

“Distant Relatives Happening onto the Same Inn”: The Meeting of East and West as Literary Theme and Cultural Ideal

David N. Myers

In surveying the landscape of nineteenth-century European Jewish culture, the historian Meyer Waxman once observed that the literary journal served as “the seminary in which the early (Hebrew) writers, poets, and scholars . . . were nourished, trained, and prepared for their future activity.”¹ A similar theme was sounded by the prolific Hebrew author and activist, Reuven Brainin, around the turn of the century. In the opening editorial statement for his new journal, *Mi-mizrah u-mi-maarav* (From East and West), Brainin declared that Hebrew literature “fills for us the role of councils, assemblies, educational institutions, legislatures, and courts.”²

Both Brainin and Waxman were acutely aware of the dearth of institutional support for modern Jewish, and especially Hebrew, culture in eastern Europe. While there was an extensive network of traditional yeshivot in Russia and Poland, there were no modern rabbinical seminaries along the lines of the *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar* in Breslau or the Berlin *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* until the last years of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Jewish attendance at Russian universities was severely restricted. One consequence was that for an important subset of eastern European Jewish intellectuals—*maskilim* and their intellectual descendants—a

distinct tradition of autodidacticism obtained throughout the nineteenth century.

Another consequence of this institutional gap in modern eastern European Jewish culture was the emergence of the journal as a surrogate home for Jewish intellectuals. The journal served simultaneously as a forum for scholarly inquiry, intellectual debate and ideological polemic, as well as an arbiter of literary taste and source of financial subvention. While the story of the journal in sustaining and reinvigorating Jewish culture in eastern Europe is important, it remains beyond the scope of the present discussion. A more limited purpose here is to identify a central *topos* in Jewish periodical literature of the early twentieth century which reflected growing and diverse demands to recast Jewish culture in national terms. This *topos*, embodied in the very title of Brainin's *Mi-mizrah u-mi-maarav*, affirmed the prospect of reconciling East and West—or more accurately, eastern European Jews and their culture, on one hand, and central and western European Jews and their culture, on the other. The theme of geographic and cultural reconciliation that surfaced in early-twentieth-century journals mirrored the desire to forge a holistic Jewish national culture.

The centrality of this theme underscores the extraterritorial condition of those intellectuals devoted to Jewish nationalism in the early twentieth century. Though they periodically basked in the liberating powers of exilic existence, they also sought a more enduring locus for the reconciliation of East and West than that offered by literary journals. One of the most interesting, though decidedly provisional, venues for this meeting was Germany, whose geographic location at the crossroads between the European East and West made it an obvious site for such a project. In fact, all of the journals discussed here that reflect the aspiration to reconcile East and West were published in Germany. As such, all belonged to a curious and evolving experiment in Jewish cultural formation that took place in Germany, especially during the Weimar period.

A second major task of this essay will be to examine this experiment, in which eastern European Jews met German Jews in the hope of finding a shared cultural language. To comprehend it fully, this meeting must be set against the backdrop of Jewish culture in late-Wilhelmine Germany. It has been frequently pointed out that many German Jews possessed a profound sense of difference from eastern European Jews, believing themselves to be of a higher cultural order.³ This sense belied the fact that German Jews were often but a generation removed from an eastern European *shtetl*. It also belied the fact that eastern European immigrants had come to constitute nearly twenty percent of Germany's

Jews by the end of the First World War.⁴ Nonetheless, the delicate collective psyche of the "native" German Jews at times demanded conscious denigration of the "primitive" *Ostjuden*.⁵

This long-standing tradition of denigration was periodically checked by a countervailing tendency to romanticize the eastern Other. Franz Kafka's well-known infatuation with a visiting Yiddish theater troupe in 1911 symbolized the quest of the assimilated, culturally German, Jew for a new source of Jewish authenticity. Earlier, Martin Buber's published editions of Hasidic stories received an extremely eager and widespread reception in Germany; his tales of the Baal Shem Tov and Nahman of Bratslav led to a newly positive evaluation of Hasidism fully consonant with the neo-Romanticist spirit of *fin-de-siècle* Germany.⁶

Even more significant than these idealizations of the traditional Jew was the actual encounter between German and eastern European Jews during the First World War. When German Jewish soldiers discovered large concentrations of coreligionists on the eastern front, abstract romanticizing gave way to concrete expressions of empathy and kinship. One young soldier by the name of Franz Rosenzweig wrote that upon encountering a group of Polish Jews outside of Warsaw, "I felt something that I rarely feel, pride in my race, in so much freshness and vivacity."⁷ The process of Jewish discovery which Rosenzweig and other German Jews underwent was not confined to the front. It continued after the war in Germany itself, where thousands of displaced eastern European Jews found refuge, including scores of distinguished authors, artists and scholars.

