Why does he hit Jews? What is an old man like that doing? Why isn't he sitting at home drinking coffee? [...] God should help him out and have him die soon. The fewer who live, the fewer will be guilty." (translation EW)

Gehinnim hot genommen a Soff.”²⁷¹ “Geriefen, ojfgeregt, schier nit vin Sinnen” are the narrator’s words, not Rabinowicz’. And this is the only point in the novel in which Yiddish seeps into the narration itself. The juxtaposition of the morning’s optimistic Rabinowicz and the evening’s decrepit Rabinowicz reflects a cognitive shift within the narrator as much as it reflects a physical change in his companion. The fact that he narrates his observation of Rabinowicz in Yiddish suggests he has not only relegated the images Rabinowicz calls up to the realm of fiction, but also suggests that he had temporarily allowed himself to dwell in this fantasy.

Throughout the novel, Yiddish remains the language of what-ifs, allohistories and performance. When the men see large carriages normally pulled by horse, the narrator tells the reader, “Pferde gab es nicht. Und Rabbi Schimon schüttelte den Kopf: Men werd doch nicht annemmen, doß wir ... Aber wir zogen die Wagen.”²⁷² As Tschukran lies dying, he gives a letter to his neighbor, “Jacques, der ja davon überzeugt war, daß er Paris wiedersehen würde, und sagte: Schick dos meinem Weib! – Dann wurde er schwarz im Gesicht.”²⁷³ Wander perhaps most closely associates Yiddish and imagined alternative realities through his depiction of Tadeusz Moll, a teenager with “unerschöpflichen Seelenkräfte” the narrator comes to admire. In one scene, the narrator watches Moll, who has already survived many attempts on his life, perform short skits set in grand cafés and restaurants for the other prisoners. “Wie konnte ein Sechzehnjähriger die Gaskammer überstehen, ohne Schaden zu nehmen?” the narrator asks himself. He continues,

²⁷¹ Wander 27 – “Children, Modchen Rabinowicz cried out, excited, out of his mind, we will be home soon and Mama will be blessing the candles. We’ll remember the day that hell came to an end.” (translation EW)

²⁷² Wander 36

²⁷³ Wander 41

“Tadeusz fing meinen Blick auf. Später trat er zu mir. Um mich aufzuheitern, spielte er eine andere in jiddisch: Oj, a Teppale Kawe, oj, a Glesl Bromfn, oj, hob iach gechulemt a sißn Traum [...]”²⁷⁴ Although Yiddish is a language of dialogue in Wander’s novel, a fact that suggests mimetic use of the language both due to the norms of classic Yiddish literature and more recent ethnographic interpretations Yiddish fiction, it is not a language of documentation. Nor is it a language that allows itself to be confined to the camps; it is a language of escape. But, the novel suggests, these fictions sustained by Yiddish do not have an afterlife among their East German readers, if they have an afterlife at all.

If “[d]as Wort,” as the narrator tells the reader in the novel’s opening pages in reference to Teichmann’s stories, “machte die Männer erbleichen, es verwandelte sie, kehrte ihre Blicke nach innen,” it does not save them. And the fact that the language of these stories, Yiddish, seems into the language of narration only once, along with the narrator’s aforementioned lament that Teichmann’s verses have been forgotten, alerts the reader to the fact that they stories themselves have not survived either. Death, in fact, is clearly marked in the novel as the end of storytelling. It is in fact the chapter title “Der siebente Brunnen,” in which Teichmann introduces his companions to the fabled well and compares their suffering to its purifying waters, that this connection becomes the clearest. This chapter takes places in a crowded train car, bringing the men closer to yet another camp. The narrator notes, “Alle Ostjuden erzählten gerne von den Festen. Jetzt reden sie nicht.” He continues, “Nichts mehr von den erregenden Geschichten aus dem Leben, das

²⁷⁴ Wander 110 – “Oh, a small cup of coffee, a little glass of vodka, oh, did I dream a sweet dream...” (translation EW)

nie mehr sein wird, chassidische Spitzfindigkeiten, Bonkes und Memoiren.²⁷⁵

Teichmann may call out, “[D]as lautere Wasser des siebenten Brunnens wird dich reinigen, und du wirst [...] selbst der Brunnen, bereit für künftige Geschlechter,” but the rest of the chapter calls this optimism into question.²⁷⁶ If language and narration are the bearers of mystic potential in the novel, the narrator’s remark of the men who die in the very train car in which Teichmann’s proclamation is made, “Sie sterben lautlos” suggests that any redemptive power their words once possessed is not available “für künftige Geschlechter.”²⁷⁷

One of the men who dies in the train car, Meir Bernstein, the reader is told, was an impressive storyteller. Although in the train car he only “hebt wenig den Kopf,” the narrator thinks back to a time when “Meir erzählt mit kunstvollen Ausschmückungen, beinahe so gut wie Mendel Teichmann und andere, die seit Jahrhunderten verfolgt sind und daher im Worte leben.”²⁷⁸ He would begin his stories, the narrator remembers and then translates, “well ich ajch derzejln a majsse ... will ich euch eine Gesichte erzählen.”²⁷⁹ The fact that the stories have stopped and can now only be passed on mediated through the memory of the death and in German translation points to the same problem that Bobrowski points to in *Mäusefest*. And while all of the texts discussed thus far in this chapter highlight not the continuation of the Yiddish storytelling tradition in East Germany, but the impossibility of this task, the texts themselves and the criticism

²⁷⁵ Wander 45

²⁷⁶ Wander 52

²⁷⁷ Wander 47

²⁷⁸ Ibid

²⁷⁹ Ibid

thereof at the same time attest to a cache of Yiddish storytelling afforded Yiddish in the GDR.

The four works discussed in this chapter represent the most direct engagement with Yiddish and the Yiddish literary tradition in East German prose. All four, directly or indirectly, deal with the problems and potentials of fictions, those crafted by storytellers and those crafted by the state. Despite all of the translated collections published in the GDR, it seems that there was just as much interest in the fiction of Yiddish than in fiction in Yiddish. But by calling attention to the thick layers of mediation that separated East German readers from this tradition, or by beginning to create a new fiction surrounding this tradition, as Liebermann did, these authors were able to resist dominant narratives and create spaces for new ones, resulting not in a revival of Yiddish fiction, but in a self-critique of East German literature.

Chapter Three

The Yiddish Uncanny: Relocating the Lost East in the New West

It may seem strange to begin a chapter on Yiddish in West German literature with a novel, perhaps best categorized as a work of science fiction, that has little to do with Jewish culture and contains only a few lines of dialogue in an imitated Yiddish. It is, however, Hermann Kinder's sophomore novel *Ins Auge: Des Starstecher H.C. Hirschberg Geschichten aus dem Innern des Hurrikans* (1987) that first imagines the return of Yiddish to the geographic space of postwar Germany. This places the work in stark contrast both to the East German novels discussed in the previous chapter, set exclusively during the Second World War, and to the West German novels featuring Yiddish that came before *Ins Auge*. Crucially, it is also this novel that most explicitly combines this chapter's object of study, the appearance of Yiddish in West German prose, with the text I use to construct this chapter's theoretical framework, Sigmund Freud's essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919).

Ins Auge takes readers through several centuries of German history through a narrative that focuses around the concepts of sight and vision. The central character, if he may be referred to as such, is Hirschberg, a version of whom the narration follows continuously through the lengthy time span covered in the book. The novel begins with a retelling of the evolution of the human eye and then transitions into a history of

conceptions of sight. In the space of only five pages Kinder's narrative spans the demise of the dinosaurs to the peak of Hitler's reign. The narrative then makes a leap backwards in time to recount, with a slightly different focus, German history from the Middle Ages to the end of WWII. Following a length description of cruel punishments and gruesome experiments relating to human eyes, ranging from the medieval to Nazi periods, the narrator poses a question central to much of postwar German cultural production, "Zurück! Aber wohin?"²⁸⁰

Entering the postwar period, narrative time slows significantly. At this point, the reader is introduced to the modern incarnation of the Hirschberg spirit, Prof. Hirschberg, and his "EyeControl" mechanism, which has the potential to ensure that everyone would see in the same way. Hirschberg recruits two unknowing subjects, whom he plans to use in his first attempt to install EyeControl into human brains. Unfortunately for Hirschberg, these subjects discovered his plan and escape, leaving Hirschberg so frustrated that he decides to blind himself. The majority of the novel is dedicated to Hirschberg's journey across West Germany after he decides to flee from his laboratory, accompanied by his loyal assistant Clara, on a tandem bicycle.

It is at this point in the novel that Hirschberg, Clara and the reader encounter Yiddish, or an attempt at Yiddish. Clara and Hirschberg decided to unblind themselves only after arriving in what turns out to be a dilapidated Jewish cemetery. Feeling the text on the broken stones with his fingers and able to make no sense of it, Hirschberg opens the eyes he has allowed to grow closed. At this point, a man in a physical state not unlike that of the cemetery appears, lead by what the narrator identifies as an electronic seeing-

²⁸⁰ Ibid

eye dog. The performance that ensues, in which the old man, like many stage actors, only acknowledges his audience's existence in the fact that the performance exists at all, consists of a half sung, half spoken monolog in a mix of Yiddish, standard German, German dialect, and English.

On the surface Kinder's references to Yiddish and to the uncanny are connected through their relationship within the text to the novel's central symbols, eyes and vision. Given Kinder's interest in eyes and the spectral, ghoulish nature of the Hirschberg figure, it is not surprising that the novel directly references the very moment in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* central to Freud's concept of the uncanny.²⁸¹ Hirschberg, the reader learns, cannot be addressed by the title Professor without thinking about the very scene that Freud pinpoints as the central source of the uncanny with Hoffmann's text.²⁸² More important for this analysis than the explicit connections Kinder draws between Freud's text and his own use of a Yiddish-like language, however, is the way in which Kinder more implicitly explores the concept of the uncanny through this literary staging of a pseudo-Yiddish performance on postwar German soil. In other words, this novel stages the very connection between *Unheimlichkeit*, geographic space, and language that is central to this chapter.

²⁸¹ In *Das Unheimliche*, Freud rejects the idea that it is the figure of Olimpia that makes *Der Sandmann* an uncanny story. "Im Mittelpunkt," Freud argues, "steht vielmehr ein anderes Moment, [...] das an den entscheidenden Stellen immer wieder hervorgekehrt wird: das Motiv des Sandmannes, der den Kindern die Augen ausreißt." Freud describes the scene in which Professor Spalanzani throws Olimpia's bloody eyes at Nathanael, exclaiming that Coppelius stole them from Nathanael. Freud then recounts how Nathanael, after recovering from his troubled state and marrying Clara, Nathanael looks through the eye glass he once purchased from Coppola and, mimicking Coppola's cry of "Sköne Oke!" throws himself to his death. (Sigmund Freud. *Gesammelte Werke Vol. 12*. Munich, Fischer, 1978. 238)

²⁸² Hermann Kinder. *Ins Auge: des Starstecher H.C. Hirschberg Geschichten aus dem Inneren des Hurrikans*. Zurich, Haffmans, 1987. 91

For Freud the concepts of the home, the self and of return are key to the concept of the uncanny. His general claims can be summarized using the following quotes from the original essay.²⁸³ “[H]eimlist ist ein Wort,” writes Freud, “das seine Bedeutung nach einer Ambivalenz hin entwickelt, bis es endlich mit seinem Gegensatz unheimlich zusammenfällt. Unheimlich ist irgendwie eine Art von heimlich.”²⁸⁴ Freud later argues in his essay that, if, as had been supposed, every affect “durch die Verdrängung in Angst verwandelt wird, so muß es unter den Fällen eine Gruppe geben, in der sich zeigen läßt, daß dies Ängstliche etwas wiederkehrendes Verdrängtes ist.”²⁸⁵ This, for Freud, is the *Unheimliche*, or the uncanny. For Freud, the concept *Heim* is intimately connected to a much smaller site of identity formation, the self. He writes, for example, of “die Identifizierung mit einer anderen Person, so daß man an seinem Ich irre wird oder das fremde Ich an die Stelle des eigenen versetzt, als Ich-Verdopplung, Ich-Teilung, Ich-Vertauschung.”²⁸⁶

Central to Freud’s concept of the uncanny is the permeable boundary between the self/home and at once intimately familiar and foreign other. Not only are the uncanny and the process of creative or imaginary mapping²⁸⁷ described here linked by their interests in the categories mentioned above, but the former provides a vocabulary that can be used to describe the affective results of the latter. The primary texts analyzed here,

²⁸³ Sigmund Freud. *Gesammelte Werke*.

²⁸⁴ Freud 237

²⁸⁵ Freud 254

²⁸⁶ Ibid

²⁸⁷ See: Edward Said’s “Imaginative Geography and Its Representations” in *Orientalism*, in which he writes, “For there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of self by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away.”

connected by their focus on the boundaries of the home as a psychological construct and the potential for the collapse or porosity of these boundaries, provide a helpful framework for understanding the anxiety surrounding the place, physical or literary, of Yiddish in the postwar West German imagination. The proximity of German and Yiddish, understood in both possible ways, evokes the same type of unsettling mood ascribed by Freud to the inversion of the familiar.

Though Freud's uncanny has often been discussed as an inherently Jewish state of being by Jewish Studies scholars and antisemites alike, my interest here is not primarily in the a potential connection between the uncanny and German-Jewish identity nor is it in Freud's text as a scientific explanation for the coupling of Yiddish with the unsettling or uncanny in postwar West German literature.²⁸⁸ Instead, I see *Das Unheimliche* as a literary text that engages in the same discourse as the works discussed here, in that it provides a language for talking about the home, the self, the other and the anxiety produced by the perceived blurring of boundaries that never existed in the first place. Rather than affirming the tradition of viewing Freud's text as somehow inherently Jewish or speaking exclusively to a Jewish condition, this chapter seeks to examine works of literature produced under the similar conditions, in which a tension is seen between the coterritoriality of Jewish identity or Jewish language and German identity or German space. Here, I am interested specifically in way in which Freud's concept can be used to analyze the way in which Yiddish is presented and mapped onto specific geographic locations in German literature.

²⁸⁸ *Unheimlichkeit* is often mentioned in relation to the image of the wandering Jew. Additionally, the tie between *Umheimlichkeit* and the lack of home made *unheimlich* an antisemitic slur.

After providing a general overview of the engagement with Yiddish in West German culture, this chapter will elucidate a process that I refer to as the imaginary remapping of Yiddish. It will then trace this remapping, and its inherent relation to the uncanny, through the analysis of three works of West German literature. Under discussion here are Jeanette Lander's novel *Ein Sommer in der Woche der Itke K.* (1974), Edgar Hilsenrath's novel *Der Nazi und der Friseur* (1971 in English translation; 1977), and Maxim Biller's short story *Harlem Holocaust* (1990). Each of these works associates Yiddish with a different geographic space, from the American South to Israel to postwar New York and Munich, and explores the affective associations engendered within the West German imagination by the mapping of Yiddish language and culture onto these spaces, at once displacing Yiddish from Germany and insisting on Yiddish rightful place in the capitalist West.

Zürück! Aber wohin?

Even before the Second World War, Yiddish was something both at home and foreign in the German literary imagination. The question of exactly how close Yiddish is to German was then, too, a source of some anxiety, or at least confusion, among German speakers, Jews and non-Jews alike. While Yiddish and its speakers are included in the portraits of Berlin in works such as Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and Walther Mehring's *Der Kaufmann von Berlin*, much of the discourse surrounding Yiddish reflected the exoticism associated with the language, even if there was something familiar about it. In a turn of the century article by Fabius Schach in *Ost und West* on Yiddish

(“deutsch-juedische Jargon”) and its literature, the author describes the reaction of a German to the sounds of Yiddish saying, “Es sind offenbar deutsche Laute, die an sein Ohr schallen, und doch kann er sie nicht verstehen.”²⁸⁹ A decade later, Franz Kafka began his “Einleitungsvortrag über Jargon” with the reminder to audience that directly contradicts Schach’s statements; “[ich möchte] Ihnen,” Kafka begins, “noch sagen, wie viel mehr Jargon Sie verstehen als Sie glauben.”²⁹⁰ The tension and anxiety surrounding the linguistic proximity and assumed social distance between German and Yiddish is reflected in both Schach’s and Kafka’s remarks on the subject. Both also hint at a willful refusal to acknowledge the linguistic closeness of the two languages and, in the case of Schach, an anxiety about their geographic overlap. In many ways, then, the simultaneous proximity of and distance between Yiddish and German that set the foundation for the Yiddish uncanny in German-speaking culture pre-date the Second World War. The exact character of West German Yiddish uncanny, however, is also shaped by postwar shifts in the way in which the relationship between the two languages was framed in West Germany.

Following the war, the “closeness” of Yiddish to German was reframed as a closeness based on responsibility and repentance. The most ironic, although also academically influential, originator of this position was the Yiddish scholar-turned-Nazi-turned-Yiddish scholar Franz Beranek.²⁹¹ In his foreword to Salicia Landmann’s

²⁸⁹ Fabius Schach. “Der Deutsch-Juedische Jargon und seine Literatur.” *Ost und West* January 1901.

²⁹⁰ Accessed via kafka.org: <http://www.kafka.org/index.php?jargon> on October 27, 2014.

²⁹¹ Franz Beranek was a German linguist who published on Yiddish linguistics before and after the war. He became one of the leading voices in the attempt to establish the academic study of Yiddish in West German universities and was celebrated for this work. Beranek came from southern Moravia and joined the NSDAP just weeks after the Nazi occupation of this region. He then served as an officer in an SA unit.

Jiddisch: Das Abenteuer einer Sprache (1962), which seeks to introduce German-speaking audiences to Yiddish cultural and literary history, he states, “Nächst den Juden aber sind es die Deutschen,[...] die dem Jiddischen als Sprache und als kulturellem Faktor ein besonderes Interesse entgegenbringen müßten.” He supports this claim writing, “Nach den Erlebnissen zweier Weltkriege, [...], ist es doch allmählich bekanntgeworden, daß den integralen Juden Mittel- und Osteuropas eine Sprache eignet, die trotz aller Besonderheiten und Merkwürdigkeiten mit den Deutschen engst verwandt ist, so eng zumindest, daß eine gegenseitige Verständigung bei einigem guten Willen der Gesprächspartner ohne besondere Schwierigkeiten möglich ist.”²⁹² Beranek sees in the linguistic proximity of German and Yiddish “die Grundlage einer weltumspannenden Kulturpolitik.”²⁹³ But the discourse at the time surrounding the redemptive possibilities of learning, or simply taking an interest in Yiddish, was not limited to linguistic revival. Yiddish is discussed not only as a language, but also as a place, as part of a lost East. In the same year that Landmann’s book was published, for example, a collection of Yiddish stories translated before the war by Alexander Eliasberg was republished with a new introduction by Rudolf Neumann.²⁹⁴ In this introduction, Neumann writes, “Die Schilderungen einer [...] versunkenen Welt neu vorzulegen, ist um so mehr gerechtfertigt, als auch die Nachfahren dieser Welt vor unseren Augen vernichtet wurden und damit

²⁹² Salicia Landmann. *Jiddisch: Das Abenteuer einer Sprache*. Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 1962. 7

²⁹³ Landmann 8

²⁹⁴ *Jiddische Erzählungen*. Trans. Alexander Eliasberg, Ed. and introduction by Rudolf Neumann. Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1962.

nicht nur das alte Judentum Osteuropas, sondern das Ostjudentum überhaupt untergegangen ist.²⁹⁵

The utopian redemptive goal is not only to revive a language or reintroduce literature produced in the language, but to redraw the map, at least the imaginary one. While East German literature and journalistic writing that uses or thematizes Yiddish focuses on the Soviet Yiddish culture or idealized visions of the Eastern European shtetl, often presented alongside visions of their destruction in the Holocaust, West German writing concerned with the same themes is almost exclusively set in America, Israel and Western Europe.

Itke K.: America, Folk Art and an Escape from the Uncanny?

The review of Jeannette Lander's *Ein Sommer in der Woche der Itke K* in *Die Zeit* states, "Er liest sich wie eine Beschwörung [...] und gibt zugleich Zeugnis von einer eigenartigen Welt."²⁹⁶ In other words, the text is at once exotic and accessible, as is the world it describes, a predominantly African American neighborhood in 1940s Atlanta. Importantly, this is a world geographically far removed from its postwar German readers. This fact plays a central role in Leslie Adelson's reading of the novel. *Itke K.* and Lander's other novels, she writes, "explore the construction of Jewishness in settings that are often temporally and/or geographically far removed—or displaced—from the Third

²⁹⁵ Ibid 31-32

²⁹⁶ Peter Demetz. "Kritik in Kürze." *Die Zeit* 9 February 1973.

Reich.”²⁹⁷ By doing so, Adelson continues, Lander’s novels are able to “pose Jewish identity in West Germany as a topical question, not an archaeological one” without “being paralyzed” by the German past.²⁹⁸ My analysis of this novel also rests on the fact that the narrated events occur in space geographically far removed from West Germany. I’d like to highlight, however, that the novel, while mapping Yiddish onto the very broadly conceived Western home created by political dichotomy of the Cold War, also relies on a linguistic proximity between Yiddish and German. This section will explore Lander’s use of language and her thematization of folk art through the lens of the Freud’s conceptions of *ich-Störung* and *ich-Verdoppelung* as central elements of the uncanny. Ultimately, this portion of the chapter will demonstrate that, despite the fact that *Itke K.* comes closer to a bilingual German and Yiddish novel than any other West German text, the novel not only keeps German and Yiddish geographic space removed from each other, but also provides a limited look at the potential of these two languages to share literary space.

This novel, Lander’s first in German, was published in 1974 after the American author of Polish Jewish background moved to West Berlin to study and write. The novel tells the story of a teenage girl, Itke K., who lives above her father’s shop with her parents and two sisters. The body of the novel describes Itke’s life as the daughter of Jewish immigrants expected to behave according to relatively restrictive norms of the Jewish community. Itke, however, desires to break free of these restrictions and is inspired to do so both by the injustices she witnesses in her neighborhood and her

²⁹⁷ Leslie Adelson. *Making Bodies, Making History: Feminism and German Identity*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993. 89

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*

growing sexual curiosity. Formally *Ike K.* sets itself apart through Lander's weaving together of a more traditional narration of the events in the life of its protagonist with short introductions to each chapter that frame the following either as scene from a minstrel show or as a retelling of a scene from the Yiddish-language drama *The Dybbuk*.

To aid readers unfamiliar with these performances, Lander begins her novel with a note explaining the background of the American minstrel tradition and the Jewish dybbuk motif and its appearance in theater, as she understands them. Of the minstrel tradition she writes, "Vor dem amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg ließen sich die weißen Herren der Baumwoll- und Pfirsichplantagen Volkskunst von ihrem Negersklaven vorführen. Später nahmen weiße Sänger diese Tradition auf, schlüpften in die Rolle der Neger [...] und truge Negervolkskunst epigonenhaft vor."²⁹⁹ Lander then writes, "Der ganz anderen Tradition der mittelalterlichen Juden entstammt ein Volksstück, das *Der Dibbuk* heißt."³⁰⁰ In both of these excerpts, Lander is making a case of the authenticity of each of these types of performance. In doing so, she is parroting popular misconceptions about each. Eric Lott's *Love and Theft*, for example, disproves the assumption that minstrelsy can and should be viewed as an African American art form.³⁰¹ Additionally, the idea of

²⁹⁹ Lander 9

³⁰⁰ Ibid

³⁰¹ See for example: Eric Lott. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Working Class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 (20th edition) p. 17: "Blackface minstrelsy as an African-American people's culture: this may seem an odd view. But it is one perception of the minstrel show that has been understandably repressed in the antiracist accounts of it. Most scholars have yet to appreciate W.E.B. Du Bois's belief that Stephen Foster compositions such as 'Old Black Joe' and 'Old Folks at Home' were based on African-American themes." "In *Black Manhattan*, James Weldon Johnson similarly remarked that minstrelsy originated on the plantation, and constituted the 'only completely original contribution' of American to the theater. These judgments appear terribly misguided now, given that black minstrelsy's century-long commercial regulation of black cultural practices stalled the development of African-American public arts and generated an enduring narrative of racist ideology, a historical process by which an entire people has been made the bearer of another people's 'folk' culture. We ought none the less to know how such positive assessments of the minstrel show were possible as well as wrong."

the dybbuk is a modern creation and the play to which Lander refers was undeniably written as a piece of ethnography. Though often considered an authentic, even medieval, type of folk performance, the story of the dybbuk, a spirit capable of possessing a human soul, was made famous by ethnographer S. Ansky's 1914 play and its performance by the traveling Yiddish-language modernist theater group, the Vilna Troupe.

Crucially, each of these traditions has been connected to the uncanny in previous scholarship. In *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, for example, Lott states both, "Clowning is an uncanny kind of activity," and "Blackface performances, often inspiring a certain terror as well as great affection, relied precisely on this doubleness."³⁰² In Lewis Aron and Karen Starr's *A Psychotherapy for the People: Towards a Progressive Psychoanalysis*, the chapter "The Uncanny Jew or Freud's Dybbuk" argues that Freud's own ghost, or dybbuk, is his Jewish identity itself. The authors write, "The effect of Freud's *dybbuk* can best be described as uncanny, *unheimlich*, a favorite anti-Semitic epithet of the era."³⁰³ According to these readings, the lines between self and other are blurred in Blackface, while the dybbuk figure represents a failed attempt to expunge the oxymoronic inner-other from the self.

In Yiddish scholar Marc Caplan's *How Strange the Change*, he in fact uses the concept of minstrelsy to explore classic Yiddish literature. Caplan's concept of minstrelsy includes within it in a concept very similar to Freud's *unheimlich*. Caplan writes, "[M]instrelsy insists in rhetorical terms on the absolute, immutable otherness of the object *impersonated*, which it always betrays in the performance of difference the

³⁰² Lott 25

³⁰³ Lewis Aron and Karen Starr. *A Psychotherapy for the People. Towards a Progressive Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

ultimate closeness, familiarity, and similarity of the object of the creator-performer of the impersonation.”³⁰⁴ In other words, minstrelsy ostensibly aims to present something quite literary *umheimlich*, but in doing so reveals the closeness of this other to self or the *heimlich*. It performs a task not unlike Freud’s essay.

The most important section of Freud’s essay here is the previously mentioned section on Ich-Störung through the doppelgänger. Freud argues that the original doppelgänger was likely the immortal soul as a double of the mortal body. He adds, however, “Der Doppelgänger ist zum Schreckbild geworden.”³⁰⁵ Speaking specifically of Hoffmann’s *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, Freud writes, “Die anderen bei Hoffmann verwendeten Ichstörungen sind nach dem Muster des Doppelgängermotivs leicht zu beurteilen.“ Freud explains, “Es handelt sich bei ihnen um ein Rückgreifen auf einzelne Phasen in der Entwicklungsgeschichte des Ichgefühls, [...] da das Ich sich noch nicht scharf von der Außenwelt und vom Anderen abgegrenzt hatte.”³⁰⁶ This is closely related to the form of ich-Störung most relevant in Lander’s *Itke K.*, in which the folk art forms used to frame the story and Itke’s narration itself stress the permeable nature of the self-other boundary.

Lander’s novel begins with an introduction of the protagonist: “Itke. Itke mit krausem Haar, mit dunklen Augen, lebt in einem Kreis in einem Kreis in einem Kreis. Der innerste ist jiddisch.”³⁰⁷ The description of the circles that form Itke’s *Lebenswelt*

³⁰⁴ Marc Caplan. *How Strange the Change: Language, Temporality, and Narrative Form in Peripheral Modernisms*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011. 98

³⁰⁵ Freud 248

³⁰⁶ Freud

³⁰⁷ Jeanette Lander. *Ein Sommer in der Woche der Itke K.* Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1971. 13

continues, “Der mittlere ist schwarzamerikanisch. Der äußere ist weißprotestantischamerikanisch tief im Süden.” The following paragraph reads simply “Itke-ich.”³⁰⁸ The novel that follows is all about locating this ‘I’ within these three circles, which reveal themselves to be much less well defined than this first paragraph presents them to be. Through short headings, each chapter is presented as either a scene from *The Dybbuk* or from a minstrel show and central theme is announced. Chapter two, for example, begins, “Kapitel II, in der Itke die Geborgenheit prüft, ihrer selbst in ihrem Heim, der Neger in der Gesellschaft, ihrer Eltern in der Welt.”³⁰⁹ Here, we see that not only is the association of the ideas *Geborgenheit* and *Heim* called into question, but that Itke’s physical or geographic, if not affectual, *Unheimlichkeit* is compared directly to a predicament shared, according to the text, by African Americans and Yiddish speakers in the world of the 1940s.

The blurring of the interior and exterior, both as it relates to Itke’s ‘ich’ and to the home, remain a central theme throughout the novel. This is perhaps most explicit during the only scene in which the text suggests that Itke herself is thinking in Yiddish. Lander writes, “Itkeaußerhalb geht auf das große Kovskyladenschaufenster zu, das auf einmal klein ist, von außen: klein, und schaut hinein.”³¹⁰ As Itke peers into her father’s store she sees that, “[e]in kleiner, runder Mann sitzt auf dem kalten Gasofen unter der gelben Lampenglocke mit den schwarzen Fliegenflecken.” She then notices her mother sitting next to him and thinks, “oi, Mammeniu as di wollst dich gekennt sehn mit meinen

³⁰⁸ Ibid

³⁰⁹ Lander

³¹⁰ Lander 239

Äugelach.”³¹¹ The German narration then continues, “Sie hat ihm den Arm um die Schulter gelegt: Wir.”³¹² Throughout the novel, it is the Kovsky parents who are quoted in Lander’s Yiddish, while Itke speaks and thinks exclusively in German, albeit a German intended to stand in for English. As Itke stands physically out of her home and looks in, her thought is suddenly represented in the language of the most interior circle, Yiddish. And yet Itke’s thoughts reveal not a familiarity with her parents, but a distance from them. Yiddish for Itke is not simply the intimate *Mameloshn* seen in so many nostalgic portrayals of the language and its culture. Instead, Itke has an ambivalent view of her home language, which in fact lies at the core of the type of *ich-Störung* most prevalent in this novel.

The *ich-Störung* in Lander’s novel is an *ich-Störung* related directly to language. Itke never seems troubled about her own ability to move through the cultural circles that organize her world, but the bleeding of language between these circles is the source of much anxiety. In fact, Itke’s sense of inner stability comes from a belief in the stability of language. For Itke, the social conflicts in “*der rissigen Welt*” are tangential to the “*zentralen Itkekreis*,” which is language itself, or “*SPRACHE*,” as it is called in the novel. “*AM ANFANG WAR DAS WORT (halte es rein)*,” Lander writes. She continues, “*Am Anfang war ein Lied, das mir Mamma vorsang und vorsang [...] Oif a Pripitscheck/ Sitzt a Rebbeniu/Un in Stub’ is heeß/Un der Rebbe lerent kleene Kinderlach/Den Aleph-Bees.*”³¹³ Itke is not nostalgic for Yiddish or Yiddish folksong, but for a time when ‘pure’ language could be acquired and maintained. Itke reflects on

³¹¹ Oh, Mama, if you could see yourself through my eyes. Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Lander 89

the content of the song saying, “In jener heißen Stube, auf jener Ofenbank, um jenen Rabbiner herum, der um die Tränen wußte, die in den Buchstaben liegen, war die Welt ganz. Er wäre berechtigt mich zu erziehen. Meine Sprachwelt wäre wie am Anfang ein Kreis gewesen.”³¹⁴ In Itke’s world, however, the perfect language *Kreis* could not be maintained. “She war nicht rund zu halten, nicht unbefleckt, nicht rein.”³¹⁵

Although Itke insists on the purity or authenticity of language, her understanding of individual, distinct *Sprachwelten* does not preclude the possibility of connections between groups based on commonalities between linguistic systems. Itke, for example, sees a connection between her parents’ world and the world of their African American neighbors not only because of their shared social status of disenfranchised minorities, but because of their shared use of the double negative. Itke asks, “Wie aber sollte ich mich gegen die doppelte Verneinung wehren? Darin einigten sich die Sprachminoritäten und machten gemeinsame Sache gegen meine Sprachwelt.”³¹⁶ Here, Itke compares the sociolect spoken by her neighbors to the English she hears in other social circles and at school. This sociolect, through its use of the double negative, breaks the rules of standardized American English grammar and is thus an affront to Itke’s search for linguistic authenticity. But to what does she compare her parents’ Yiddish and why does their use of the double negative, in a language in which these forms are standard, irk her? The answer seems to be that Yiddish is constantly compared to German, a language which the character Itke does not speak, but through which her experiences are mediated to the reader.

³¹⁴ Lander 90

³¹⁵ Ibid

³¹⁶ Lander 91

African American figures speaking a southern sociolect and Itke's Yiddish-speaking parents converse without problems not because of any commonalities between Yiddish and English, but because of the proximity of Yiddish and German, the language through which both worlds are mediated for the reader's benefit. Take, for example the scene in which Tessie, an African American employee of the Kovsky shop hears Mr. Kovsky call her boyfriend George a *beheme*, a beast. While Itke initially holds out hope that Tessie has not heard her father's comment, Lander writes, "Oh, Tessie hat es aber gehört: 'George ist nicht keine Beheeme!'"³¹⁷ Lander continues, "Sie kennt alle hebräischen Wörter, mit denen Tante täglich den Laden, den Hintergarten, die umliegenden Bürgersteige und das Telefon speist."³¹⁸ The assumption that Hebrew-derived words would be the most difficult for a non-Yiddish speaker to understand only works in the German *Sprachwelt*. This means that when the novel sets up oppositions between the interior circles of southern African American and Jewish culture and the outside world, the reader is drawn into the interior position. Lander, for example, introduces the second chapter of the novel as a "*Minstrel-Schau*, in der Itke die Harmonie zwischen zwei Minoritäten erlebt, sowie die Dissonanz der beiden zum großen Ganzen."³¹⁹ Here, it is hard to imagine German belonging the exterior majority, when it is the language that, in the world of the novel, mediates the relationship between the two interior circles.

Lander's novel seems to suggest that, rather or in addition to an oppressive external culture, it is a repressive originary culture, represented most explicitly the

³¹⁷ Lander 30

³¹⁸ Ibid

³¹⁹ Lander 69

minstrel and *Dybbuk* traditions, that restrain the protagonists. For example, other than through her parents, Itke's principle connection to the Yiddish language and its culture is through the *Arbeiterringschule*. The narrator notes of this organization, "Doch Itke weiß es, dem Arbeiterring gehört kein Arbeiter an. [...] Der Arbeiterring hat eine [...] Schule, damit ihre Kinderlach unter ihresgleichen Freunden, unter ihresgleichen heiraten."³²⁰ At this school, Itke and the other children "führen Volksstück auf 'A Goilem und 'Der Dibbuk' [...] und lernen Lieder, [...] in der Sprache, die das Anderssein in sich aufnimmt und daraus in 'in der Heem' macht."³²¹ This type of folk art, according to the novel, is exclusionary and stifling, as is the home it creates. The minstrel show, which is presented as African American folk art in the novel, is treated similarly. When Itke's cousin Sonny arrives, in many ways heralding in a more enlightened era, he corrects the behavior of the African American figure Brother Wilson shouting, "Schalt die Clownerei ab!" and "Ihr spielt immerfort Minstrelschau!"³²² When the novel ends, the African Americans in Itke's community have decided to stand up for their rights against a racist police force and Itke's father has decide to peddle his wares on a bicycle, thus integrating more fully into the community. This final chapter is framed as, "Gleichzeitig ein Akt des *Dibbuk* sowie ein *Minstrelschau*, in denen Itke und die Neger gleichzeitig ausbrechen."³²³ Folk art, then, is not a celebration of a productive authenticity, as it was viewed by many modernists to be, but as a restrictive force placed by minority cultures on themselves. It is a home to be escaped.

³²⁰ Lander 20

³²¹ Lander 21

³²² Lander 197

³²³ Lander 235

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, scholars have theorized both forms of the folk art central to Lander's novel as inherently uncanny. *Itke K.*, then, seems to suggest that the characters at the end of the novel, if they do in fact break free of the folk performance that has defined them throughout the narrative, are able to move past the tension-filled relationship between self and other that had defined their existences up to this point. The absence in *Itke K.* of the ghoulish, haunting or grotesque characters that populate the other three narratives discussed in this chapter could be read as a substantiation of the novel's suggestion that it provides an escape from the uncanny. And, to return to the introduction of this section, the novel's mapping of Yiddish far from West German territory could then provide a possible mechanism by which Lander removes the Yiddish other from the German home, thereby foregoing the basic process by which I argue the sense of *Unheimlichkeit* is introduced into the literature discussed in this chapter in the first place. But such a reading would fail to account for the centrality of linguistic proximity between German and Yiddish within Lander's narrative and the return of the Yiddish language to German literature that this narrative seems to stage.

Though I agree with Leslie Adelson that the setting of this novel allows Lander to discuss Jewish themes and use Yiddish in a way that would have been more difficult had the novel been set in West Germany, I believe that it is Lander's split between the realm of literary narration and the folk art forms alluded to in the text that allow her to siphon the affect of *Unheimlichkeit* into the latter. For all of the allusions to minstrelsy and the *Dybbuk* tradition in the introductions to each chapter, the body of the text itself never really performs the haunting and clowning central to the uncanniness of these performance traditions. Though Lander relies heavily on the presence of the Yiddish

language within her German novel to showcase the way in which Itke struggles with her own identity, this language ultimately plays a role unlikely to engender a sense of *Unheimlichkeit* within the text. The proximity of Yiddish and German, as I have shown, make this entire text, in which characters we are to believe speak a Southern African American sociolect of English and others who speak Yiddish converse easily, possible. Rather than play with the simultaneous proximity and distance between the self and other central to the types of performance to which Lander makes repeated nods within her novel, the narration itself thematizes only one side of this relationship in the German-Yiddish context. Though Adelson has identified ways in which the American setting of this novel allows for a more nuanced discussion of certain Jewish themes, it seems as if the novel's avoidance of specifically German themes results in a more simplified discussion of the relationship between German and Yiddish and the of the tensions and anxieties this relationship evokes in the other literature discussed here.