This phenomenon lent a distinctive quality to Jewish life in Weimar Germany (1918–1933). Unlike other centers of Jewish culture (for example, Palestine, Poland, the United States), Germany hosted a cultural exchange among diverse groups of Jews, *particularly among elites*, that was uncommonly reciprocal; deep-seated assumptions held by German and eastern European Jews regarding one another began to wither away.⁸ While the latter came west in search of physical refuge, political freedom and intellectual stimulation, a number of local Jewish intellectuals embarked on a cultural journey eastward, immersing themselves in the traditions and languages of the new arrivals.⁹ The point at which their paths crossed represented a unique space and moment—one regulated by a cultural code that was neither eastern nor western, native nor foreign.¹⁰ And to bring matters full circle, this point of convergence was marked by the appearance in Berlin of a number of literary journals that gave concrete expression to the mission of cultural reconciliation.

The main aims of this paper are thus inextricably entwined: the identification of an important thematic strain in the history of Jewish

periodicals helps illuminate the unique Jewish context of Weimar Germany and vice versa. Beyond these tasks, this essay makes a broader, though still tentative, attempt to rethink traditional notions of cultural influence and exchange as they have been applied to Jewish history.

I

One of the most intriguing—and perhaps apocryphal—events in the life history of young Gerhard (later Gershom) Scholem was the episode in which he received a registered letter from his father demanding that he vacate the family premises within one month. As Scholem relates in his memoirs, the night before receiving the letter in late January 1917, he had a bitter confrontation with his father. The source of the rift was two acts deemed both provocative and political within the Scholem household: first, young Gerhard's support for his brother when the latter was arrested for participating in an antiwar demonstration (in his military uniform); and second, Gerhard's ongoing commitment to the cause of Zionism.¹¹ In fact, the seeds of discontent had been planted well before this event. Several years earlier, Scholem had been expelled from high school for expressing his own opposition to the war, a stance unmistakably linked to his Zionism. As a high school student, Scholem did not merely become involved in Zionist activity; he joined a small group of young Zionists who deliberately eschewed the path of first-generation German Zionists. For this small circle, the older generation appeared slavishly beholden to the view that allegiance to Zionism and loyalty to the German nation necessarily coincided. But for Scholem and his colleagues, the war demonstrated that the interests of Zionism must supersede German national concerns.¹²

Underlying this position was a genuine antipathy for the paternalist and bourgeois mentality of the older German Zionists. The young radicals had no desire to perpetuate a philanthropic Zionism which "only" provided safe refuge to distant relatives from eastern Europe. They felt *themselves* to be in need of rehabilitation; consequently, they saw Zionism more as a curative for the perceived vacuity of German Jewish life than as a palliative for *Ostjuden*. According to Kurt Blumenfeld, the inspirational leader for this circle of young activists, Zionists in Germany should deliberately assume a posture of "distance" from German culture.¹³ In suggesting this stance, Blumenfeld struck at the very core of modern German Jewish identity—indeed, at the very prospect of a seamless fusion of *Deutschtum* and *Judentum*. The object of criticism was not merely German Zionism, but, more broadly, the abiding German Jewish faith

in social integration and assimilation that originated in the Enlightenment age.

Those who rejected this faith, such as Scholem and his friends, stepped beyond the boundaries demarcating their parents' comfortable world. They became, in their parents' eyes, apostates—albeit in an ironic sense. For they were undermining belief in the possibility of a new secular identity. In their own eyes, rejection of their parents' *Weltanschauung* marked a "revolt against self-deceit," to be consummated through a return to a fuller and more self-consciously Jewish world.¹⁴

For Gershom Scholem, such a world was to be found among the eastern European Jewish intellectuals and activists who had settled in Berlin. After leaving his parents' home, Scholem took up residence at a small boarding house in western Berlin run by a Jewish woman named Struck. Mrs. Struck's boarding house served as a place of lodging mainly for eastern European Jews residing in Berlin. Upon his arrival, Scholem was heralded by a fellow resident, the Russian Jew Zalman Rubashov (later Shazar), as a "martyr of Zionism." Despite the hyperbole of this claim, it is fair to say that Scholem's arrival at the Struck boarding house signalled his own course of "dissimilation," or retreat from the assimilationist aspirations of his elders.¹⁵

To young German Jews such as Scholem, eastern European Jews played an important part in the process of dissimilation. Though often reviled by the Germans' parents as uncouth and parochial, the eastern Europeans represented Jewish authenticity and vitality. They were also far more tangible and accessible than the exotic Hasidim romanticized by Martin Buber a decade earlier. Indeed, the war had not only brought German and eastern European Jews face to face; it had also introduced a more realistic understanding by German Jews of their eastern European *confreres*.