Der Nazi und der Friseur

In his review of Edgar Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi und der Friseur* (1977) in *Die Zeit*, Heinrich Böll concludes, "ich habe kein fix und fertiges Urteil über dieses Buch, frag mich nicht nur, ob's 'gelingen' ist, sondern auch, ob es überhaupt 'gelingen' konnte, dieses heikle, waghalsige Unternehmen."³²⁴ Hilsenrath's novel, which appeared in English translation several years before it was released for German audiences, tells the story of Max Schulz, a member of the SS who murders his Jewish childhood friend, Itzig

³²⁴ Heinrich Böll. "Umgekippte Märchenfiguren: Obszön und grotesk: Hans im Glück im Blut." *Die Zeit* (51) 16 December 1977.

Finkelstein, only to later take on Finkelstein's identity and move to Israel after the war ends. That the subject matter was difficult for Böll and other readers is not difficult to imagine. Böll ultimately argues that the novel is rescued from failure by Hilsenrath's language. My interest in language in Hilsenrath's novel has less to do with the "stille Poesie" that Böll writes about and more to do with the way in which languages (German, Yiddish and Hebrew) are mapped in the novel. Yet the central concern, the relationship between language and the possibility of a grotesque that does more than shock, is the same.

Even the single-sentence synopsis above makes the relevance of Freud's interest in *ich*-Störung to this text clear. In the previous section, this *ich*-Störung was introduced as it relates to the forms of folk art thematized in Lander's novel and to protagonist herself. Although these art forms have themselves been described as uncanny and Itke struggles throughout the novel to find a stable *ich*, Lander's novel itself does not evoke the unease in the reader that Freud associates with his exemplary text *Der Sandmann* or that is evoked by Hilsenrath's text. This is due in part to the productive nature of Itke's struggle and in part to the fact that Lander's novel does not itself perform the transgressive work Adelson's ascribes to the folk art performances. The discrepancy between Lander's and Hilsenrath's novels, however, are also a matter of geography. The German home itself is left untouched in Lander's novel, while Hilsenrath's novel creates a particular kind of unease or *Unheimlichkeit* by bringing the German home and the Yiddish familiar other back into contact.

Hilsenrath's novel begins on the day on which both Max Schulz and Itzig Finkelstein are born in the then-German town of Wieshalle. Max is born to Minna

Schulz and one of five potential fathers. Itzig is born to the successful barber, Chaim Finkelstein and his wife, upstanding members of the Wieshalle's Jewish community. Max becomes a close friend of Itzig's, eventually attending synagogue with the family and training under Chaim Finkelstein to become a barber. From his friendship with the Finkelsteins, Max becomes familiar with Jewish history, customs and prayers and also learns Yiddish. Although not all Jewish families in Wieshalle speak Yiddish, the Finkelsteins, who come from Pohodna in Galicia, speak Yiddish at home. Max grows up to join the Nazi party and then the SS. Working with the SS, Max personally kills Itzig and his parents. At the end of the war, Max works at the fictional concentration camp Laubwalde, from which he flees before the Red Army arrives. After he makes it back to Berlin, he survives as a wanted man living off the black market before deciding to live out the rest of his life as Itzig Finkelstein. To maintain his cover, Max relies on everything he learned from the Finkelsteins, including Yiddish. In fact, he is able to adjust to his new life in Israel more easily than the German Jews he encounters there.

As is briefly mentioned previously in this chapter, Freud's discussion of the *doppelgänger* in *Das Unheimliche* centers around the idea that this image of the double, once a source of comfort, has morphed into something deeply troubling. The connection between Freud's concept of the *doppelgänger* perversion of a self-preservation mechanism and the plot of *Der Nazi und der Friseur* is clear. Once Max is on the run from the Red Army, he begins to see parallels between himself and the Jews he has murdered. Soon after he leaves Laubwalde, Max is taken in by Veronja, who bears striking resemblance to a witch in a fairytale. When Max remarks to Veronja, "Ich war

noch kein Untermensch,” the old woman responds, “Jetzt sind Sie einer.”³²⁵ Imagining himself being cooked in Venonja’s cauldron, Max explains that he, “guckte selber in die dicke Brühe ... sah meinen Hintern [...] sah den Hintern des Massenmörders ... sah meine Augen ... sah Millionen Augen.”³²⁶ In this moment of self-reflection and self-pity, Max sees himself as a mass murderer in the same breath he draws a parallel between himself and his victims. This perverse form of identification with his victims is what allows Max to save himself and escape prison time in Germany. Under the assumed identity of the murdered Itzig, Max boards a ship for Israel and begins a new life there.

However, the disturbing doubling that fills this novel is not limited to the double ‘I’ Max takes on once he uses the identity of his friend-turned-victim, Itzig, to escape to what is then British Palestine.³²⁷ The other double image present throughout the novel is cast by the constant comparison by the reader between the Itzig Max kills and the Itzig Max brings to life. While Max at times addresses his narration directly to the reader, marked by the use of the formal *Sie*, his reports on his life in Tel Aviv are often addressed directly to the original Itzig, marked by the informal ‘du.’ In one such passage, Max describes his trip to British Palestine by boat and he fellow passengers to his old friend. “Lieber Itzig,” he begins, “Seit der Vitaminkur lieben mich die Kinder. Vorher pflegten sie mich ‘Herr Finkelstein’ zu nennen. [...] Jetzt nur noch ‘Chawer Itzig!’”³²⁸ As

³²⁵ Edgar Hilsenrath. *Der Nazi und Der Friseur*. Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996. 160

³²⁶ Ibid

³²⁷ It is interesting to note that, in Freud’s discussion of the Ich-Störung, he writes that the type of double associated with Ich-Störungen in the form of Ich-Verdoppelung engender, “die beständige Wiederkehr des Gleichen, die Wiederholung der nämlichen Gesichtszüge, Charaktere, Schicksale, verbrecherischen Taten.” (247) Max’s act of Ich-Verdoppelung, in his assumption of the role of Itzig, is at once a perverse attempt to reverse the original “verbrecherische Tat” and its extension or even repetition.

³²⁸ Hilsenrath *Der Nazi und Der Friseur* 281

Max travels from Germany to British Palestine, he recreates himself in the image, or at least in Max's image, of the murdered Itzig. Not only does Max, as the German Jew Itzig, become less German and more Jewish, he imagines himself to be more knowledgeable about Jewish languages than the original Itzig. "Weißt du," Max asks, "was 'Chawer' heißt?"³²⁹ Chawer may come from Hebrew, a language Max learns that Itzig never did, but it is also used in Yiddish, a language Max learned from the Finkelstein family. It is through the connection he cultivates to Yiddish and Eastern European Jewry that Max continues not to emulate but to out do his predecessor. One of Max's first stops in Israel, for example, is a kibbutz on which he is asked, "Bist du wirkliche ein deutscher Jude, Chawer Itzig?"³³⁰ When Max replies that his parents came from Galicia, he is told, "Dann bist du ein Galizianer."³³¹ Later in the novel, after Max has settled into a job as a barber, the barbershop where he works hires another man who goes by Itzig. It is suggested that Max go by the Hebrew version of the name, Jitzhak. He ironically replies, "Kommt gar nicht in Frage. Ich ändere meinen Namen nicht."³³² Of the original Itzig, however, the reader is told nothing that would suggest he identified as anything other than German. The Jewish community of Wieshalle, after all, had its center at the corner of Goethestraße and Schillerstraße.

These competing, or at least geographically distanced, ideas of where the Jewish home can be mapped relate both to the tension between the multiple 'I's at play in the

³²⁹ Ibid

³³⁰ Hilsenrath *Der Nazi und Der Friseur* 314 – Again on p. 334, after Max explains 'his' family background to Schmuel Schmulevitch, his boss, Max is again told, "Sie sind ein Galizianer, Herr Finkelstein."

³³¹ Ibid

³³² Hilsenrath *Der Nazi und Der Friseur* 332

novel and to broader postwar attempts to resurrect or re-appropriate the culture of the *Ostjude* as the authentic Jewish culture. Erin McGlothlin argues that the Finkelstein parents present themselves as “prototypical German Jew[s],” only to then “complicate this notion” by speaking Yiddish and that “the Finkelsteins’ seamless integration into German culture is further complicated by our awareness that the so-called German-Jewish symbiosis [...] was largely an idealized construction.”³³³ This argument, however, is far too close to antisemitic uses of the term *unheimlich* that assume an image of the Jew as an inherently homeless being, never truly part of German culture. Rather than making any pronouncement about the status of Jews in German culture before 1933, Hilsenrath’s novel is concerned with the place (literary and figuratively) of Eastern European Jewish culture in postwar Germany.

At the hand of the narrator, Yiddish is violently removed from Germany, both through the murder of the Finkelstein family and through his (in the voice of his double, Itzig) continued denial of his own Germanness. Max’s need to identify and have others identify him as an *Ostjude* in Israel stands in stark contrast to the Finkelstein family’s relationship to Yiddish and German. Far from “complicating” their position as bourgeois Germans, as McGlothlin suggests, the Yiddish language, for the Finkelsteins, provides a direct and deep connection to Germandom. Max, retelling what he was told by Chaim Finkelstein, explains early in the novel, “Jiddische ist eine Art Mittelhochdeutsch, eine Sprache, die dem deutschen Wesen verwandter ist als unser Hochdeutsch, das ja im Grunde nur – wir mir der Herr Friseur Chaim Finkelstein erklärte – ‘ein verhunztes,

³³³ Erin McGlothlin. “Narrative Transgression in Edgar Hilsenrath’s *Der Nazi und der Friseur* and the Rhetoric of the Sacred in Holocaust Discourse” *The German Quarterly*. 80:2 (April 2007) pp. 220-239.

zersetztes, hochgestochenes Jiddisch ist.”³³⁴ Additionally, it is through Itzig that Max is introduced to German literature. As Max retells the story of his escape from the Red Army, he remarks that the woods in through which he escaped must have looked just like the woods in “Grimms Märchenbuch ... das Lieblingsbuch des Itzig Finkelstein.” Max continues, “ ... als Itzig Finkelstein ein kleiner Junge war ... das Märchenbuch ... aus dem er mir vorlas ... der Itzig Finkelstein ... das er so liebte ... sein Märchenbuch ... und das ein deutsches Märchenbuch war.”³³⁵ The double that Max creates of himself and of Itzig, thus bears limited resemblance to either original. This grotesque double is, as Freud describes, a *Schreckbild*. And the *Bild* upon which this terrifying image is based is not the delusional Jew who misinterprets his relationship to the German *Heim*, but the postwar German who recreates a geographically distant Jewish *Heim*.

Throughout the novel, the authenticating role of geographical mapping plays an important role. As mentioned above, the heart of the Wieshalle Jewish community is proudly located at the corner of Goethe- and Schillerstraße. When Max begins counting trees in Israel, an activity intimately connected to counting his victims both through his frequent claims of “Ich habe nicht gezählt” and “Ich zähle nicht gern” and through the various mentions of the “Wald der Sechs Millionen,” he counts in the Schalom-Alechem-Straße, Anskistraße, and Peretzstraße.³³⁶ While the center of Jewish life was once centered at an intersection named for the German authors they admired, Max now associates Jewish death with streets named for Yiddish-language authors. For Max, however, the very fact that he lives among these streets in Israel authenticates him as a

³³⁴ Hilsenrath *Der Nazi und Der Friseur* 30

³³⁵ Hilsenrath *Der Nazi und Der Friseur* 137

³³⁶ Hilsenrath *Der Nazi und Der Friseur* 360

Jew. As he tells his fabricated life story to an American Jewish customer, he notes, “[S]o dikierte ich, der Massenmörder Max Schulz, dem amerikanischen Juden Jack Pearlman [die Geschichte], [...] der kein so guter Jude war wie ich, weil ich heir wohne, er aber dort!”³³⁷ It is Max who, within this novel, has the power to decide where the authentic Jewish *Heim* is to be mapped, and it is definitely not in Germany. And yet it is this distancing and the fact that the authentic Yiddish-speaking Jewish double Max has created and the German murderer exist in the same person that create the sense of *Unheimlichkeit* aroused by the attempted *Verdrängung* of an integral, yet unwanted, part of the self or the home.

Yiddish, as has previously been shown, is frequently alluded to in the book and plays a large role in the formation and performance of Max’s assumed identity. The audience for this performance is the Jews living in Israel who, at least in Max’s telling, do not suspect a thing. Unlike in Lander’s novel, however, Yiddish is hardly represented in the text itself. Words such as *Chawer*, *Gojim*, *Kigel*, and *Zimmes* (the latter two are food items), but otherwise the text of the novel is monolingual. This is another way in which Yiddish is removed from the postwar Germany of the reader. In the previously quoted article by McGlothlin on Hilsenrath’s text, she writes of the competing Itzig biographies that the “narrative transgression” lies “in the small but significant difference between the two narratives, namely the non-identical assumption of the pronoun ‘ich,’ which represents the unbridgeable gab of personal experience that even [...] the most idiomatic Yiddish cannot bridge.”³³⁸ In other words, Max’s relationship to Yiddish does

³³⁷ Hilsenrath *Der Nazi und Der Friseur* 342

³³⁸ McGlothlin 224

represent for McGlothlin a way in which Max is successfully able to create a double of the dead Itzig, but it is not enough. It is not the case, however, the Max's transgression is one that exists beyond the realm of language. In fact, as I have written above, the discrepancies between the original Itzig and his ghostly double exist largely in their relationship to language or, more precisely, to the mapping of language.

In considering the relation of the reader to Yiddish in this text, it is important to note that there is not only an uncanny doubling of the first person in this novel, but also of the second person. As mentioned, the narration shifts between a second person addressee identified as the dead Itzig and an additional second person addressee, presumably the reader. The constant switching between these two addressees and the ambiguity of addressee at many points within the text implicates the reader in the perverse doubling attempted by Max. Yiddish is removed from the German of narration in the name of self-preservation, just as it is removed from Germany to the same end in the story itself. As much as there is a clear attempt to remove Yiddish from the German-speaking sphere, it is this very repression of a once familiar element that creates the uncanny tension between the real and the imagined in this novel. The problems with 'ich' in this novel should be understood as part of the mood of *Unheimlichkeit* of the entire story, while the presencing of Yiddish only for the fictional audience in Israel and the implication of the reader in the re-mapping performed by Max contain Hilsenrath's critique of the postwar attempt to simultaneously expunge and re-appropriate, from a safe distance, Yiddish from and into German culture.

Harlem Holocaust

Published between the fall of the wall and reunification, Maxim Biller's short story *Harlem Holocaust*, deals both with dual identities, as *Der Nazi und der Friseur* does, and envisions a return of Yiddish to Germany, as is seen in *Ins Auge*.³³⁹ The story, originally published in Biller's collection *Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin*, is told from the perspective of the non-Jewish German Ephraim Rosenhain and tells of the narrator's entanglement with the American Jewish writer Gary Warszawski. This narrative is later revealed to be the creation of a Friedrich Rosenhain, who has recently committed suicide after sending the manuscript to a Hermann Warschauer at Columbia University. Within the interior text, Ephraim is the German-language translator for Warszawski, who is not well known for his writing in the United States, but receives critical acclaim in Germany. The majority of the narrative is set during Warszawski's time in Munich, during which he meets frequently with Ephraim and his German "discoverer" Ina, who also happens to be Warszawski's current lover and Ephraim's ex-girlfriend. In the short narrative, Ephraim recounts what he knows about Warszawski's childhood in New York and his literary career and preferred genre, "surfiction." The reader also hears of Ephraim's failed relationship with a previous Jewish girlfriend, Eve, and the decline of his relationship with Ina and her decision to abort their child after she meets Warszawski. Early in the narrative, the reader is told that Ephraim suffers from some sort of health

³³⁹ Maxim Biller. *Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin. Erzählungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1990.

problem that causes hallucinations, which seems to be the cause for his breakdown and suicide at the end of the recorded narrative.

Criticism of *Harlem Holocaust* has focused on the “negative symbiosis” between Jews and non-Jewish Germans or on problematic philosemitism in the postwar era. In Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes’ edited volume *Unlikely History. The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis*, for example, Rita Bashaw argues that Biller uses the comic to critique the “‘negative symbiosis’ that [Biller depicts] as characteristic of contemporary German-Jewish relationships.”³⁴⁰ A more nuanced reading of Biller’s text in Kathrin Schödel’s chapter in *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*.³⁴¹ Although Schödel gives more weight to the style of narration and the construction of the story than Bashaw, she is equally interested in the afterword by Gustav Seibt published in a latter edition of the text as in Biller’s story itself. Her central claim is that this afterword reflects social assumptions about the ‘ease’ of Jewish identity and therefore narration and the “Opferneid” this engenders.³⁴² However, Schödel writes, the narrative structure of the story undermines the possibility of the ‘ease’ of narration.³⁴³ While this chapter is less focused on tensions between Jews and non-Jewish Germans themselves or between competing forms of remembrance, I share, to an extent, Schödel’s interest in what she describes as the “problematic interdependence of constructions of a German

³⁴⁰ Rita Bashaw. “Comic Vision and ‘Negative Symbiosis’ in Maxim Biller’s *Harlem Holocaust* and Rafael Seligmann’s *Der Musterjude*.” *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis*. Eds. Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes. New York: Palgrave, 2002. 265

³⁴¹ Kathrin Schödel. “‘Secondary Suffering’ and Victimhood: The ‘Other’ of German Identity in Bernhard Schlink’s ‘Die Beschneidung’ and Maxim Biller’s ‘Harlem Holocaust.’” *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*. Eds. Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009.

³⁴² Schödel 228

³⁴³ Schödel 229

identity conceived of as burdened by the past of a Jewish identity as its Other.”³⁴⁴ While Schödel is primarily interested in moving past certain assumptions about the ease or difficulty with which Jews or non-Jewish Germans are able to write the past, I am interested in the way in which Germans, regardless of other cultural or religious identities, use Jewish culture, particularly Yiddish, to define German identity in the present.

Much of Rosenhain’s narrative takes place inside the Jewish restaurant *Klub Maon* in Munich, where Ephraim, Ina, and Warszawski dine surrounded by Yiddish and Polish-speaking Jews. From the very beginning of the story, it is clear how these surroundings and his companions affect Ephraim. The story begins, “Wir saßen wie fast jeden Samstag mittag im *Klub Maon*, und Warszawski, der immer so tat, als ob er um ein Haar deportiert worden wäre, ließ seine Hand auf Inas Knie fallen.”³⁴⁵ Here, where Ephraim’s jealousy over a lost girlfriend and his resentment over Warszawski’s relationship to the German past are conflated, it is easy to see what there has been focus on the topic of *Opferneid* in criticism of this text. The fact that Ephraim says that he thinks of “den Himmler oder Mengele in mir” when he sees Warszawski’s dentures, as he always does “bei einer jüdischen Zahnprothese,” also reflects a clear othering of the Jew and problematic affect this other has on postwar German identity formation.³⁴⁶ More than jealousy or rejection of the Jew, however, this story, through its portrayal of Yiddish, evinces the anxiety about the return of something once familiar.

³⁴⁴ Schödel 220

³⁴⁵ Biller 89

³⁴⁶ Biller 96

Unlike in *Ins Auge*, several Yiddish-speaking figures appear throughout the interior narrative in *Harlem Holocaust*. Like in *Ins Auge*, however, the most concentrated use of Yiddish appears in one of the most clearly uncanny scenes in the story. Of the beginning of his affair with Ina, Rosenhain writes of Warzawski, “so endete – ich weiß genau, auch wenn ich nicht dabei war – die erste Begegnung zwischen ihm und Ina [...] in einem Fahrstuhl, den die beiden angehalten hatten, um es dort im Stehen miteinander zu treiben.”³⁴⁷ Rosenhain’s paranoid certainty about a series of events he was clearly not privy to is a foreshadowing of the fabricated nature of the entire narration revealed at the end. The perverse sex scene that Rosenhain imagines between Warszawski and Ina culminates in Ina, seemingly possessed, screaming, “*Oj, as ich hob sej lib, reb Warzawski.*”³⁴⁸ Rosenhain’s anxiety about Ina, who in Rosenhain’s telling Warszawski calls Teutonia, sexual penetration by the Jew, so clearly coded here as foreign, reflects a historically common fear of *Rassenschande*, an unwelcome assault on the purity of the *Heim*. And yet, for all of Rosenhain’s projects of foreignness onto Warszawski, the later is undeniably German. Even within the interior narrative, Rosenhain writes that Warszawski was born in Germany. When this narrative is revealed to be a creation of a possibly deranged Rosenhain, however, the reader is forced to realize that all of the *ostjüdische* trappings of the Warszawski figure, presumably based on the professor with the clearly German name of Hermann Warschauer, are likely figments of Rosenhain’s imagination. This is not a story of any kind of two-sided relationship, it is a story about the place of Eastern European Jewry in the German imagination and it reflects the way in

³⁴⁷ Biller 124

³⁴⁸ Biller 126

which this imagined place can no longer exist separate from the imagined space of Germanness.

Like the appearance of the old man in *Ins Auge*, the return of Warszawski to Germany in Rosenhain's narrative does not represent a cultural revival to be celebrated. Nor is the timing of this return uncalculated. "Ich komme wohl wieder," Warszawski exclaims, "Aus Neugier, aus Sadismus und weil die Teilung ein zweites Versailles ist, ein nationales Aufputzmittel." He continues his rant, "Ich will sehen, wie es wirkt, wenn die zwei deutschen Hälften nun in dieser großen Schlacht der Wiedervereinigung aneinander geraten [...] Denn der nächste deutsche Krieg ist ein [...] Kampf zwischen Lessing und Jünger, Büchner und Benn, Stefan Heym und Martin Walser."³⁴⁹ Finally Warszawski exclaims, "Ich bin euer Dybbuk!"³⁵⁰ Warszawski's rant, as penned by Rosenhain, reflects the fear of unification and the cultural tensions that will undoubtedly arise over the German identity and cultural legacy. And these tensions, Warszawski's diatribe suggests, will not be resolved without the reincorporation of the Yiddish voice, however, disconcerting this might be, into German letters. In the end, this premonition, ultimately a correct one as the final chapter will demonstrate, proves too much for Rosenhain to handle.

Rosenhain's portrayal of Yiddish remains marked by *Unheimlichkeit* and death throughout the narration. He describes Café Maon as "ein Gruselkabinett, eine richtige Hexenküche" and notes that "fast ausschließlich Polnisch und Jiddisch" are spoken there,

³⁴⁹ Biller 130

³⁵⁰ Ibid

languages he associates with “Mord und Tod.”³⁵¹ For Yiddish to be at home in this Munich café, would be impossible as it is inherently, for Rosenhain, macabre and anachronistic, a “Mumifizierung von Geschichte.”³⁵² And yet, in one of the story’s final scenes, in which Rosenhain again finds himself at Café Maon and appears to be entering the psychotic frenzy that immediately precedes his suicide, he suddenly believes himself to understand every word of this foreign tongue, convinced he is surrounded by the whispered retellings of the experience of the camp.³⁵³ Within the interior narrative, this seems to be what drives Ephraim Rosenhain to his death. If this is also what pushed Friedrich Rosenhain to suicide, is of course impossible to know. But the fact that the revulsion, and ultimate haunting communion with Yiddish play a central role in Rosenhain’s imagined downfall coinciding with German unification is telling enough in itself.

Through Yiddish, Towards a New Germany

All four texts discussed in this chapter reflect and reflect on the ways in which Yiddish was in mapped in West German literature during the Cold War. While this mapping largely the exclusion of Yiddish from new West German prose in the early years following the Second World War, the four texts analyzed here evince a slow and creeping return of Yiddish into German space in the West German literary imagination, with this slow march first bringing Yiddish to postwar German soil in the science fiction oddity *Ins*

³⁵¹ Biller 103

³⁵² Biller 104

³⁵³ Biller 138

Auge before culminating in Biller’s mapping of Yiddish directly in what would soon be a new, united Germany.

With a clearer idea of what is at stake, I’d like to return to the unsettling scene described by Kinder in which the mad scientist Hirschberg and his assistant Clara unblind themselves to witness an odd Yiddish-inspired performance in a dilapidated Jewish cemetery. The seemingly ancient man begins his monolog in a mix of Yiddish and German: “Amol auf einer Zeit, da der obermieseste Gewittergoi än sein hole Hackelbackel Rischekoppes jogte de Barjisreilem mit Roches.”³⁵⁴ He proceeds to tell the story of a certain Rebecca Smith, a German Jew with two Gentile “Sehn-Im-Gesetz” (sons in law). Rebecca and the more caring son-in-law, Michel, “baldowerten out” (figure out) how they can escape Germany and immigrate to the United States.³⁵⁵ When Rebecca and Michel arrive in America, Michel is unable to find work. When Michel asked about job opportunities among Jews, he was told, “Kannst nischt mauscheln, kannste am Toches malochen!”³⁵⁶ Luckily, Michel stumbles upon a barley field and begins to pick barley (“found,” “pick,” and “barley” all appear in the original text). A woman named Ruth who works the fields sees Michel, invites him inside for food, and they eventually fall in love. “Give a guess, Menschele, what happened?” the old man

³⁵⁴ For *Gewittergoi*, see: Hans Peter Althaus’ *Mauscheln. Ein Wort als Waffe* p. 192; *Hackelbackel* is used in Südhessisch, comes from Yiddish and is used to mean “all in all”; *Rischekoppes* = evil or antisemitic ones, from the Yiddish, from the Hebrew rish’ut; Kinder 206 – essentially, “Back then, the worst of all of the gentiles and his whole group of antisemites chased out the Jews with a vengeance.”

³⁵⁵ Duden lists the verb “baldowerten” as “landschaftliche, besonders berlinisch” and notes that the verb comes into German from *Gaunersprache* and Hebrew.

³⁵⁶ Kinder 207: If you can’t speak Yiddish, you can’t do anything!

asks. “They bikäimen Män und Weif, änd se seijn bemasselt liwing still stieke³⁵⁷ allways.”³⁵⁸ At the conclusion of his story, the man disappears into the cemetery’s small building for the ritual purification that precedes burial in Jewish tradition. Clara and Hirschberg peer inside and see no trace of man and notice the only path by which he could have exited is through the chimney.³⁵⁹

In its content, the old man’s story reflects the same mapping of Yiddish onto American soil as seen in *Itke K*. Even the language itself demonstrates the projection of Yiddish onto English-speaking territory in the German imagination. The performance itself, of course, is happening in Germany. Additionally, to the extent that the old man’s story is intelligible to any audience, it is a German one. While Lander also writes with the clear intention of reaching a German-speaking audience, Kinder’s Yiddish-inspired text is comprised of words that have made their way into German dictionaries (*Gewittergoi, Hackelbackel, malochen, stiekum*). Kinder’s language in this passage, more than can be said for the simplified and transliterated Yiddish text in Lander’s novel, is, to use the term as Marc Caplan does, a masquerade. Caplan speaks of playful, supposedly imitative use of Yiddish that crosses over into caricature as “akin to minstrel performance.”³⁶⁰ This minstrelsy, as Caplan writes, presupposes a distance between the subject and object of the impersonation while simultaneously undermining that distance. Just as the story on one level continues to project Yiddish onto America, it at the same

³⁵⁷ The “still stieke allways” construction is ambiguous. *Shtike* is a Hebrew-derived Yiddish noun for silence, which, according to Duden, made its way into German as the adverb *stiekum*, meaning quiet. *Still* could be interpreted according to its English or German meaning.

³⁵⁸ Ibid

³⁵⁹ Kinder 208

³⁶⁰ Caplan 97 – Here, he is speaking of the Yiddish author Aksenfeld and his heavy reliance on hebraisms, but the concept can be applied here as well.

time places both the storyteller and the language of the story in Germany. Kinder stages a return of the Yiddish *other* to the geographic and linguistic realm of postwar West Germany through a figure who more closely resembles the literally and figuratively *unheimlich* figure of the wandering Jew than any redemptive figure heralding the return of Yiddish to Germany.

Similarly, in Biller's *Harlem Holocaust*, Yiddish returns to German soil not as a resolution of a past trauma or any sort of reconciliatory celebration, but in the form of a ghoulish threat to a yet unborn, newly united German *Heimat*. As the following chapter will demonstrate, however, this sense of *Unheimlichkeit* associated with Yiddish disappears early in the post-unification era when Yiddish art and culture is re-appropriated as a product of the Germanic cultural *Heimat* from which it was clearly excluded during the Second World War and the national division that ensued.

Chapter Four

From Imagined Voices to Remembered Texts: The Yiddish Written Word in the New Germany

Writing in 2014 on Wolf Biermann's 1994 translation of Yiddish-language poet Yitshak Katzenelson's most famous poem, scholar Peter Davies proclaims, "The politics of the relationship between German and Yiddish have been transformed."³⁶¹ Davies' thesis is based on his analysis of Biermann's dual language publication of Katzenelson's "Dos lid funem oysgehargetn jidishn folk" alongside his own German-language version, "Großer Gesang vom ausgerotteten jüdischen Volk," as it compares to Hermann Adler's 1951 German-language *Nachdichtung* of the same poem.³⁶² Katzenelson's epic poem tells the story of the Warsaw Ghetto and the destruction of Eastern European Jewry. Writing after he had been transferred to Vittel due to a falsified passport, Katzenelson hid his manuscript before being deported to Auschwitz via Drancy.³⁶³ Biermann's translation and reworking of this poem, Davies argues, reimagines the relationship between German

³⁶¹ Peter Davies. "Die Juden schießen' Translations by Hermann Adler and Wolf Biermann of Yitshak Katzenelson's Epic Poem of the Warsaw Ghetto." *The Modern Language Review*. 109:3 (July 2014) pp.708-725.

³⁶² Adler was himself a German survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto and was commissioned to write a German translation of Katzenelson's epic by the Israeli Minister of Education. This translation was published in Zurich in 1951, but popularized when it was performed and then republished in Berlin, in 1990 and 1992, respectively. Davies 712

³⁶³ Davies 709

and Yiddish through Biermann's positioning of the two texts relative to each other and relative to the reader.

The previous chapters have looked at the status of Yiddish language in German postwar literary texts. This has included a number of texts that reference Yiddish literary tradition and made use of the paratexts accompanying translated publications of Yiddish literature. In this chapter, however, I will focus exclusively on the issue of transtextuality and the recontextualization of Yiddish literature through its presence in German-language works. This focus will allow this chapter to provide an analysis of the Yiddish text, such as Katzenelson's ballad, within German literature, as distinct from the role of spoken language, and will also demonstrate the appropriation of Yiddish into an expanded image of Germanic literary heritage following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Much has been written about changes in German self-understanding precipitated by the so-called *Wende* and its reflections in literature. A large portion of this work has focused on the increasing nuance in portrayals of Nazi perpetrators seen in German literature and film and on concept of normalization.³⁶⁴ While this might suggest that groups, such as Yiddish-speakers or Jews more generally, often placed in the victim category would receive less attention, this period of German history has also been described as a period of increased philosemitism.³⁶⁵ Not surprisingly German philosemitism is often viewed skeptically, as reflected in Maxim Biller's *Harlem Holocaust* in the previous chapter and in Henryk Broder's general condemnation of

³⁶⁴ See, for example: Stephen Brockmann's *Literature and German Reunification*; Barbara Beßlich's, Katharina Grätz's and Olfa Hildebrand's *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989*; and Stuart Taberner's *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond*.

³⁶⁵ See "A German-Jewish Symbiosis" in Stuart Taberner. *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond: Normalization and the Berlin Republic*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005.

sentimental philosemitism as the “Germanisierung des Holocausts.”³⁶⁶ In this chapter I consider post-*Wende* literature from various genres that seem to welcome, through a variety of transtextual strategies, Yiddish literary texts into, or at least into contact with, German literary history. I do not want, however, to make an argument about the general status of Jews in post-Wall Germany or about the normalization of the German past. Instead, I want to analyze the works included in this chapter as texts involved in projects not unlike those described in the previous chapters of this dissertation, shaped, in part, by the new environment in which their authors write.

As I have shown in the second and third chapters, Yiddish was utilized in both East and West German literature in the negotiation of the self and other, categories which were shaped by the Nazi past, the Cold War, and by deeply ingrained cultural assumptions about the status of Yiddish. With these categories in many ways collapsed in 1989,³⁶⁷ it is not entirely surprising that we see a significant change in the way in which Yiddish is portrayed and utilized in German literature after reunification. While the apparent increased desire for the close association of Yiddish literature with the German tradition and even with German space can certainly be seen simply as a symptom of a philosemitism in the name of a more positive self-image, this view fails to take the history presented in this dissertation into account. The previous chapters have focused almost exclusively on literature that thematizes Yiddish oral culture (through song,

³⁶⁶ Taberner 170

³⁶⁷ Stephen Brockmann writes, “The events of October and November, 1989 forced a fundamental rethinking of postwar German cultural history and initiated major philosophical, political, sociological, and literary debates which are still continuing.” “If many of Germany’s writers and intellectuals reacted to German reunification as if they had completely lost all sense of proportion and bearing, it is because to a large extent they had.” *Literature and German Reunification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 45

drama, oral storytelling and the representation of these types of performances in literature), but the Yiddish written word has received very little attention. In this chapter, I will explore the importance of Yiddish textuality in post-Wall German literature and reflect on the interplay of geography and textuality in the negotiation of national identity.

In his *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Gerard Genette uses the term transtextuality to refer to “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts.”³⁶⁸ Genette then breaks this large concept into several related phenomenon, including intertextuality and what Genette calls hypertextuality. He defines this as “any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary.”³⁶⁹ Intertextuality, for Genette, is a more limited concept restricted to the physical presence of one text within another, for example in the form of quotation. While Genette notes that his use of the word “grafted” within his description of hypertextuality speaks to “the provisional status of this definition,” it also hints at a relationship to space and physical proximity, as does the title of the book itself.³⁷⁰ In this sense (and in many others), hypertextuality and intertextuality are overlapping categories of equal importance to this chapter.

A third relational category of particular importance here, considering the texts I am interested in come from two distinct linguistic and literary traditions, is that of translation. The exact relationship between the texts present in Biermann’s reworking

³⁶⁸ Gérard Genette. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

³⁶⁹ Genette 5

³⁷⁰ Ibid

and republication of Katzenelson's poem, for example, cannot be fully analyzed without considering the act of linguistic and cultural translation undertaken by Biermann. Davies contrasts Biermann's "Großer Gesang," which includes his own German text, copies of Katzenelson's handwritten manuscript, and a transliteration of the Yiddish by Arno Lustiger, to Adler's publication. The latter, he argues, insists on an inherent "separateness" between German and Yiddish, based on the languages' reliance of "entirely different mode[s] of expression."³⁷¹ Biermann, on the other hand, rejects the distinction between an *Opfersprache* and a *Tätersprache* and, while insisting that Katzenelson's text can be made accessible to a German readership.

This emphasis on a readership, rather than a listening audience, also sets the works discussed in this chapter apart from those analyzed in the previous chapters.³⁷² Even in the second and third chapters, which deal exclusively with written German texts, Yiddish appears almost exclusively in dialog, song, and oral performance. In the works discussed in this chapter, however, the Yiddish written word takes center stage. I argue that the works presented here attempt not only to reimagine a closer relationship between German and Yiddish-language culture as a whole, but specifically between German and Yiddish-language texts. This requires an engagement with the fact that, while spoken Yiddish may be made to be more or less comprehensible to the average German speaker, written Yiddish is comprised of Hebrew characters. This means, with the exception of Biermann's publication, actual Yiddish texts or fragments of texts rarely appear within

³⁷¹ Davies 717

³⁷² Biermann did perform this ballad in public, but only years after the publication of *Großer Gesang* in book form.

German writings. Instead, intertextual relationships are constructed through transliteration, translation and allusion.

Though the construction of transtextual networks between German and Yiddish literature by and for a general postwar German audience must work around what appears to be an increased distance between the two languages when compared in print, the presencing of the Yiddish literary works in post-Wall German literature emphasizes the materiality of this body of literature. No longer is Yiddish solely a medium for the voices of competing imagined pasts or of ghoulish intruders, but represents a tradition with a material presence within German literary history. While the presence of a real or imagined material text also offers its own form of immediacy, a confrontation with a translated text and its illegible (to any reader unfamiliar with Hebrew characters) original simultaneously reminds the reader of the several layers of mediation that stand between Katzenelson's language and the post-Wall German audience.

In the context of Biermann's poem, we see the overlap of translation and intertextuality, as described by the scholar of translation Lawrence Venuti.³⁷³ Venuti notes, "The first set of intertextual relations that the translator must confront, those established by and within the foreign text, is rarely recreated in the translation with any completeness or precision because translating is fundamentally a decontextualizing process."³⁷⁴ He later adds, "The foreign text is not only decontextualized, but *recontextualized* insofar as translating rewrites it in terms that are intelligible and

³⁷³ Lawrence Venuti. "Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation." *Romance Studies*. (July 2009) 27:3 pp. 157-173.

³⁷⁴ Venuti 158

interesting to receptors [...] in different literary traditions, in different social institutions, and often in a different historical moment.”³⁷⁵

If Biermann, as Davies argues, changes the way in which the German reader conceptualizes the relationship between German and Yiddish through his ability to make visible the process of literary translation, we must examine further what exactly Biermann is translating and why this seems to carry such political weight. Katzenelson’s ballad is equally invested in cataloging vast losses as it is in reflecting on the possibility of communicating these losses in a meaningful way. “How can I sing?” Katzenelson asks: “Vi ken ikh zingen?” Davies writes that the epic “is about the possibilities of speech—and specifically art” on the brink of the destruction of the speakers and readers of the linguistic and literary traditions of which this poem is a part.³⁷⁶ The translations, he adds, “are about the meaning of this kind of speech in a context where the Yiddish-speaking world has been destroyed.”³⁷⁷ Katzenelson’s poem portrays itself as final text in a literary tradition. He writes, “O, fregt nit dort oyf yene zaytn yam, nit fregt zikh oyf kasrilevke, nit oyf yehupetz.”³⁷⁸ He commands the reader across the sea not to inquire about Kasrilevke or Yehupetz, two of the most well known settings from Yiddish literature, both creations of Sholem Aleichem. “Zukh nit keyner,” he continues, “nit di menakhem-mendelekh, di tevyeh-milkhiker, di shloime nogids, di motke ganefs.”³⁷⁹ No one should go looking for the Menachem-Mendels, the Tevyes, the Shloyme Nogids, or thieves

³⁷⁵ Venuti 162

³⁷⁶ Davies 710

³⁷⁷ Ibid

³⁷⁸ Yitshak Katzenelson. *Dos lid funm oysgehargetn yidishn folk*. Warsaw: Tshitenik, 1986. 75

³⁷⁹ Ibid

named Motke, he adds, citing figures from some of Yiddish literature's most beloved novels by Sholem Aleichem and Sholem Asch. With his own addition to the canon, Katzenelson heralds the end of Yiddish literature. And yet, as both Katzenelson and Biermann are aware, these works remain in circulation.