While this postwar contact has been noted by numerous scholars, it is less frequently observed that the revalorization of eastern European Jews—as genuine bearers of a vibrant Jewish culture, as distinct from Buber's ideal Hasidic type—preceded the outbreak of World War One. Already in 1913, a small group of German Jewish intellectuals, including some who would later become part of Gershom Scholem's circle of Zionist intimates in Berlin, had begun to identify with the cultural legacy of eastern European Jewry. The central figure in this prewar movement was Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann, a German Jew born to a middle-class family in the industrial city of Eschweiler. Throughout his youth, Kaufmann demonstrated a proclivity for both social activism and rebellion; he campaigned tirelessly, although fleetingly, for a variety of causes including socialism, school reform, vegetarianism and anti-alcoholism.

It was not until his university years in Leipzig from 1910–12, however, that Kaufmann turned his attention to specifically Jewish causes. His first involvement was with the local Zionist organization in Leipzig through which he began to develop a keen interest in eastern European Jews and their culture.¹⁶ This interest impelled Kaufmann to take a most unusual step for a German Jew: he began to study Yiddish. Kaufmann's inspiration in embarking on this path was Nathan Birnbaum, the enigmatic Austrian Jewish cultural activist whom he met in Leipzig. Birnbaum's fascinating life had taken him from prescient support for the Zionist idea to steadfast opposition to the movement, from religious apathy to orthodox observance, from indifference to Yiddish to passionate and intense devotion to it.¹⁷

Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann's encounter with Birnbaum in Leipzig confirmed the former's emerging sense that eastern European Jewish culture was a vital and underappreciated resource. Birnbaum also validated Kaufmann's growing disenchantment with Zionism, precisely because of its denigration of eastern European Jewish culture. Under Birnbaum's tutelage, Kaufmann set out to elucidate a new ideological position which he designated "*Alljudentum*" (Pan-Judaism). By 1913 Kaufmann had moved to Berlin where he and his brother, Julius, established a German-language journal devoted to the propagation of *Alljudentum*.

This new journal, *Die Freistatt* (literally, sanctuary or free space), embodied Kaufmann's expansive and eclectic view of Jewish culture. The opening programmatic statement of April 1913 declared that *Die Freistatt* would hold to no party line or strict doctrine, but rather would be an open and independent forum for the expression of Jewish viewpoints.¹⁸ In the course of its brief existence, *Die Freistatt* published authors representing a broad ideological spectrum: Zionists, autonomists, assimilationists, socialists, Yiddishists and Hebraists. And yet, Kaufmann's commitment to ideological openness did not preclude him from articulating his own biases. His article, "*Alljüdische Kritik*," in the second number of *Die Freistatt* initiated a series of essays which assailed the overlapping aims and intellectual corruption of assimilation and Zionism. Kaufmann took issue with Zionism for its obsessive concern with the "*Golusproblem*" (Exile problem), disputing the idea that there was an identifiable problem with diaspora existence.¹⁹ Moreover, he challenged the Zionist impulse to portray diaspora Jewry as a cultural monolith. Kaufmann's view of diaspora Jewry reflected a special appreciation for the diversity and dynamism of eastern European Jews, contrary to the stereotypical image of *Ostjuden* as "a band of *shnorrers* and have-nots."²⁰

Kaufmann's *Alljudentum* sought both to infuse new energy into western Jewry and to correct the perceived imbalance in Zionism's prescription for a healthy Jewish national culture. Accordingly, he did not cast eastern European Jewry in deprecatory or instrumental terms (for example, as a huge pool of potential Zionist immigrants), but rather as possessing a precious cultural legacy in its own right. This theme resounded throughout *Die Freistatt*, not only in Kaufmann's essays, but also in those of many fellow contributors. Those who marched under the banner of *Alljudentum* attempted to move beyond what they saw as the superficially opposed, though profoundly linked, phenomena of Zionism and assimilationism, to create a new sanctuary for Jewish life and thought in the West, as the journal's title suggested.²¹ Although the principal occupants of this space would be German Jews, its creation could only result from the narrowing of the cultural gap between the Jewish periphery and center, West and East.

Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann's efforts to establish a new cultural space achieved moderate success; by April 1914 sixty-seven people were listed as members of the *Freistatt* society on the journal's inside cover. Among them were notable Jewish figures from Germany, Austria, Galicia and Russia including Nathan Birnbaum, Sholem Asch, Ber Borochov, Max Brod, Martin Buber, Simon Dubnow, Nahum Goldmann, Shai Ish Hurwitz, Jacob Klatzkin, Else Lasker-Schüler, Jacob Lestschinsky, Ignatz Schipper, Max Weinreich and Arnold Zweig. Kaufmann's success in recruiting members and contributors to *Die Freistatt* came to a rather abrupt halt on the eve of the First World War, when the journal ceased publication. But his intense commitment to the study of eastern European Jewish culture and language continued unabated for nearly seven years, focusing particularly on the collection and transcription of Yiddish folk songs.²² In 1921, Kaufmann's cultural odyssey from West to East concluded suddenly when he ended his own life at the age of thirty-three.²³

Despite his tragic end, Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann left an interesting legacy. He was surely not the first to advocate the fusion of East and West as the basis of a cultural rejuvenation for the Jewish people. As noted earlier, the ambition of reconciling East and West surfaced frequently in Jewish periodical literature in *fin-de-siècle* and early-twentieth-century Europe, animating a number of different strains of Jewish nationalist expression. F. M. Kaufmann nonetheless deserves a special place in the genealogy of Jewish mediators between East and West. His program of *Alljudentum*, for all its professed nonpartisanship, imparted a measure of ideological and conceptual coherence that previous efforts, such as the Berlin journal *Ost und West*, lacked. *Ost und West* did

provide a forum for Jewish writers, artists and ideologues from East and West at the turn of the century. But its editors did not make explicit what Kaufmann later demanded of his fellow German Jews: that they immerse themselves in the culture and language of *Ostjudentum* in order to enrich their own Jewish existence.²⁴ Kaufmann's personal example of immersion served as a direct inspiration for a small group of young German Jews who began to study Yiddish and Hebrew, and their respective literatures, as part of a program of Jewish self-discovery and renewal. If not all of Kaufmann's disciples accepted his trenchant criticism of Zionism, they did share his ambition to enter a new and compelling cultural world, one that an older generation of German Jews regarded with disdain and scorn.

In assessing the role of *Die Freistatt*, Steven Aschheim has observed that it never occupied more than a fringe position in the cultural constellation of German Jewry. Nonetheless, "it raised new possibilities, sharpened the debate, and made Zionists sensitive to questions they had previously dismissed."²⁵ Indeed, Kaufmann's literary polemics in *Die Freistatt* served to stimulate and provoke precisely at a moment when the German Zionist movement was undergoing an important transformation. The younger and more radical forces led by Kurt Blumenfeld had begun to shift the movement's orientation from philanthropy to self-help. At the German Zionist congress of 1914, for example, Blumenfeld succeeded in gaining majority approval for the proposition that the Jews of Germany were "rootless" (*wurzellos*).²⁶ Blumenfeld's diagnosis of rootlessness paradoxically coincided with that of the anti-Zionist Kaufmann.²⁷ Both the new Zionism and the doctrine of *Alljudentum* sought to overcome what they saw as the emptiness of German Jewish life. Moreover, both ideologies provided their young adherents with a sense of cultural direction after leaving the world of their parents.

II

The eastward gaze of young disciples of F. M. Kaufmann or Kurt Blumenfeld became more concentrated as they directly encountered *Ostjuden* during the First World War. Numerous commentators have described the place of the war in the history of relations between East and West, and therefore the subject need not be reprised here.²⁸ Our focus will be on the unusual cultural context born of the last years of the war and the beginning of the Weimar regime. Far from the grueling conditions of the front, German Jews had the opportunity to meet up with large numbers of eastern European Jews who fled their war-ravaged

homes for the west. Though lacking the intensity of the front, this encounter was extraordinary in its own right. More accurately, it was extraordinary for a small percentage of German Jews, among them returning soldiers touched by their experiences in the East, radical Zionists and followers of Kaufmann. For these Jews, the cultural passage to the East did not require geographic displacement. It could be, and was, undertaken in their own home towns.