Katzenelson ends his stanza on the fate of Yiddish literature and its figures by predicting, “Zey veln dir, vi di noviim dayne, vi yishayohe, yermyohe, ikheskl, vi hosheye, amos fun dem eybigen tanakh, aroysveynen fun bialikn, aroysreydn tzu dir fun sholem-alechemen, fun sholem ashs a bukh.”³⁸⁰ [*They will cry out to you, like your prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, like Hosea and Amos from the eternal Tanakh, from Bialik, speak out to you from Sholem Aleichem, from a book by Sholem Asch.*]³⁸¹

Katzenelson's suggests that his own voice, should it find a postwar audience, will speak in a sea of Yiddish literary voices. Figures from these works will be canonized in the extra-literary sense, enshrined and possibly ignored as symbols of an ostensibly static religious tradition rather than as parts of an emerging body of literature. Biermann, of course, also positions Katzenelson's text in a constellation of texts. In addition to placing it physically aside Biermann's German rendition and the transliteration, Biermann's introduction to the poem places it in the postwar tradition of “*einem tief innerjüdischen Streit.*”³⁸² This controversy, Biermann writes, stems from “*Hannah Arendts Thesen über den deutschen Beamten Adolf Eichmann*” and concerns the possibility and reality of

³⁸⁰ Ibid

³⁸¹ translation E.W.

³⁸² Wolf Biermann and Jizchak Katzenelson. *Dos lied vunem ojsgehargetn jidischen volk = Grosser Gesang vom ausgerotteten jüdischen Volk*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994. 13

Jewish resistance and collaboration.³⁸³ Katzenelson's epic, Biermann writes, "ist für mich eine entscheidende Stimme in diesem Streit. Der Dichter zeigt beides: die Hilfslosigkeit der überrumpelten und getäuschten Opfer, aber eben auch den heldenhaften Widerstand der Ghettokämpfer."³⁸⁴ Biermann then contrasts Katzenelson's work, which he describes as "der finale Todeskampf eines Volkes," with "die geschichtsoptimische Verheißung 'C'est la lute final' aus dem Lied L'INTERNATIONALE."³⁸⁵

Though Biermann portrays Katzenelson's poem as part of an internal Jewish textual network, it is difficult to read his introduction without thinking of debates played out in East German literature. As demonstrated in the first and second chapters of this dissertation, Yiddish played a not insignificant role in the negotiation of the status of Eastern European Jewry between proletarian ally and passive victim in East German literature. When Biermann concludes, "Es gab also den jüdischen Widerstand," it is difficult not to think of *Die Geschichte von Moischele* and *Jakob der Lügner*. Yet the closest Biermann comes to explicitly acknowledging this tradition comes in the form of his remark that, when he speaks of Jewish resistance, "rede ich noch gar nicht von den ungezählten Juden, die, wie auch mein Vater, als Kommunisten im Widerstand kämpften und die ihre 'Jüdischkeit' vergessen hatten oder verdrängt."³⁸⁶ For Biermann, Katzenelson's text is in dialog not only with the Yiddish literature that has come before it, but with explicitly postwar literary and political voices.

³⁸³ Ibid

³⁸⁴ Biermann 15

³⁸⁵ Biermann 16

³⁸⁶ Biermann 25

In the case of the Biermann/Katzenelson text, the intertextual references contained in the original are, as Venuti predicts, indeed disrupted. With Biermann's guidance, however, a new set of transtextual relationships emerge for the new readership. This creates a space for Katzenelson's original within the German literary historical imagination. It is by similar processes that literary histories are composed and canons are formed.³⁸⁷ The spinning of new intertextual webs is inherent both in the process of appropriation and, to use Genette's words, in the "refusal to inherit."³⁸⁸ "Each new age," Genette writes, "indulges in its own characteristic" and "chooses its own predecessors, preferably from an age older than that in which the detestable previous generation lived."³⁸⁹ Writing after German reunification, Biermann's book appears to be a refutation of a central claim made by the now defunct East German state. In his refutation, however, he makes his own place in this particular German literary lineage all the more visible.

In the following chapter I will examine the work of post-reunification German authors who, like Biermann, framed Yiddish literary texts or called on Yiddish literary traditions within their own German-language work. By exploring the strategies these authors employ, I will affirm Venuti's assertions that intertextuality "presupposes the existence of a linguistic, literary, or cultural tradition, [...] even as a particular

³⁸⁷ See, for example, Arndt Engelhardt's article "Palimpsests and Questions of Canonisation," in which the author argues that "the use of differing intertextual relationships, intersections and overlappings [can be] viewed as a strategy and means of establishing a new canon of Jewish knowledge." Arndt Engelhardt. "Palimpsests and Questions of Canonisation." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*. 5:3 (2006) pp. 301-321.

³⁸⁸ Genette 212

³⁸⁹ Ibid

intertextual relation [...] in effect creates tradition.”³⁹⁰ Specifically, I am interested in the recontextualization of Yiddish texts by post-Wall German literature as a means of redefining the German literary tradition as whole. I argue that the terms palimpsest and grafting are appropriate here not only because they imply the overlay of two or more texts, but also because the physical proximity these terms imply also resonates with the post-reunification attempt to reclaim Yiddish literature as native to German soil.

This chapter will consider literary works from various genres and produced over the two-and-a-half-decade long lifespan of the unified Federal Republic. Beginning with Edgar Hilsenrath’s novel *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* (1993) and concluding with Martin Walser’s book *Shmeckendike Blumen* (2014), this chapter will trace the negotiation of Yiddish literary legacies, along with those of the GDR and DDR, in the new Germany. These works, together with the Berlin theatrical production *Die Purimspieler* (2006) and Michel Bergmann’s novel *Die Teilacher* (2010), illuminate the role played by Yiddish texts, embedded within and providing a foundation for German-language literature, in the reconfiguration of imagined literary networks after 1990.

Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr

In the previous chapter I argued that Edgar Hilsenrath’s *Der Nazi und der Friseur* (1977), reflects a more widespread anxiety about the linguistic and (potential) geographic proximity of Yiddish to German. In this chapter, however, my focus is on the dissolution of this anxiety in favor of a will to incorporate Yiddish literature into the German literary

³⁹⁰ Venuti 157

and geographic landscape. Maxim Biller's *Harlem Holocaust*, also analyzed in the previous chapter and written on the brink of political reunification, reflects the overlap of these competing urges. In Hilsenrath's first post-*Wende* novel, *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*,³⁹¹ no trace can be detected of the Yiddish uncanny I previously described. Although the novel does not place, or remap, Yiddish into or onto German national territory, as the later works discussed in this chapter do, *Jossel Wassermann* revolves around the convergence of the Yiddish and German-speaking worlds through the overlay of two texts.³⁹²

Jossel Wassermann begins in 1942, with the Yiddish-speaking Jews of a shtetl called Pohodna forced into a crowded train car. They are told only that they are heading East, though many are skeptical that "the East" is actually located to the East of their Galician village. As rumors of death camps and ovens compete with hopeful predictions of a spa vacation, the rabbi of Pohodna becomes fearful that they may never return. Wanting to preserve their history, he decides to somehow record these stories using the roof of the train car as a physical surface onto which or into which the narration be projected. The rabbi says to his conversation partner, the wind, "Wir dürfen sie auf keinen Fall mit uns herumschleppen. [...] Am besten wir verstecken sie auf dem Dach des Zuges."³⁹³ "Und siehe da," the narrator commands, "Kaum hatte der Rebbe diesen Gedanken zu Ende gedacht, da huschte die Geschichte der Shtetljuden aus den

³⁹¹ Edgar Hilsenrath. *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*. Munich: Piper, 1993

³⁹² One of these is a text in the most traditional sense. The other, produced by what Hilsenrath describes as the hiding of stories in a train car roof, if not an inscription in the strict sense, certainly represents depository for language, the materiality of which separates it from oral storytelling.

³⁹³ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 21

schlechtgelüfteten Waggonen und hockte sich auf das Dach des Zuges.”³⁹⁴ While not a traditional text, but rather one composed with the help of mystical powers of some kind, the document produced, perhaps best described as a point of transition between oral and written language, is the Yiddish-language “text” in which the German-language text central to the novel is embedded. The voices that fill the train car “schreiben [...] nichts auf.”³⁹⁵ However, all of their stories seep into the roof of the car. The “text” produced is not written, and yet the novel clearly indicates that the stories take on a material form. Included among these stories is the tale of Uncle Jossel and his last will and testament. Unlike a traditional will, this document gives a centuries-long account of the history of Pohodna and the Wassermann family. Within the internal story, this narrative exists as a German-language legal document composed by Uncle Jossel’s lawyer and notary in 1939 Switzerland, where Jossel is dying. In the world of the frame narrative, Jossel’s story exists along side the other Yiddish-language stories told in the train.

Karin Bauer writes of the novel, “*Jossel Wassermann* ist ein komplexes Geflecht individueller Geschichten, die sich im Prozeß des Erzählens zu einer heterogenen, brüchigen Geschichte des osteuropäischen Judentums zusammenfügen.”³⁹⁶ While the reader knows that many stories are told on the train and while Uncle Jossel’s historical account is certainly complex, the novel ultimately tells only two stories: one of the Yiddish-language train car text and the other, embedded within the first, of the production of a German-language history of Yiddish-speaking Jewry. Both

³⁹⁴ Ibid

³⁹⁵ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 24

³⁹⁶ Karin Bauer. “Erzählen im Augenblick höchster Gefahr: Zu Benjamins Begriff der Geschichte in Edgar Hilsenraths *Jossel Wassermanns* Heimkehr.” *The German Quarterly* 71.4 (Autumn 1998) pp. 343-352. 343

intradiegetically and extradiegetically, then, it is a German-language text that makes the mystical Yiddish-language text visible (and therefore comprehensible) to readers.

The narrator of the frame narrative divides the voices that populate the train car into two groups: the “Stimmen der Geschichtsschreibung” and the “Quasselstimmen.”³⁹⁷ There is much chatter about other villagers, including Uncle Jossel’s flatulent nephew, Jankl, the water boy. Not believing they have anything to record for the history books, however, the first group of voices joins the *Quasselstimmen*, “aber nur, um sich die Zeit zu vertreiben.”³⁹⁸ The voice then suggests that he could tell the story of Onkel Jossel. When the voices pause and are unsure of how to continue (the story of Jankl’s fart has been rejected as “nichts geschichtsträchtig”), one suggests to the other that it could tell the untold story of Uncle Jossel’s second testament. While the listening voice is already aware that Uncle Jossel left a large sum of money to Jankl, he knows nothing of the second testament “für die Gemeinde des Shtetls.”³⁹⁹ He thus asks to hear “Onkel Jossels Geschichte, die zugleich die Vorgeschichte der Erbschaft ist, die für die Juden des Shtetls zu spät kommt . . . oder auch nicht, falls ein Wunder geschieht.”⁴⁰⁰

Much of the story that follows is told as direct quotations from Jossel’s retelling of his family’s history to his legal team, who has been instructed to write down everything for the Jewish community of Pohodna. In other words, the story is largely made up of direct quotations from the testament itself. The rest, the story of this text’s production history, seems to be fabricated by the “erzählende Stimme.” This fact, which

³⁹⁷ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 36

³⁹⁸ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 36

³⁹⁹ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 37

⁴⁰⁰ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 38

suggests that Jossel's story exists only as part of the Yiddish text being inscribed in the car's roof, is suggested at by striking similarities between the conversations between Jossel and his legal team that pad the content of this testament and those being had on the train car itself. When the reader first encounters Jossel, for example, Jossel is having a conversation with his lawyer about Jankl's fart that bears a marked resemblance to the fart conversation between the Pohodnans.

Yet it is not only the complex structure of the novel that evinces an interest in the overlap of German and Yiddish-speaking texts and communities. Jossel's story itself is largely the story of Eastern European Jewry as an inherent part of German-language culture and as a group of outsiders with exaggerated influence over the fate of German-speaking nation states. Even the lawyer's plan to get Uncle Jossel's body back to Pohodna rests on the historical geographic overlap of Germans and Yiddish speakers prior to the Nazi era. "Ich werde Ihnen andere Papiere besorgen," his lawyer assures him. "Sie werden nicht Jossel Wassermann heißen, sondern Johann[,] [...] ein Volksdeutscher aus Pohodna."⁴⁰¹ After Jossel's death, the lawyer tells him, they will appeal to the local authorities and tell them that the ethnically German Wassermann family left for Germany in 1933, "um den braunen Frühling zu erleben." They will then explain that "Johann" was sent to Switzerland on assignment from the NSDAP and requested that his body be returned to Pohodna upon his death, "um deutsches Blut nach Polen zu verpflanzen." The lawyer concludes, "Denn auch das ist deutsche Erde."⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 52

⁴⁰² Ibid

The testament recorded by Jossel's notary includes several years of Eastern European Jewish history, but is chiefly concerned with the last half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Jossel received most of his historical information from his grandfather Leibl Wassermann, who famously spoke Yiddish with Kaiser Franz Joseph I. The Kaiser, as Jossel was told by his grandfather and now asks the notary to record, was unsure of how to reach Czernowitz from Pruth, asked one of his personal physician to plan the route. Upon hearing that the route through Pohodna would be quickest, the Kaiser agreed to take this route, against his doctor's warnings that, "die Luft stinkt nach Branntwein, Knoblauch, Salzheringen und den Fürzen der Kaftanjuden."⁴⁰³ Once he reached the shtetl, the Kaiser, full of surprises, decided he wanted to try the local cuisine and chose to eat in Grandfather Wassermann's restaurant. At this point, the story really begins. The Kaiser sits down and asks what he might order. "Salzhering," Leibl replies. "Salzhering?" the Kaiser asks, speaking "so wie ein Jude."⁴⁰⁴ Jossel then adds, "Wissen Sie, wenn ein Goi mit einer Betonung redet, die an die Betonung der Juden erinnert, dann ist er zweifelsohne ein Antisemit."⁴⁰⁵ Yet despite this accusation, which can perhaps be read as a nod to the ongoing negotiation of how to portray Eastern European Jewry in German literature,⁴⁰⁶ this longwinded tale ends in the emancipation of Austrian Jews in

⁴⁰³ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 106

⁴⁰⁴ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 121

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, Other than Max Frisch's note published alongside his play *Als der Krieg zu Ende war* (1949) advising actors not to play the role of the Yiddish-speaking "Ghettojude" Jehuda in such a way that he might come across as an antisemitic caricature, discussed in the first chapter, this is the only work discussed in this dissertation that explicitly acknowledges the risk inherent in any postwar German attempt to use Yiddish as a literary devise.

⁴⁰⁶ In addition to being part of the postwar German tradition described throughout this dissertation, Hilsenrath's work is also part of a older tradition of German-Jewish writing on traditional Jewish life, often in the East. Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb place *Jossel Wassermann* in the tradition of the German-

1867. Leibl speaks to the Kaiser, as he eats his herring and drinks “jüdische[n] Schnaps,” about the inadequacy of the civil rights currently afforded to Jews. After several drinks, the Kaiser agrees to grant Jews equal rights. Many years pass, however, before this comes to be. Twelve year later, the Kaiser begins having digestion problems and assumes that herring and schnapps are haunting his stomach as revenge for his broken promise. To cure this malady, he decides, the Jews must be granted full civil rights. Years later, Leibl Wassermann is able not only to boast that his herring led to improved lives for his coreligionists, but that “wir [haben] mit [dem Kaiser] jiddisch gesprochen.”⁴⁰⁷

Not only does the Wassermann retelling imagine their own family as major players in Austrian Jewish history, it also casts the Eastern European Jews as the strange and undesirable force that determined the outcome of disputes between European powers. Jossels asks the notary to write down his grandfather’s account of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, according to which Austria was defeated because “in Berlin herrschte ein anderer Geist als in Wien, wo man lieber im Kaffeehaus saß.”⁴⁰⁸ According to the Wassermann version of events, “die Juden [haben] dem Kaiser Franz Joseph das Reich gerettet.”⁴⁰⁹ This conclusion is reached based on the assumption that the Prussians would have taken more Austrian territory, had it not been so full of Jews. Hilsenrath’s tragicomic recasting of Yiddish-speaking Jewry as key players in the political history of German-speaking lands must, even if the stories are never set in Germany itself, be seen

language writing on the *Shtetl* in their edited volume, *Ghetto Writing: Traditional and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Literature from Heine to Hilsenrath*.

⁴⁰⁷ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 227

⁴⁰⁸ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 151

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*

as providing a stark contrast, both in content and in tone, to the uncanny, anxiety-provoking Yiddish seen in West German novels, including Hilsenrath's own.