Gershom Scholem, for instance, who successfully eluded army service, began his eastward journey by moving to the Pension Struck in west Berlin. There, he fell under the sway of the charismatic Zalman Rubashov, a central figure among eastern Europeans and dissimulating German Jews in Berlin. According to Scholem, Rubashov's vast erudition in Jewish matters and his linguistic and oratorical brilliance "made an overwhelming impression in Germany."²⁹ Rubashov was an important influence on Scholem and other German Jews, including the members of a secret club he formed in 1917 within the German Zionist movement that included Martin Buber, Victor Jacobson, Leo Herrmann, Max Meyer and Ludwig Strauss (one of Kaufmann's main disciples).³⁰ As with Scholem, Rubashov encouraged them to intensify their study of Hebrew, Yiddish, and Jewish history in order to deepen their connection to the national culture of the Jewish people.

The centripetal turn of these German Jews represented a conscious defiance of their parents' cultural world. Similarly, the eastern Europeans whom they met in Berlin were also detached, at least physically, from their homes. Both sets of partners in this exchange manifested a strong sense of alienation from their home cultures. Alienation, that paradigmatically modern sensibility, bred both iconoclasm and a willingness to experiment, to observe and absorb the Other's cultural traditions. The result was a mutual fascination, nowhere better exemplified than in Gershom Scholem's interaction with the Hebrew writer S. Y. Agnon. As Scholem recalls:

I found in him a new and altogether original incarnation of the Jewish spirit and of Jewish tradition . . . and what attracted him to me was my passionate devotion to the sources and the seriousness with which I had studied Hebrew.³¹

The spirit of reciprocity, of mutual interest, reflected in this statement was not always present in the evolving relationship between eastern European and German Jews. Previously, eastern European Jews had come to Germany in search of advanced academic training; at various points prior to the war, German Jews had expressed admiration for the

culture of eastern European Jews. But rarely had the two groups discarded altogether their ossified stereotypes of each other. For a fleeting period around the turn of the century, Jewish intellectuals from East and West, animated by a shared Zionist commitment, had gathered in the cafés of Berlin to debate their ideological differences.³² The interaction in Berlin in 1917, however, was of a different kind. It did not simply yield passionate debate; it pushed in the direction of a new cultural language and identity that belonged neither to the East nor to the West.

In thinking about this encounter and, more generally, about the formation of Jewish cultural identity in the diaspora, it is helpful to recall some theoretical insights drawn from the field of cultural studies. Taking Edward Said's influential *Orientalism* as a point of departure, scholars and cultural commentators have begun to challenge a number of entrenched assumptions regarding the relationship between seemingly discrete cultural entities. In particular, they have contested the mutually reinforcing ideas that cultures represent monolithic or pure "essences," and that such cultures exert hegemonic and unidirectional influences upon other cultures. Said himself has recently summarized this set of challenges by asserting that all culture "is hybrid . . . and encumbered, or entangled and overlapping with what used to be regarded as extraneous elements."³³

This concept of a dynamic hybridity calls into question the whole notion of cultural influence. For in dissolving the boundaries of cultural essences, it also erodes the once-sacred distinction between internal and external forces, or native and foreign cultures. The effect of this anti-essentialist impulse has been especially pronounced in postcolonial discourse where the native-foreign antinomy has yielded to a more textured view of cultural mediation and negotiation. Scholars studying Africa and India, two major venues of European colonization, have noted that the language and cultural norms of European colonizers were almost never absorbed unchanged, but rather were subtly and ceaselessly appropriated and transformed. For instance, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah insists that European languages served as "double agents" whose initial function as a tool of colonial domination was complicated and redefined by African intellectuals under colonial rule.³⁴

The process of re-inscribing language and cultural norms seems to be of particular relevance to the case of diaspora groups. It is indeed no surprise that one of the most fruitful lines of inquiry to emerge from postcolonial discourse has been diaspora and transnational studies. As one participant in this new subfield elaborates, the diaspora experience

is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.³⁵

The author of this statement, Stuart Hall, applied his model of fluid diasporism to the juncture of African, European and American currents that forged an Afro-Caribbean cultural identity. Others have found this model useful in analyzing Indian, Iranian and Chicano cultures in transnational contexts. Strangely, very little attention has been devoted to Jews, for whom the idea of diaspora is at the foundation of their historical experience and consciousness.³⁶ In part, this neglect results from a certain reticence by Jewish scholars to propel their object of study into a wider arena of discourse (for example, transnational studies). In the main, however, this neglect seems to be a function of two interrelated political considerations which have surfaced in post-colonial thought: first, pervasive criticism of Zionism as a Western colonial experiment, often attended by the equation, perhaps unconscious, of Zionists and Jews; and second, the identification of Jews as white Europeans, and hence partners in the exploitive work of Western imperialism.³⁷