While *Jossel Wassermann* revolves around an internal text, Jossel's testament, ostensibly intended for an Eastern European Jewish audience, the novel is full of reminders that it speaks to a different readership. Though Jossel's lawyer is Jewish and familiar with the world in which Jossel grew up, the notary transcribing Jossel's story has none of the relevant background information and the explanations he requires from Jossel make their way into the testament and, conveniently for contemporary German readers, into the novel. This (in part necessary) privileging of the extradiegetic German readership over the intradiegetic audience producing their ghostly Yiddish oral-textual manuscript likely contributed to scholar and author Ruth Klüger's sense that Hilsenrath, "behandelt [...] seine Geschöpfe mit Herablassung. Er geht mehr auf Distanz als auf Einfühlung."⁴¹⁰ This comment goes hand in hand with Klüger's simultaneous likening of Hilsenrath to "die großen jiddischen Autoren," whom she refers to as "seine Vorgänger," and her assertion that he fails to live up to this legacy.⁴¹¹

Klüger's comments raise questions about the identity of Hilsenrath's "Vorgänger," and therefore about the body of texts with which *Jossel Wassermann* is in dialogue. Certainly, there is reason to see Hilsenrath's novel as inspired by facets of classic Yiddish literature. Anne Fuchs' statement that the book evinces what "one might call a poetics of insignificance which evokes a concrete sense of the life in the *shtetl*,"

⁴¹⁰ Anne Fuchs. "Edgar Hilsenrath's Poetics of Insignificance and the Tradition of Humour in German-Jewish Ghetto Writing" in *Ghetto Writing: Traditional and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Literature from Heine to Hilsenrath*. Camden House: Columbia, SC: 1999 pp. 180-194

⁴¹¹ Fuchs 181. This postwar desire to believe that Yiddish authors always wrote lovingly of the shtetl folk is seen very clearly in Martin Walser's book on Abramowitz and will be discussed in detail in the final section of this chapter.

echoes the appeal of Yiddish literature for many postwar readers.⁴¹² Additionally, Jossel’s grotesque descriptions of his own wife (“Sie [sah] nicht aus wie ein Matzekloß, sondern wie eine fetter, tote, weißgraue Qualle.”⁴¹³) echo the tendency in classic Yiddish literature that Don Miron has described as “an aesthetics of ugliness.”⁴¹⁴ As a narrator, Jossel is even reminiscent of S.Y. Abramovich’s Mendele the Book Peddler, perhaps most famous narrators in all of Yiddish literature. In addition to Jossel’s and Mendele’s shared position as the intermediary between the worlds of “traditional” and “assimilated” Jewry, Jossel’s tendency to get off track in his storytelling allows him to use a German version of Mendele’s famous catch phrase (“ober dos bin ikh nit oysen”), “Aber das wollte ich gar nicht erzählen.”⁴¹⁵ Still, these echoes of modern Yiddish narration do not affirm German critic Lothar Baier’s overreaching assertion that Hilsenrath’s novel is a direct descendant of “chassidische Legenden.”⁴¹⁶

More importantly, these echoes of a Yiddish hypotext, to use Genette’s term, should not preclude Hilsenrath’s novel from being viewed as part of a distinctly German literary tradition. If Baier’s comments in *Die Zeit* prove anything, is that Hilsenrath’s novel struck its readership as being in dialogue with Yiddish literature precisely because it resonated with the image of Yiddish literature created within postwar German culture: one populated, as described in the second and third chapters, by good-natured but often foolish characters and rambling narrators who, even in the face of oppression, always

⁴¹² Fuchs 189. See also: Jeffrey Shandler’s description of postwar ethnographic readings of Yiddish literature in his *Adventures in Yiddishland*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008.

⁴¹³ Hilsenrath *Jossel Wassermann* 291

⁴¹⁴ See Dan Miron. *A Traveler Disguised. The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century*.

⁴¹⁵ Hilsenrath 73

⁴¹⁶ Lothar Baier. “Legende von der sinnlosen Tat.” *Die Zeit* (14) 2 April 1993.

have a joke to tell. This is not meant as an accusation, but rather as a reminder that *Jossel Wassermann* is very much a product of its time. What makes the novel interesting is that it possesses enough self-awareness to reflect on the nature of the relationship between German and Yiddish-language texts in the postwar era.

Jossel Wassermann is largely a novel about the creation and reception of texts (or, to be very specific, material depositories of language in the case of the train car roof). While the novels discussed in the previous chapter reflect less explicitly on literature itself in their use of Yiddish, they share an investment in the imagined geographic location of Yiddish language and culture relative to the German home.⁴¹⁷ In *Jossel Wassermann*, Germany is conspicuously absent from the text; none of the narrated events take place there (Wassermann narrates his life story from his deathbed in Switzerland). Yet the structure of the novel affords great importance to the postwar German readership. Published in a newly reunited Germany, the novel purports to make legible for the first time a hidden Yiddish text magically inscribed in the roof of a train car full of Jews heading towards their deaths. This sense that Yiddish culture may have been all but destroyed by the Germans, but that Yiddish literature can now return to a German homeland, is echoed again and again in the works discussed in this chapter. In these texts, however, this is never expressed through an ability of the work “to assure German-Jews of their belonging,” or any other oft-discussed facet of normalization of German

⁴¹⁷ Though *Itke K.* references *Der Dybuk*, it does so in a way that imagines the dybuk as a centuries-old tradition of folk performance, rather than as a specific modernist dramatic text. *Harlem Holocaust* is in many ways about literature and authorship, but Yiddish appears in the text exclusively as a spoken language.

society, but through the imagined return of Yiddish texts to an literary, and often geographically bound, conception of German national culture.⁴¹⁸

Yiddish Modernism, Back Home in Berlin

Recent scholarship on Yiddish modernist writing in Weimar Berlin, such as in Allison Schachter's *Diasporic Modernisms* (2011) and in Verena Dohrn's and Gertrud Pickhan's edited volume *Transit und Transformation* (2010), has brought increased attention to Berlin as a site of modernist Yiddish literary production in the early twentieth century. Preceding this wave of scholarship, research in both English and German helped return the history of Yiddish theater in Berlin to the public eye. Thanks to publications such as Peter Sprengel's *Scheunenviertel-Theater: Schauspieltruppen und jiddische Dramatik in Berlin (1900-1918)* (1995) and, later, to broader accounts such as Marline Otte's *Jewish Identities in German Popular Entertainment, 1890-1933* (2011), it became impossible to ignore the variety of Yiddish and Yiddish-inspired theater performances that pervaded early 20th-century Berlin. (Even then, however, Berlin did not have its own Yiddish-language theater troupe, relying instead on traveling troupes from Eastern Europe.) This recent wave of scholarship, however, was preceded by a marked uptick in German cultural productions that sought to highlight Berlin's and, more generally, Germany's intimate connection to Yiddish literature and performances, in stark contrast to the East and West German literature before reunification.

⁴¹⁸ Ruth A. Starkman. "Perpetual Impossibility? Normalization of German-Jewish Relations in the Berlin Republic." Ed. Ruth A. Starkman. *Transformations of the New Germany*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2006.

Of course, the authors and artists involved in this trend wrote and performed in a Berlin whose demographic, cultural and literary climates differed greatly from that of the early 20th century. Hitler's rise to power and the subsequent genocide violently removed any Yiddish-language cultural production from German soil. In 1993, however, sixty years after the National Socialists came to power and almost fifty years after their defeat, Berlin could boast of its own Yiddish theater troupe. This theater, known as the *Hackesches Hoftheater*, could not successfully revive Yiddish theater as it existed in Berlin before the Second World War. Instead it produced mixed language performances intended to make Yiddish theater, poetry and song accessible and appealing to a postwar, post-reunification German audience.

In 2003 the Hackesches Hoftheater performed an adapted, German-language version of the Esther story, based on Yiddish poet Itzik Manger's *Megile lider* (1936). Not surprisingly, this text, inspired in part by the long tradition of the *Purim shpil*, had been staged before.⁴¹⁹ The most famous of these productions remains composer Dov Setzer's 1960s musical performed in Israel and New York. It was thus not an entirely novel endeavor when the Hackesches Hoftheater decided to dramatize these ballads. The project was unique, however, in that it created a version of the Purim story based on the work of the prewar Yiddish modernist poet intended specifically for a postwar German audience.

Like Manger, a modernist interested in tradition and folklore, the writers and performers of Berlin's Hackesches Hoftheater looked to Yiddish theatrical and literary traditions in hopes of creating something distinctly suited for a contemporary audience.

⁴¹⁹ See Jerold C. Frakes' contribution to *The Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1069-1996* (1997).

This theater, located in an area of central Berlin once home to both traditional Yiddish theaters and popular mixed-language *Jargon* theaters, grew out of the East German project *Tage der jiddischen Kultur*. This festival was founded by Jalda Rebling in 1987. Rebling, the daughter of performer Lin Jaldati, discussed in the first chapter in detail, then helped found the Hackesches Hoftheater together with the writer, mime, and theologian Burkhardt Seidemann in 1993. UNESCO supported the project until 2006, at which point the Hackesches Hoftheater was forced to close its doors.

The theater was located in Berlin's central *Mitte* district and advertised itself as providing "jiddische Kultur am historischen Ort." Although it provided access to an "exotic" culture, the directors of the theater were also eager to portray Yiddish theater as an art form that had come home to Berlin. While this speaks to the historical fact that Yiddish theater was once common in *Mitte*, it also helps to establish a problematic sense of authenticity of the adapted performance pieces. The performances at the Hackesches Hoftheater included music revues, poetry readings, and full-length dramas. Songs were performed in the original Yiddish, while poetry was often read in translation. The dramas were staged in a mix of German and Yiddish and incorporated both original work and fragments of famous Yiddish literature.

Rather than perform a German translation of Seltzer's successful adaptation of Manger's *Megile*, as Dresden's *Rocktheater* would later do, Burkhardt Seidemann wrote *Die Purimspieler*, an original drama based on Andrej Jendrusch's translation (1999) of Manger's *Megile*. This piece focuses on a family of tailors living at an unspecified time and place in mid-20th century Eastern Europe. The first half of the play takes place in the tailors' workshop and, through a combination of prose, poetry, and folk song, portrays

the group preparing for the arrival of Purim. There are only six characters in the play, although these six characters take on new dramatic personas during the second act. The characters, as they appear in the first act, include the male master tailor, called the *Meister*, his female counterpart, the *Meisterin*, three *Schneidergesellen*, and Herschel, who moves fluidly between the plane of the characters and that of the audience. It is Herschel who writes the Purimspiel performed by the characters in the second half of the play, which is made up almost entirely of selected passages from Jendrusch's translation of Manger's ballads. The tailors thus perform an abridged version of Manger's Purim story, which includes many revisions to the biblical original. In Manger's cycle of ballads, the story of Esther is set within an Eastern European community in the early 20th century. He also creates the character Fastrigosse, a young tailor and Esther's lover, whose name comes from the Yiddish word for basting stitch.

In looking at Manger's poetry and Jendrusch's translation of these poems, I will focus on role the translated text plays in shaping the relationship between the audience and Yiddish literary culture, as they are staged in *Die Purimspieler*. Following a broad linguistic analysis of the translated ballads, I will describe the transformation of the Esther figure in the German-language play. Finally, this section will analyze Seidemann's character Herschel, who is presented as the author of the Purimspiel. This exploration will demonstrate the ways in which *Die Purimspieler* creates an image of Yiddish artistic culture as something the audience now has intimate access to and is already helping to revive.

Though I am largely interested *Die Purimspieler* as hypertext to Manger's Yiddish hypotext, the fact that this was performed as a theater piece should not be

overlooked. If, as Benjamin writes, translations give literary works a type of afterlife, then this must certainly be true for a medium of artistic performance that relies on “liveness.” If the goal is to revive an artistic tradition, there must in addition to this “liveness” also be a claim to some sort of authenticity. In this case, the original Manger text makes possible a claim to authenticity, while the performative nature of *Die Purimspieler* adds the elements of “liveness.”⁴²⁰

Additionally, in the specific German-Yiddish context, performed, spoken language is able to evoke the similarities between German and Yiddish that written text does not, hence the privileging of oral culture throughout this dissertation. While the songs sung in the original Yiddish during *Die Purimspieler* are largely comprehensible to a German ear, a book of Manger poetry would be indecipherable to a reader unfamiliar with Hebrew characters. It is interesting to note that, while the original script of the play includes a Haman line, written by Seidemann, that reads, “Juden?!? Die gibt es bald nicht mehr. Keinen der dein Geschreibsel verstehen könnte.”⁴²¹ The last sentence is cut from the final version, thus removing the only part of the play that explicitly references the textual basis of Yiddish in the Hebrew alphabet and thereby makes a German readership a less likely heir to Yiddish literary tradition.

The analysis of the relationship between Manger’s poetry and Seidemann’s staged production requires a focus on the second act of *Die Purimspieler*, which is made up

⁴²⁰ In discussing the experience of theater in *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004), Fischer-Lichte stresses the importance of the “leibliche Ko-Präsenz von Akteuren und Zuschauern” and the type of feedback-loop this creates during a live performance (114). Here, the postwar German audience is engaged in the type of feedback loop described by Fischer-Lichte with a new performance piece that has direct ties to prewar Yiddish literary culture.

⁴²¹ Burkhardt Seidemann. *Die Purimspieler* (script unpublished, accessed through author’s private collection in Berlin, 2011)

almost entirely of translated fragments of the *Megile lider*. It is in this act that the Purim play itself is staged. That is, it depicts the story of Esther as written by Herschel and performed by the tailors. This act thus not only uses translations of Manger's original language, but also stages the transformation of Manger's poetry into a staged dialogue and dramatized narration.

The first act of *Die Purimspieler*, through its portrayal of the tailors' workshop, creates an image of Eastern European Jewish culture as something far removed from Western European culture. In the second act, however, the language used in Jendrusch's translations of Manger's *Megile lider* bolsters a spirit of inclusion that extends to the German audience. This is not to suggest that Jendrusch's translation entirely removes "foreign" elements from the text. Instead, I suggest that the translation presents Manger's poetry in such a way that the audience, while aware they are witness to a piece of Yiddish culture, is ultimately offered a version of Yiddish culture that is not only accessible to a postwar German audience, but also encourages audience identification with this culture.

The medium of theater thus allows for audience engagement with the actors on stage and with the resulting artistic product in a way that is not possible when viewing a traditional written text or piece of visual art. In the case of *Die Purimspieler*, the audience enters into this relationship with a theater performance based largely on a text intended for a reader in a different cultural and linguistic context. Seidemann ultimately, however, creates a piece of theater that, far from alienating its modern audience, creates an atmosphere of inclusion both linguistically and dramaturgically. Theater scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte notes that elements from theater traditions from a particular country or region are often incorporated into foreign theater performances in such a way that they

“can neither refer back to the context from which they originate, thereby offering coherence and meaning, nor enter into a relation with one another, to produce meaning.”⁴²² It is certainly true that many of the oblique and even direct references within the Manger text and within Seidemann’s play are not likely to carry the same meaning they would for Manger’s Yiddish-speaking contemporaries. However, Fischer-Lichte does not account for instances in which codes from the original culture are altered such that they can evoke in their new audience a sentiment that approximates that created by their symbolic weight in their original culture. Importantly, instances of this type of translation and transfer within *Die Purimspieler* frequently occur in circumstances that reference ideas of community and inclusion. When a Yiddish term from the Manger text would have implied an inclusive community made up both the characters and by the readership, for example, this phrase is translated not literally, but such that the sense of inclusion is not disrupted.

In referencing the threat posed by the genocidal Haman, Jendrusch, for example, translates Manger’s statement that “yidishe blut” will flow as “unser Blut” will flow.⁴²³ While these statements mean the same thing contextually, the term “yidishe blut,” suggests an internal difference between Jews and non-Jews. While there are foreseeable dramaturgical and political reasons for staging the play such that the audience does not identify with the figures on stage, the Manger text itself contains nothing that suggests this should be the case. To an Eastern European Yiddish-speaking audience, the term

⁴²² Fischer-Lichte *The Show and Gaze of the Theater* 139

⁴²³ Itzik Manger. *Megile Lider*. Warsaw: Aleynenyu, 1936; Andrej Jendrusch. *Ich, der Troubadour*. Berlin: Edition Dodo, 1999.

“yidishe blut” would have indicated an inclusive community of characters and readers, rather than suggesting a separation between Jews and Gentiles.

Similarly, Jendrusch translates Manger’s “Khotsh Ester iz nisht zayn eygn kind/nur zayn vaybs a vayte kroyve/vet zi dem feter un kol yisroel/fundesn tun a toyve” as “Zwar – Esther ist nicht ganz sein Kind/Nur seines Weibes Verwandte/Doch dient sie so dem ganzen Volk/Auch ihm und ihre[r] Tante.”⁴²⁴ “Kol yisroel” would convey “everybody” to a Yiddish-speaking audience, just as “das ganze Volk” does for a German audience. This term, while in context clearly referring to the Jewish characters and their coreligionists, is far less charged than “kol yisroel” and is not explicitly religious. It is thus more welcoming to a mixed audience.

The young Gershom Scholem would likely have seen the aforementioned example as typical of bourgeois German translation, which, according to Scholem, robs Yiddish of its true spirit in an attempt to make Jewish religious elements comprehensible to “entfremdeten Westjuden oder Europäer.”⁴²⁵ Scholem would thus perhaps be surprised by Jendrusch and Seidemann’s inclusion of Yiddish words in such a way that, rather than furthering the *Verfremdung* of this audience, instead helps close the distance between the audience and the Yiddish language. Jendrusch, for example, uses well known Yiddish words like *tacheles* and *meshugge* that never appear in the Manger

⁴²⁴ Manger; Jendrusch 94

⁴²⁵ The so-called Eliasberg-Scholem debate was sparked by Gershom Scholem’s harsh critique of a publication of I. L. Peretz translated into German by the prolific translator Alexander Eliasberg, whose translations continue to be published today. Scholem’s critique, and Eliasberg’s response, were published in the German-Jewish journal *Ost und West* in 1917. Scholem sees Eliasberg’s project as a failure in that it fails to express any of the Hebraic elements of the Yiddish language, which he sees as shaping Yiddish’s “oberste und bestimmendste geistige Ordnungen.” Yiddish itself, according to Scholem, can be seen as a translation or mapping [*Abbildung*] of Hebrew into German. It is this, he argues, that makes the task of the translator so difficult. In criticizing Eliasberg’s text, however, Scholem, like Grossman years later, only cites examples of religious terminology. (Scholem “Zum Problem der Uebersetzung aus dem Jiddischen.” *Juedische Rundschau* 16.2 (1917): 16-17.)

original. The Yiddish words heard by the audience are not Manger's, but rather are taken from the pool of Yiddish words of non-German origin that would be familiar to most Germans. The inclusion of these at once exotic and familiar Yiddish words reminds the audience that, while they are engaging with a foreign-language text, the language and culture that produced this text are, in fact, not so foreign after all.

Perhaps the most intriguing change that occurs in the Esther figure is the portrayal of Esther in *Die Purimspieler* as a bearer of Yiddish cultural and literary tradition, a role that extends to Herschel and to the audience itself. This portrayal of Esther is made possible not by changes that occur in the linguistic translation, but as a result of the way the story is staged. In the text of the ballad, Esther, who has just sent Fastrigosse away after their final meeting, looks on as he walks away forlorn and sings *dos lid fun der goldener pave* alone. This is maintained in the wording in the German translation, which states, "Und Esther sieht den Schneider gehn, den Kopf zur Brust gebogen. Er singt für sich allein das Lied vom Pfau der fortgeflogen."⁴²⁶ In the play, however, it is Esther who in fact performs the song. This scene warrants attention for several reasons. First, the golden peacock is a common symbol not only in Manger's work, but also in Yiddish literature in general. In Manger, Naomi Brenner argues, this symbol is used as an embodiment of "the rich Yiddish poetic tradition."⁴²⁷ In *Die Purimspieler*, Esther sings Manger's own golden peacock poem, which was first published after WWII in his collection *Der shnayder-gezeln Note Manger zingt*. Esther thus becomes the bearer not only of the Yiddish literary tradition as represented by the golden peacock, but also the

⁴²⁶ Jendrusch

⁴²⁷ Naomi Brenner. "Itzik in Israel: Itzik Manger's Yiddish in Hebrew Translation." *Prooftexts* 28.1 (Winter 2008) 63.

bearer of a Yiddish literary tradition that has survived the Second World War and the Holocaust. This heroic Esther figure is portrayed not only as the savior of the Jews, but also as a key figure in the play's meta-plot of the survival and revival of Yiddish literary culture, which, of course, also relies on the audience. This is enhanced by the fact that Jalda Rebling herself embodies Esther. The daughter of the most famous Yiddish performer in East Germany, and herself the founder of the *Tage der Jiddischen Kultur*, few individuals would better represent the attempted revival of Yiddish culture in postwar Germany than Rebling.⁴²⁸ Unlike the written ballads, the performance provides a postwar German audience with a live demonstration of the continuation of Yiddish musical performance in 21st-century Berlin. While translations may provide a type of afterlife for the original text, the theater is singularly able to provide “liveness,” making it a convenient medium for an attempted revival movement.