Without resorting to the lugubrious game of victimology, it must be noted that Jews, even in Europe, underwent experiences, and availed themselves of strategies, similar to those of colonized peoples outside of Europe. That is, they not only confronted discrimination, persecution and forced assimilation; they also became immersed in European languages and cultural practices, all the while infusing them with their own inflections and customs.³⁸ The result in modern Germany was not the disappearance of Jews, but the creation of an identifiable Jewish "subculture," at once distinct from and part of the broader German society.³⁹ The aim here is not to offer an apologia on behalf of the German-Jewish symbiosis nor, for that matter, on behalf of diasporism. Rather, it is to assert that the Jewish condition in modern central and western Europe has been one of radical hybridity, at least from the time of the Enlightenment. Jews did not always embrace this condition willingly. Frequently, they tried to escape it through the assertion of a pristine identity—the content of which ranged from an unadulterated Germanness to an unmediated Jewishness (for example, Orthodoxy or *Alljudentum*).⁴⁰ Yet even these attempts at flight often devolved back to a radically hybrid position.

The case of the dissimilating German Jewish intellectuals in the waning days of the *Kaiserreich* serves to illustrate this point. When

Gershom Scholem, Ludwig Strauss, Max Meyer and their friends met eastern European Jewish transplants in Berlin, they were consciously turning their backs on the hyphenated identity of their parents. Despite this attempt to overcome their bifurcated identities, they proved incapable of avoiding the condition of hybridity. Inevitably, they integrated dimensions of their previous existence into their new cultural identity. In fact, the formula for their cultural re-formation—fusing the critical, rationalist and scientific ethos of the West with the folk-national pathos of the East—was decades old, having undergirded almost all expressions of Jewish cultural nationalism since the late nineteenth century. It was this formula that guided Gershom Scholem's first forays into Jewish mysticism—intellectual adventures which demonstrated a deep appreciation for the spiritual force of mysticism and simultaneously bore the unmistakable imprint of German *Wissenschaft*. It was also this formula which led to the unique poetic creations—powerfully Jewish in theme and purely German in language—of Ludwig Strauss and Else Lasker-Schüler, who, like Scholem, immigrated to Palestine.⁴¹ While their ultimate sights may have been set on the land of Israel, they first sought a fusion of cultural horizons in Berlin.

III

The allure of Berlin as the cultural capital of Germany held sway for generations of Jews. In seeking to explain this phenomenon, Peter Gay once observed that "Berlin was the city where mobile men came to rest."⁴² With their long tradition of peripatetic travels and ardent desire for social advancement, Jews surely satisfied Gay's criterion of mobility. But if Berlin provided rest for Jews, it was only temporary. Jews came to Berlin to transform themselves. This was especially so in the Weimar period, an age of "overflowing plenty of stimuli, of artistic, scientific, commercial improvisations."⁴³ Jewish improvisation knew many forms: some Jews came to lose their Jewishness through conversion; others came to deepen their knowledge of Judaism through intensive and advanced study. Among many other roles, Berlin was both the home of Jewish assimilation and the center of a vibrant German Jewish subculture.⁴⁴

The city's allure extended beyond the borders of Germany. As far back as the late eighteenth century, Berlin had been a source of attraction for eastern European Jews, a fact to which the notable cases of Solomon Maimon and Baruch of Shklov attest. While many eastern European Jews came west in search of economic opportunity or en route to the New World, others came specifically in search of intellectual

enrichment—especially Russian Jewish students whose attendance at Russian universities was severely restricted from the year 1887. Through the influence of these students and fellow Jewish émigrés, Berlin became in the first decade of this century a minor center of Hebrew letters.⁴⁵ Not coincidentally, the period in which this center emerged was also one in which the number of eastern European Jews in Germany rose steeply: from 20,000 in 1890 to 70,000 in 1910.⁴⁶