Finally, *Die Purimspieler* ends in Esther reciting the majority of the triumphant, penultimate ballad of Manger's *Megile lider*, which in German is titled *Meister Fonfasse eröffnet das Bankett*. In the German production, the character Fonfasse is introduced only nominally and the ballad describing the opening of his celebratory banquet is split between Esther/the Meisterin, Herschel, and Mordechai/the Meister. “Manchmal geschehen doch noch Wunder,” Esther exclaims as the characters transition back into their tailor roles. The Meister then demands, “Was steht ihr den so still? Stoßt an – lechajim, Freunde! Auf unser Purimspiel!”⁴²⁹ The play comes to a close as the characters

⁴²⁸ German newspaper reviews and announcements demonstrate the fact that Rebling's familial history was discussed openly in connection with her work at the Hackesches Hoftheater. Articles from *die taz*, for example point out both that the *Tage der Jiddischen Kultur* festival was planned by Rebling in cooperation with Jaldati (in 1996) and describe Rebling as the daughter of the a renowned Jiddish singer and Holocaust survivor (in 2000).

⁴²⁹ Seidemann

dance to upbeat music. In Manger's cycle of ballads, however, the celebration of the defeat of Haman is followed by a closing ballad describing Fastrigosse's mother mourning the death of her son alone and cursing the harlot Queen Esther. This ballad is not included either in Jendrusch's published translation or in *Die Purimspieler*. The exclusion of this ballad is indicative of the flattening of the figure of Esther that occurs in *Die Purimspieler* and of the redemptive story arc provided by the German production. Importantly, the triumphant ending and ensuing celebration take place with audience participation. Since they play ends with the cheering and singing of the characters on stage, rather than with a tragic ballad, the applause of the audience coincides with the joyful ruckus on stage, bringing the audience into staged celebration of Jewish victory.

In Manger's original text, the *Megile lider* are mediated by a prologue that presents the story and the background of the author. It is written in a stylized Yiddish that references the prologues that accompanied Early Modern Yiddish texts. While this is not maintained in the performed version, the staging does rely on Herschel, whose authorial voice replaces that of the speaker in Manger's original prologue. The play, in addition to the co-presence of actor and spectator, creates a tripartite system of co-presence that also includes the authorial voice of the Yiddish poet. Not only does Herschel fulfill the structural role of the author of the Purim play within the play, he also serves as a stand-in for Manger himself. In representing cultures through literary translation, the poet already is given a privileged position within the culture that is to be translated. When the poet himself is inserted into the translated product, it provides perspective on the way in which artistic production in one culture is represented in the translated environment.

In addition to the biographical similarities between Manger and Herschel, Herschel is portrayed both as the author of the performed text and as a liaison between the characters and the audience. Like the young Manger, Herschel is an aspiring writer from a family of tailors. Also like Manger, he has a problematic relationship with alcohol. This is stated most clearly in the play when Herschel, addressing the audience, announces, “Und Likör, das ist richtig, mit Likör habe ich mich gegen die verfluchte Sterblichkeit einbalsamiert und gegen die reißenden Blicke der Wölfe!”⁴³⁰ In his own lifetime, Manger’s reputation as an alcoholic was widespread and his tendency to abuse alcohol is mentioned in almost every published analysis of his work.

Perhaps the most direct link between Herschel and Manger is the description of Herschel offered by one of the tailor’s apprentices, referred to as *I. Geselle*. He says the following of Herschel:

Tagsüber, in welcher Stadt immer er auch weilen mochte, von Schenke zu Schenke bummelnd, stets einen Bierkrug, ein Schnapsglas, eine Weinflasche vor sich auf dem Tisch, nachts – phantasierend, skandierend – auf einer Park bank liegend oder auf der Landstraße dahinschlendernd, kam er tagelang nicht aus den Kleidern. Eigentlich hätte man ebenso viel Angst vor ihm haben können, wie man Angst um ihn haben mußte. Er war ein Berserker und ein Trunkenbold. Ein fahles, mumienhaftes Lamagesicht, in dem ein paar schwarzer, unheimlich schielender Augen saßen, die seinen Zügen einen Ausdruck verliehen eines Dämons!

This is pieced together from sections of the German-language author Alfred Kittner’s *Erinnerungen an den Poeten Itzik Manger*, an essay published alongside the German translation of Manger’s work in Andrej Jendrusch’s *Ich, der Troubadour* (1999). Even the image of Herschel/Manger projected by the performance, on other words, references a Yiddish literature through a postwar German translation and its paratext.

The Hackesches Hoftheater’s performance of Itzik Manger’s *Megile Lider* in the form of the German-language *Die Purimspieler* insists on a certain type of textual

⁴³⁰ Seidemann

authenticity and imagines an intimate connection between this authenticity and the central Berlin soil on which the play is performed. And yet the mediation of text and its historical specificity remain visible throughout the performance. Although the play attempts to connect Yiddish theater and literary tradition to its audience through its insistence on a shared geographic space, the simultaneous inclusion of the audience as players in the *revival* of Yiddish literature makes the historical and cultural ruptures that separate the postwar German audience from the Manger text all the more visible. That said, the desire to imagine a geographic and cultural proximity between Yiddish modernist literature and a postwar, post-*Wende* German audience is a phenomenon that would have seemed highly unlikely during most of years of Germany's division.

Yiddish on the Rhine

In 2010, German author Michel Bergmann released his novel *Die Teilacher*, which would become the first in an eponymous trilogy.⁴³¹ The novel's plot alone sets it apart from any of the other works discussed here. Instead of portraying Yiddish as a language of the Holocaust or of an inherently foreign space or as a language and culture that post-*Wende* German culture can again claim as its own and help revive, *Die Teilacher* frames Yiddish as a continues part of German linguistic and literature culture, before and after the Second World War. The novel tells the story David Bermann and his young friend Alfred, who is revealed to be David's son at the end of the novel. The novel focuses on Frankfurt's Jewish community, specifically on a small segment of its

⁴³¹ Bergmann was born in a Swiss DP camp in 1945 and, after spending his early childhood in Paris, grew up in Frankfurt. He began his career as a screenwriter.

underbelly, men who describe themselves as “Teilacher,” which is more or less used to mean huckster. The novel is split into two central, alternating narratives. The first, set in the early 1970s, tells the story of Alfred’s experience going through David’s things after David dies in a Jewish nursing home. This narrative is often interrupted by flashbacks, often Alfred’s memories of stories David told him, of David’s and the Teilachers’ experiences leading up to and following the Second World War.

Many of the figures the reader encounters in this novel speak a Yiddish-inflected German. Though there are few instances of side characters speaking Yiddish or Yiddish song lyrics reproduced by the narrator, the central characters speak a language clearly identified as German, albeit with clear Yiddish influence. One of David’s close friends explains his background saying, “Meine gehörte zum hessisch-jüdischen ‘Landadel.’ [Sie] waren Viehhändler seit mehreren Generationen, bekowede Menschen, meine Eltern hatten a bissel Besitz in der kleinen Stadt Witzenhausen. Nebbich.”⁴³² His language, in other words, is a homegrown German phenomenon. Originally from Galicia, but very much a product of the many years he spend in Frankfurt, David speaks similarly: “Glaub mir, Bubele,” he says to Alfred, “man musste chuzpe haben, um es zu etwas zu bringen.”⁴³³ Indeed, this hybrid language is the source of the book’s title. The narrator tells the reader, “Das jiddische Substantiv ‘Teilacher’ ist der Cousin des jiddischen Berliner Verbs ‘teilacher,’⁴³⁴ und das heißt im vulgären Sprachgebrauch so viel wie ‘abhauen.’ Seinen Ursprung hat dies wiederum in dem Wort für Hausierer.”⁴³⁵ The

⁴³² Michel Bergmann. *Die Teilacher*. Hamburg: Arche Verlag, 2010. 137

⁴³³ Bergmann 42

⁴³⁴ This “jiddisches Berliner Verb” also appears in the ghostly monolog in *Ins Auge*. See Chapter Three.

⁴³⁵ Bergmann 105

narrator continues, “Was den Teilacher von herkömmlichen Handlungsreisenden unterscheidet: Der Teilacher ist Jude.”⁴³⁶ The word and the narrator’s explanation here reflect not the traditional postwar association of Yiddish with an exotic, traditional East, but the much older association of *Judendeutsch* with the German metropolitan underbelly.⁴³⁷

Die Teilacher opens with a scene shortly after David’s death, in which Alfred enters David’s room in Frankfurt’s Rothschild-Heim der Israelistischen Kultusgemeinde for the first time since the man he has also known as an uncle has passed away. Alfred places one of David’s old records on the turntable and begins to go through the rest of his belongings. A “jiddische[r] Schlager” rings forth from the record player: “Ich habe gekennt a jidl, gewejn so reich wie a lord – Er hat gekäuft a monat zirik a groißen, naiien Ford.”⁴³⁸ David’s pop record is a far cry from the traditional religious melodies or Holocaust ballads that appeared in Lin Jaldati’s repertoire, discussed in the first chapter, or many of the plays and novels discussed in previous chapters. The image of this music playing in Frankfurt in the 1970s allows the reader to imagine a postwar presence of Yiddish in Germany far different from the images projected by any other work analyzed here. But most important to our understanding of this novel is not how Alfred encounters David’s room in the opening scene, but how he leaves it in the book’s closing. Standing in front of David’s bookshelf, Alfred sees “deutsche und französische Literatur von

⁴³⁶ Bergmann 106

⁴³⁷ For contemporary scholarship on this association, see Jeffrey Grossman’s *The Discourse on Yiddish in German: From the Enlightenment to the Second Empire*, in which the author writes, “Past observers of Yiddish often equated it with the language of the German underworld, a view that sometimes won for it the name *Gaunersprache* or *Rotwelsch*. The association of Yiddish with the underworld is responsible for much of the earlier literature on Yiddish.” 13

⁴³⁸ Bergmann 10

Goethe bis Flaubert, von Molière bis Böll.” He thinks to himself, “Und eines Tages würde der große helle Raum ‘David-Bermann-Lesesaal’ heißen.”⁴³⁹ The trajectory reflected here is one in which David is introduced through his Yiddish music collection but ultimately portrayed as a link in an ongoing canonical German (and French – attributed to his years in exile) literature tradition. In this section of the chapter, I will demonstrate how these two points are connected within the novel and how the novel argues for not for a revival or re-appropriation of Yiddish into German culture, but for an understanding of the Yiddish-German relationship as a constant presence within German literary culture.

David’s own story follows the broad historical trends that shaped the European Jewish experience of the 20th century, if it is possible to speak of such a thing. After fleeing pogroms in the Galicia, the Bermanns landed in Vienna and then in Frankfurt. There, David and his brothers established the department store *Wäschekaufhaus Bermann*, while many of their friends went to work for Tietz and Wertheim, famously Jewish-owned department stores that were soon to be “aryanized.”⁴⁴⁰ David, preferring the freedom afforded him as a *Teilacher*, shirked his duties in the family business and joined forces with a small group of young Jewish men, with whom he would be reunited in the postwar years. Through the stories David tells Alfred, the reader learns the improbable stories of these men’s survival. Perhaps most remarkable is the story of Robert Fränkel, who claims to have been spared from death after impressing the guards in Sachsenhausen with his sharp wit so much that he was asked to teach Hitler to tell

⁴³⁹ Bergmann 280

⁴⁴⁰ Bergmann 133

jokes. It is these stories and Bergmann's own humor that seem to have left the greatest impression on reviewers. "Was für eine Truppe!" the radio reviewer for *Deutschlandradio* exclaims.⁴⁴¹ The review then continues, "Man liest es zwischen Lachen und Melancholie und hat am Ende nur eine Frage: Soll man heulen vor Wut, dass solche Menschengeschichten in Deutschland traditionell so schmerzhaft fehlen, oder vor Freude, dass sie endlich erzählt werden?"⁴⁴² The review that appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* concludes, "Dass aber Dunkles und Helles untrennbar miteinander verwoben sind und ein so festes Gewebe bilden wie jene Wäschestücke, mit denen die Teilacher auf ihre Verkaufsfahrten gehen, gehört zu den großen Vorzügen dieses sorgfältig komponierten, sehr lesenswerten Romans."⁴⁴³

Yes, it is from this group of David's companions that the novel takes its name. Even so, it is remarkable that none of the reviews in the German media mentions the other network into which the novel places David, and therefore itself. Though the *FAZ* does note, "Michel Bergmann präsentiert seinen Lesern eine anschauliche Lektion in jüngerer Zeitgeschichte," the review fails to mention that the history the novel constructs is largely a literary history.⁴⁴⁴ David tells Alfred his life story largely through his contacts with the German-speaking Jewish literary world. This begins when David tells Alfred, "Ich verstand mich als Flaneur," a term of course most frequently associated with

⁴⁴¹ Radio review on Deutschlandradio Kultur (5 May 2010) *Buchkritik* "Hausierer im Land der Mörder." Besprochen von Pieke Biermann

⁴⁴² Ibid

⁴⁴³ Sabine Doering. "Das kleinste spaltbare Teilchen Literatur" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 18 August 2010

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

the writings of Walther Benjamin.⁴⁴⁵ David then continues, “Ein Flaneur ist ein Bohemien, nur dass er das Kaffeehaus wechselt. Die frische Luft muss man allerdings in Kauf nehmen, wie Anton Kuh gesagt hat.”⁴⁴⁶ This reference to Kuh, a Viennese journalist who worked briefly in Berlin, is important in understanding the novel’s negotiation of the status of Yiddish within German-language literary culture. Today Kuh is perhaps best remembered for his work *Juden und Deutsche* (1921), whose title alone speaks to its thematic ties to *Die Teilacher*, and “Der Affe Zarathustras” (1925) his “Stegreifrede” against his fellow Austrian Jewish journalist Karl Kraus. Of the common practice among German-speaking Jewish intellectuals in the early 20th century to use Yiddish in their writings, linguist Hans Peter Althaus writes, “Diskussionen, in denen mit Wörtern aus dem Jiddischen wie mit Florett gefochten wurde, waren unter jüdischen Intellektuellen nicht selten.” He then continues, “Karl Kraus präsentierte dabei die ‘jüdische Ekelwörter’ [...] seiner Leserschaft wie auf eine Tablett.”⁴⁴⁷ Anton Kuh, on the other hand, “benutzte in seiner berühmt gewordenen Stegreifrede gegen Karl Kraus nicht nur Ausdrücke wie *Kille* [community] oder *Mischpoche* [family], sondern prägte im Feuer der polemischen Auseinandersetzung sogar neue Wörter wie *Itzig-Seuche*, *Itziglismus* *Zeittinnef* [tinef = junk] oder *Tinnefologie*.”⁴⁴⁸ For Kuh, then, the use of Yiddishized German is both the medium and the object of his derision. Bergmann’s reference to Kuh could perhaps be written off as insubstantial, if it were not for the

⁴⁴⁵ Bergmann 42

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁴⁷ Hans Peter Althaus. *Kleines Lexikon deutscher Wörter jiddischer Herkunft*. Munich: Beck, 2003.

⁴⁴⁸ Althaus *Kleines Lexikon* 14

continued references to German-language authors and texts interested in Yiddish throughout the novel.

A story ostensibly about a young woman David once intended to marry, for example, turns into a story about Yiddish-speaking German author and journalist Soma Morgenstern. Morgenstern, it turns out, was a friend of David's and his source for information on Maria, his love interest at the time. Alfred gives no sign of recognizing Morgenstern's name and David adds, "Soma war ein feiner Kerl und ein großer Autor. Sehr unterschätzt, leider. Wie auch immer, wo er fast täglich seinen Kollegen Joseph Roth auslösen musste, der mittags schon betrunken war."⁴⁴⁹ While Roth would have heard Yiddish on a daily basis growing up and was conversant in the language,⁴⁵⁰ Morgenstern grew up speaking Yiddish at home. Both authors remained interested in the Eastern European Jewish culture throughout their literary careers.

Though himself not a Yiddish-speaker, author Jakob Wassermann's role in David's biography and the discussion it sparks between David and Alfred reflects the novel's larger project of reinstating a "red thread" of German-Jewish linguistic negotiation to the German literary canon. David in fact gives Wassermann credit for his relationship with Alfred's mother. Alfred, still unaware that David is his father, asks, "Wie habt ihr euch eigentlich kennengelernt?"⁴⁵¹ David responds, "Du wirst es nicht glauben, aber alles fing an mit Jakob Wassermann." Wassermann's own use of "Jewish dialect"⁴⁵² in

⁴⁴⁹ Bergmann 46

⁴⁵⁰ Sidney Rosenfeld. *Understanding Joseph Roth*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001. 6

⁴⁵¹ Bergmann 49

⁴⁵²

his early novel *Die Juden von Zirndorf* and the emphasis in present-day scholarship on Wassermann's own insistence that Jews in German-speaking areas use German, reflect the author's interest in the status of Jewish languages in German literature.⁴⁵³ David tells Alfred, who has heard of Wassermann but not of his *Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude*, "Also, es war so: Wassermann brachte in den Zwanzigerjahren ein politisches Buch heraus, 'Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude.' Und er wirbelte damit viel Staub auf. Es war eine Abrechnung, das Geständnis der Niederlage, über die Unmöglichkeit der jüdischen Assimilation."⁴⁵⁴ David explains that he and Alfred's mother were both drawn to a lecture by Wassermann following the book's release and that this is where they met.

This is not the only hint in the book that Alfred owes his existence to the prewar negotiation, often by literary means, of German-Jewish identity, as embodied by David. Alfred's mother, for example, attributes his adult existence as a German actor to David, who took him to the movies as a child and inspired him to found a theater troupe for the local synagogue, in which pieces such as "'Der Dibuk' wurden mehrmals gespielt."⁴⁵⁵ Following many references to authors and pieces of literature less directly related to Yiddish and its presence in German literary culture, Bergmann imagines the Yiddish-language smash hit that introduced German-speaking audiences of the 1920s to Yiddish modernist theater as a staple of postwar German Jewish life. What's more, he draws a direct connection between the play and Alfred's success as an actor, a connection

⁴⁵³ See: Eds. Schlomo Berger, et al. *Speaking Jewish – Jewish Speak. Multilingualism in Western Ashkenazic Culture*. Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 2003; See also Shulamit Volkov's claim, "So ärgerte sich Jakob Wassermann im [sic] Wien des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts nicht weniger über das jiddische Idiom seiner Glaubensbrüder und –schwestern, als es Moses Mendelssohn hundertfünfzig vorher in Berlin getan hatte." (118) in her book *Antisemitismus als kultureller Code: Zehn Essays*. Munich: Beck, 2000 (2nd ed.)