These developments, though, were but a prelude to a later period. Initially, the outbreak of the First World War led to new restrictions on the presence of foreign nationals (Russian Jews, for example) in Germany. Shortly thereafter, the demand for cheap labor and the need to escape war-ravaged areas brought thousands of eastern European Jewish refugees into Germany.⁴⁷ The migratory stream increased following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the widespread violence against Jews in Ukraine and Belorussia.⁴⁸ Among the new arrivals from the east were a substantial number of intellectuals and cultural activists including the writers Hayyim Nahman Bialik, David Frishman, Saul Tchernichowsky, Dovid Bergelson, and the scholars Simon Dubnow, Fishel Lachover and Jacob Lestschinsky.⁴⁹ In the first instance, these figures left eastern Europe to ensure their physical survival. But like the earlier waves of eastern European Jewish intellectuals who came to Germany, these artists and scholars were not merely pushed out of the east. They were simultaneously drawn to Germany with its reputation as a center of scholarly excellence and artistic creativity. The advent of the Weimar Republic in November 1918 created an especially interesting and seductive environment. The mix of profound despair after the Great War, on one hand, and hope arising from the democratic beginnings of the new regime, on the other, yielded a unique spirit of iconoclasm and innovation.⁵⁰ This spirit, in turn, fueled new opportunities for Jewish cultural activity.

Eastern European Jews in Berlin set about to establish a center of Yiddish and Hebrew culture with remarkable zest and industry. Some seventeen Yiddish journals dealing with *belles lettres*, historical research and politics appeared in Berlin during the 1920s.⁵¹ Hundreds of Yiddish books were published by newly established or transplanted publishing houses. Furthermore, important scholarly work was encouraged in Berlin by the existence of institutions such as the *Ostjüdische Historische Archiv* and, more significantly, YIVO (Yiddish Scientific Institute), which was actually launched in the city.

A similar resurgence of *Hebrew* literary activity occurred in the post-war period. Leading Hebrew authors, such as Bialik and Agnon, wrote important works while in Germany. These writers found a wealth of

published scholarly and literary sources available in bookstores and libraries. They also found opportunities for publication as new and relocated publishing houses surfaced. Among these were Horeb, Jalkut, Klal, Moriah, Omanut, Rimon, and perhaps most prominently, Devir, of which Bialik served as editor-in-chief.⁵²

In observing this cultural efflorescence, it must be noted that the phenomenon of émigré cultures grafted onto the landscape of Weimar Germany was hardly restricted to the case of eastern European Jews. In general, the cosmopolitan ambience of Berlin proved receptive to a wide range of novel, especially modernist, artistic and literary endeavors, and served as a worthy successor to *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.⁵³ A contributing factor was the city's openness to non-German intellectual, cultural and political innovators. Circles of émigré intellectuals from Russia, Hungary and other parts of eastern Europe settled in Germany after the war. Common to these intellectuals was a sense of disaffection from the political climate of their native countries. They were exiles, full of feelings of alienation and distance, and yet seeking to find community in their "collective estrangement."⁵⁴ Some, such as the émigré circle around the Russian intellectual Vladimir Stankevich, even sought their own modified version of a reconciliation of East and West.⁵⁵

In contrast to the non-Jewish émigrés (the Baltic Germans were an obvious exception), the community of Jewish émigrés in Berlin existed alongside a large group of native-born Jews. To be sure, not all German Jews received the eastern Europeans with open arms. Ludwig Geiger, son of the distinguished nineteenth-century scholar and religious reformer, declared in 1918 that "we should take pity on these uncultured masses, but we must admit that they are irretrievably distant from our whole outlook, our mode of comprehension."⁵⁶ More common, though, was a sense of sympathy and concern for the *Ostjuden*, as reflected in the extensive network of Jewish relief organizations and social services created on their behalf.⁵⁷ But it was not just benevolent paternalism that shaped German Jewish attitudes toward eastern European Jews. After all, not all German Jews were assimilated German citizens of the Jewish faith; some were also dissimilating Jews actively seeking to reconstitute a Jewish *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁵⁸

The shift in consciousness on the part of some German Jews was not lost on the eastern Europeans. Upon arriving in Berlin, Hayyim Nahman Bialik raised the prospect of a reconciliation between eastern European and German Jews:

Many of . . . the bearers of Hebrew culture [from the East] found their way to Berlin, the same Berlin which was the birthplace of *Haskalah* and

the seat of *Hokhmat Yisrael* [Jewish scholarship] in its western dress. At this great and decisive hour, relatives who had been separated by force happened onto the same inn. Is it conceivable that their meeting will be for naught?⁵⁹