⁴⁵⁴ Bergmann 50

⁴⁵⁵ Bergmann 275

seemingly made possible by David's position as intermediary between the German and Yiddish-language cultural spheres. Most blatantly, of course, Alfred's cultural inheritance from David, representing German culture's often unacknowledged inheritance from its Yiddish-inflected element, is symbolized through the revelation of Alfred's true paternity at the end of the novel.

If it weren't for these sustained transtextual references, it might be easy to shrug off Bergmann's novel as simply a symptom of a relatively wide-spread attention in the 2000s to Yiddish in German as a linguistic phenomenon, evidenced by publications such as *Jiddisch im Berliner Jargon* (2005) and radio programs such as Deutsche Welle's *Dufte! - Jiddische Wörter im Deutschen* (2009).⁴⁵⁶ But Bergmann is not only invested in this recycled interest in Yiddish elements in German (it is a recent phenomenon in the post-*Wende* period, but dictionaries or guides to Gaunersprache, Rotwelch and Judendeutsch were not uncommon before WWII), but in staging a reorganization of the German canon in which these German-Jewish linguistic issues are called to the fore. If this attempt is successful, the cleft between German literary culture and the Yiddish language, which Davies, in writing about Biermann's translation of Katzenelson, perhaps prematurely announces sealed, and which Martin Walser takes to an extreme, can perhaps begin to be viewed as a more nuanced relationship.

⁴⁵⁶ This trend also includes *Kleines Lexikon deutscher Wörter jiddischer Herkunft* (2005) and, following Bergmann's book, *So sagt man halt bei uns: kleines jüdischdeutsches Wörterbuch* (2012)

Martin Walser's "biter hartz"

Despite the complexity of transtextual relationships within Martin Walser's (b. 1927) most recent publication, *Shmeckendike Blumen: Ein Denkmal/A dermonung für Sholem Yankev Abramovitsch* (2014), responses have thus far have focused on the novel as an apology for Walser's so-called *Paulskirchenrede* and the general "Fall Walser" this is used to represent.⁴⁵⁷ Of Walser's book, which can perhaps best be described as an extended review of Susanne Klingenstein's *Mendele der Buchhändler: Leben und Werk des Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh* (2014), Micha Brumlik writes in *Die Tageszeitung*, "Gewiss kann man diesen Text [...] so lesen, als stellte er eine Rücknahme der Paulskirchenrede dar."⁴⁵⁸ Similarly, the review in *Die Jüdische Allgemeine* describes Walser's book as an "Abbitte" for his speech in the Paulskirche.⁴⁵⁹ While Walser's book leaves little doubt that his most recent project was in many ways inspired by guilt, the book's structure and multileveled intertextuality (in Genette's strict sense) deserve at least as much attention as the author's emotional state or political intentions.

Shmeckendike Blumen, which Wuliger describes as "kein Roman, keine Novelle, sondern ein Essay," is made up of original commentary as well as lengthy quotes from

⁴⁵⁷ In 1998, upon receiving the *Friedenspreis*, Martin Walser gave a speech in Frankfurt's Paulskirche. The speech, in which Walser infamously referred to Auschwitz as a "Moralkeule," used against the Germans, set off a confrontation with Ignatz Bubis and national controversy. Since then, this incident is frequently used to stand in for more general suspicion of Walser's problematic nationalism or antisemitism. See, for example, Elke Schmitter's article "Der ewige Flakhelfer" in *Der Spiegel* (36:2005).

⁴⁵⁸ Susanne Klingenstein. *Mendele der Buchhändler: Leben und Werk des Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh. Eine Geschichte der jiddischen Literatur zwischen Berdichev und Odessa, 1835-1917*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014. Klingenstein is a lecturer in the Harvard-MIT Health Sciences and Technology Division; Micha Brumlik. "In unheilvoller Tradition der europäischen Judenfeindschaft." *Die Tageszeitung*. 7 October 2014. 13

⁴⁵⁹ Michael Wuliger. "Walsers späte Wende." *Jüdische Allgemeine*. 24 September 2014.

Klingenstein's recent scholarship on Abramovitsh and from Abramovitsh's own novels.⁴⁶⁰ Abramovitsh (1835-1917), better known by the name of his famous literary persona Mendele Moykher Sforim (Mendele the Book Peddler), is "acknowledged, almost universally, as the founder of modern artistic prose in Hebrew and Yiddish."⁴⁶¹ Abramovitsh identified strongly with the Haskala movement in his early career and his early publications include Hebrew-language scientific writing and literary criticism. In 1862, however, Abramovitsh began publishing in Yiddish, though under an assumed identity. Later, when the writer Sholem Aleichem (Shalom Rabinovitz; 1859-1916), who is credited with establishing the illusion of a "great tradition" in Yiddish fiction, would famously refer to Abramovitsh as the "grandfather" of this tradition.⁴⁶²

Having reached the final chapter, this dissertation will have demonstrated that Yiddish literature, if misrepresented or misunderstood, certainly had its place in the postwar German consciousness. But for Walser it was only through his relationship with Klingenstein, to whom his book is dedicated (as hers is to him), that he truly became aware that such a thing existed. In the opening of his book, Walser writes, "Ich hatte kaum eine Ahnung, dass es jiddische Literatur gegeben hat. Ja, Sholem Aleichems Tewje der Milchmann, Chagall-Welt literarisch."⁴⁶³ Walser then asks, "Wie kam Abramovitsh überhaupt dazu, Jiddisch zu schreiben?" Thus Walser, who readily admits he knew nothing of Yiddish literature before embarking on this project and whose book suggests

⁴⁶⁰ Wuliger

⁴⁶¹ Dan Miron. "Abramovitsh, Sholem Yankev." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. 2010. Accessed 7 December 2014
<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Abramovitsh_Sholem_Yankev>

⁴⁶² Miron *A Traveler Disguised*

⁴⁶³ Walser 10

he consulted no text other than Klingenstein's, sets himself up to explain to his German contemporaries the language politics at work among the Eastern European Jewish intelligentsia of the late 19th century. What follows is a document, constructed of three separate texts, that announces itself as the physical memorial (*Denkmal*) to one of the largest figures in Yiddish literature. In his focus on the very fact that Abramovitsh wrote in Yiddish, Walser seems to imagine himself as constructing a memorial to the language itself. Like most memorial structures,⁴⁶⁴ however, Walser's text has much more to tell us about memory culture at the time of production than about the object commemorated. In this sense Walser's text imagines a return of Yiddish literary culture to Germany not in the spirit of revival or historical revisionism, but exclusively as an object of memory and symbol of guilt.

In his article "Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation," cited in the introduction to this chapter, Lawrence Venuti writes of intertextual networks, "The reader must possess not only the literary or cultural knowledge to recognize the presence of one text in another, but also the critical competence to formulate the significance of the intertextual relation."⁴⁶⁵ This is important, Venuti continues, "both for the text in which it appears and for the tradition in which that text assumes a place when the intertextuality is recognized."⁴⁶⁶ As a site of intertextuality, Walser's text, in its ostensible

⁴⁶⁴ See, for example, James E. Young's *The Texture of Memory* (1993), in which the author notes that memorials are shaped by "the political needs and interests of their community." Also note the emphasis on visitor experience in articles such as Susan A. Sci's "(Re)thinking the Memorial as a Place of Aesthetic Negotiation" in *Culture, Theory and Critique* 50:1 (1999), in which Sci writes, "Together, memorials' symbolic meaning and the aesthetic experience they inspire present individuals with embodied arguments regarding civic duty and responsibility that guide not only what to think, but more importantly, how to think about the people and events they commemorate."

⁴⁶⁵ Venuti 157-158

⁴⁶⁶ Venuti 158

transparency, is more complicated than it seems at first glance. Though all of Walser's quotations are not only clearly marked and cited, but also followed by Walser's own commentary, it is not entirely clear in which tradition Walser's text places itself. Walser seems to suggest two options. First of all, Walser draws a relationship between his work and classic Yiddish literature by announcing the former as a memorial to the latter. Later, Walser expands on this relationship by positioning himself as an heir to early 20th-century German interest in Yiddish. Here, he is able to connect his interest in Kafka, which he contrasts to an interest in Abramovitsh early in the book,⁴⁶⁷ to his interest in Abramovitsh. The literary tradition with which Walser is most directly in contact, though he implicitly denies its existence, is precisely the tradition portrayed by this dissertation. It is difficult to get very far in imagining what light *Shmekendike Blumen* might shed on the writing of Martin Buber, Alfred Döblin and Franz Kafka, as Walser's book reflects on prewar interest in Yiddish as a sign that "es hätte auch anders enden können."⁴⁶⁸ Similarly, it is difficult to speak of Walser being in dialog with Abramovitsh, since their conversation is mediated entirely through Klingenstein.

In the middle of Walser's meandering discussion of Abramovitsh's novel *Fishke der krumer* (1869) (*Fishke the Lame*), Walser interjects, "Jetzt muss ich aber eine oft wiederkehrende Mendele-Formel gebrachen: Davon wollte ich nicht erzählen."⁴⁶⁹ Though he intended to tell his readership about a particular event within the novel, he

⁴⁶⁷ Walser does this by suggesting that he had not developed an earlier interest in Abramovitsh, or in Yiddish literature more generally, *because* he was interested in Kafka. ("Kafka war mir näher.")

⁴⁶⁸ Walser 100

⁴⁶⁹ As mentioned previously, this formulation also appears in Hilsenrath's *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*, supporting the fact more general familiarity with the contours of Yiddish literature was available to German writers before Walser's discovery.

adds, “Und trotzdem muss noch erwähnt sein eine Klingenstein’sche Fußnote zum *Fishke*-Text: ‘Digitalisiert von der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek’, mit dem dazugehörenden Link.”⁴⁷⁰ At almost every turn, Walser’s *Denkmal* for Abramovitsh is shaped almost entirely through Klingenstein’s presentation of his texts. In this instance, he is particularly excited by Klingenstein’s paratextual comment because it indicates for him that, “ein Abramovitsh-Werk, eine seltene Erstausgabe in einer deutschen Bibliothek liegt und allen Lesern global zugänglich gemacht wurde.”⁴⁷¹ This is yet another point in the book in which Walser makes clear his utter shock that, prior to his and Klingenstein’s own publications, Yiddish literature had a presence in Germany. What this excerpt also demonstrates, however, is Walser’s deeper interest in his position as a postwar German relative to Yiddish literature than in the literature itself.

Even in places in which Walser makes a claim about Abramovitsh or his literature that deviates from those presented in the Klingenstein text, these claims are just as much about defining his own position as a non-Jewish German reader (in contrast to the presumably Jewish Klingenstein) as they are about the Abramovitsh texts (in transliteration, of course). Discussing one of Klingenstein’s chapters on Abramovitsh himself, Walser writes that Klingenstein “bezweifelt in diesem Kapitel, dass Abramovitsh seinerseits zu ‘echter Bescheidenheit fähig wäre.’”⁴⁷² He then adds, “Solche Sätze erinnern mich krass an meine Außenposition.”⁴⁷³ Walser’s position as an outsider, he suggests, comes not from his lack of knowledge, but from his status as a non-Jewish

⁴⁷⁰ Walser 24

⁴⁷¹ Ibid

⁴⁷² Walser 20

⁴⁷³ Ibid

German. Positioning Klingenstein as a Jewish heir (implied by his use of Yiddish) to the Yiddish literary tradition, Walser writes, “Sie schreibt über Abramovitsh wie eine Enkelin über den *zeyde*. Voller Lieber, aber immer auch mit dem von anderen Erfahrungen erzogenen Blick ihrer Generation.”⁴⁷⁴ When Walser writes of “Susanne Klingensteins [...] keine Nähe scheuen müssende Lebens- und Wesensgeschichte Abramovitsh,” the implication that Walser’s position as German Gentile forbids him from speaking entirely openly about the subject of his own book seems clear. This, perhaps, explains why the book is largely constructed from citations.

Later in his text, however, Walser suggests that his *Außenposition*, though this time defined slightly differently, allows him to read Abramovitsh with a particular clarity. Walser cites Klingenstein as arguing that a certain letter written by Abramovitsh in 1864 reflects his tendency at that time to portray traditional Jewish learning in feminizing terms, while describing maskilic activity in masculinizing terms.⁴⁷⁵ Walser then writes excitedly, “Endlich wieder eine Stelle, die mich anders denken lässt als die Enkelin!”⁴⁷⁶ Walser then remarks, in contrast to “[w]issenschaftlich Gesonnene,” who may need to delve deeply into Abramovitsh’s complex relationship “zum ‘Volk,’” he finds himself in a privileged position.⁴⁷⁷ Instead of relying on any sort of sociohistorical information, Walser is able to base his impressions entirely on “[das], was in den Romanen

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid

⁴⁷⁵ Walser 45

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷⁷ Walser 46 – Here, Walser is referring to tensions that existed, or were perceived to exist, between a maskilic position that aimed to improve the masses and a more socially conscious approach that celebrated the folk for what it was. Scholars who work on Abramovitsh, such as Dan Miron, describe on the changing status of this folk in Abramovitsh’s writings (personal and published) throughout his lifetime, often as affected by and reflected in the language of texts.

vorkommt.”⁴⁷⁸ Even here, however, Abramovitsh’s language overshadows for Walser any detailed textual evidence from the aforementioned novels. “Am meisten,” Walser states, “sagt natürlich das Verhältnis des Autors zum Jiddischen.”⁴⁷⁹ Walser distances himself from Klingenstein both because she is an academic reader and because she bears some familial relationship to the author, presumably an ethno-religious one. And since Walser’s emotional relationship to Yiddish is determined entirely by the Holocaust, and this emotional relationship alone seems to be guiding his reading of Abramovitsh, Walser seems to be assigning special value to his position as a post-Holocaust German reader of Yiddish texts.

The take-away message from the Abramovitsh and Klingenstein texts for Walser, and the message with which he hopes to leave his reader, is this: “Wenn man Abramovitsh liest, erlebt man erst, wie Juden fühlten, träumten, beteten, wie sie waren. Dann wird es immer unbegreiflicher, dass Menschen abgerichtet werden können, so etwas zu tun.”⁴⁸⁰ He takes the tendency to read Yiddish fiction ethnographically to the extreme. Recognizing, however, that something is lost in translation, Walser recommends German readers try to go through the transliterations. “Mein Empfehlen: so langsam lesen wie noch nie. Den Wörtern die Chance geben, in uns Echos zu wecken.”⁴⁸¹ But echoes of what? For Walser, Yiddish seems largely to exist in a vacuum. Though his

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid - Of course something of Abramovitsh’s relationship to the Eastern European Jewish masses is reflected in authors use of the derided folk language, but Abramovitsh’s political beliefs were far from static even during which he wrote his most famous Yiddish novels. See, for example, Dan Miron’s *The Traveler Disguised*, in which the author traces Abramovitsh’s relationship to “the Jew” or “the little Jew” as an entity contrasted to the enlightened writer or reader.

⁴⁸⁰ Walser 101

⁴⁸¹ Walser 80

text is, by Genette's definition, the most clearly intertextual work discussed here, it thoroughly fails to find resonance with either of the traditions it makes any claim to come in contact with. Perhaps more bizarrely, it seems to deny relation to the, at the time of publication, 69-year history of Yiddish in the postwar German cultural sphere.

In both Walser's text and Biermann's repackaging of Katzenelson's poem, discussed in the opening of this chapter, there is the suggestion that a primary function of Yiddish literature in the post-*Wende* period is to make palpable the magnitude of the German crimes perpetrated against the Jews during the Second World War. Walser ends *Shmekendike Blunen* with the lines, "Es vilt mit oysgishn do mayn harts, mayn biter harts. Das Ausmaß unserer Schuld ist schwer vorstellbar."⁴⁸² Yiddish, it seems, is a means not only of inducing the proper emotional response to the Holocaust, but also of expressing it. Unlike Walser's work, however, Biermann's translation and re-publication imagines and constructs a distinctly post-Wall intertextual network in which Katzenelson's work might be placed in the post-*Wende* German imaginary. Though Biermann's text, the work of Hackesches Hoftheater and, to a lesser extent, *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* and *Die Teilacher*, engage in a certain amount of re-framing and recontextualizing of Yiddish texts at the expense of a fuller understanding of Yiddish literary history, all of these works reestablish Yiddish, for better or worse, as part of a German tradition. The Yiddish written word is recontextualized not only by the change linguistic setting, the temporal and political chasm that has all but destroyed the Yiddish-speaking communities, but also by the fall of the Wall and the attempts to rearrange Germanic literary legacy to fulfill new cultural expectations that this engendered.

⁴⁸² Walser 101

Concluding Remarks

This dissertation is, for the most part, organized chronologically. The decision to end with a text by Martin Walser was largely determined, therefore, by the book's 2014 publication date. But the contrast between Walser's belief that he has rediscovered Yiddish literature for post-Holocaust German audiences and all the evidence in this dissertation to the contrary highlights a trend in the literary historical narrative presented here. Walser's complete lack of awareness of Yiddish in postwar German literature and theater and the republication of Yiddish literature in German translation beginning in the 1950s is coupled with a simplistic and self-serving desire to ossify Yiddish literature into a site of Holocaust commemoration and mourning. Nowhere in this work do we see traces of the much more nuanced attempts to renegotiate the place of Yiddish in German letters that came before Walser's essay. Working against an interest in and awareness of Jewish cultural history in Germany is the increasing lack of contact with the lost worlds reflected in Nelly Sachs' writing and described by, for example, Johannes Bobrowski, Edgar Hilsenrath and even Michel Bergmann, in which the German and Yiddish-language cultural spheres overlapped and German interest in this culture was not steered by memory politics alone.

Moving forward with this project will likely not involve, or at least not center around, the continued study of contemporary German culture. Instead, it will be much more fruitful to expand the chapters on the immediate postwar and Cold War eras, during which artists and audiences alike retained an awareness not only of Yiddish language and culture, but of early

20th century German literary culture, a culture in which, as evidenced by Martin Buber, Franz Kafka, Max Brod, Arnold Zweig and Alfred Döblin, an interest in the relationship between Yiddish and German was much more widespread. Further research on this time period will allow, for example, for the analysis of Yiddish on the radio and on film screens in postwar Germany, neither of which has received any scholarly attention. The scholarship most closely related to this project tends to look either at Yiddish in Weimar-era German culture or at the “rebirth” of the German-Jewish culture⁴⁸³ following the fall of the Berlin Wall. By focusing on the interim in this dissertation and strengthening this focus as this project develops into a book, I hope to make a unique contribution to scholarship by helping to illuminate the role of Yiddish in a more broadly defined German culture.

⁴⁸³ See: Jack Zipes. “The Contemporary Fascination for Things Jewish: Toward a Minor Jewish Culture.” *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany. Life and Literature Since 1989*. Eds. Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler. New York: New York University Press, 1994. Here, Zipes writes that he is interested in contemporary German Jews “defining themselves in a way that they had not done in the immediate postwar years.” See also: Eds. Hillary Hope Herzog, Todd Herzog and Benjamin Lapp. *Rebirth of a Culture: Jewish Identity and Jewish Writing in Germany and Austria Today*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2008. In her introduction, Dagmar Lorez makes clear the volumes interest in “specifically Jewish points of view and textual strategies.”

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