Bialik wondered whether age-old antipathies and stereotypes might be on the verge of dissipation. The answer, while not unequivocal, was moderately promising. New cultural and literary activities that combined the labors of the two groups were underway. One of the most distinctive efforts in this regard was the bilingual journal, *Rimon-Milgroyim*, published in Berlin in Hebrew and Yiddish editions (six volumes from 1922 to 1924).⁶⁰

Described as a "magazine of arts and letters," *Rimon-Milgroyim* is one of the most visually striking examples of Jewish publishing in the modern age. Its high-quality paper and etched binding contain beautiful (occasionally color) reproductions of traditional Jewish art, as well as works from modern, largely Jewish, artists such as Marc Chagall, El Lissitzky, Nathan Altman and Issachar Ber Ryback. The editors of *Rimon-Milgroyim*—Mark Wischnitzer and Rachel Wischnitzer-Bernstein—sought to create a forum in which innovative perspectives on art, literature and scholarship would be presented, and in which Jewish intellectuals from East and West could exchange ideas, and perhaps develop a shared cultural sensibility.⁶¹ The editors, who were themselves of eastern European origin, succeeded in attracting an eclectic and distinguished roster of contributors. Among the eastern Europeans who wrote for *Rimon-Milgroyim* were S. Y. Agnon, Micha Yosef Berdyczewski, Dovid Bergelson, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Yehezkel Kaufmann, J. Opatoshu, and Saul Tchernichowsky. The Germans included the artist Hermann Struck and the historians Eugen Täubler, Franz Landsberger and Hugo Bieber.

Both the multimedia approach and the desire to embrace East and West recall readily identifiable strains in the history of Jewish periodical literature.⁶² Moreover, there was a two-pronged emphasis on art in *Rimon-Milgroyim* that closely paralleled that in *Ost und West*: to edify the Jewish public about current trends in painting and the plastic arts, and to cultivate a decidedly Jewish-national artistic heritage.⁶³ The obvious distinction between *Rimon-Milgroyim* and the earlier *Ost und West* was the choice of language. To a great extent, the replacement of German by Hebrew and Yiddish can be attributed to the new context of Weimar Berlin. With the influx of thousands of eastern European Jews, the city had surfaced as a center of Hebrew and Yiddish writing and publishing, even more vital than the brief flurry of Hebrew (and to a lesser extent, Yiddish) cultural activity in the first decade of the century. There was

•
"Distant Relatives Happen
onto the Same Inn"
The Meeting of East and West
as Literary Theme and
Cultural Ideal

now also a small, but significant, number of German Jews who shared the desire of kindred eastern European souls to forge a Jewish national culture in a Jewish language. Also new was the broader context of Weimar Berlin's "frantic creativity," a condition prompted by alternating waves of postwar despair and hopes for a better future.⁶⁴ Invariably, Jewish intellectuals were caught up in this cauldron of cultural activism. Eastern Europeans were introduced to avant-garde theater, to Expressionist Utopianism, to the *neue Sachlichkeit* with its call for a sober realism. Dissimilating German Jews, meanwhile, were drawn to the task of creating a new Jewish national culture.

At the crossroads of these cultural paths was *Rimon-Milgroym*. In the opening article of the Hebrew and Yiddish versions, Rachel Wischnitzer-Bernstein commenced the dual mission of providing edification to the culturally uninitiated and helping to shape the contours of a national Jewish culture. In her essay on "Modern Art and the Jews," she surveyed the history of Jewish art from the Middle Ages to the present, concluding with critical observations on the impact of Expressionism on the current generation of Jewish artists.⁶⁵ Animating her sweeping survey was the desire to discover an aesthetic and an artistic idiom that were unmistakably Jewish. Wischnitzer-Bernstein noticed encouraging signs in Jewish artists in her midst:

In the heart of the young artists of our generation, the feeling (of national solidarity) is alive and well. The feeling of connection to the past, to the Jewish past, has awakened within them. With the sweetness of sorrow, and with bitter and impetuous fortitude, they feel the shared present—that we are one people and one fate unites us all.⁶⁶

Not all articles were quite as explicit. Other authors operated on the implicit assumption that the very task of cultural edification served a national purpose. These contributors cut a wide swath through European cultural history, producing essays on subjects as varied as Leonardo da Vinci, Paul Cezanne, the novelist Arthur Schnitzler and the social theorist Georg Simmel. Still others discussed more distinctly Jewish personalities such as Leon Pinsker, David Frishman, Baal-Makhshoves and Bialik.⁶⁷ Together, these articles represented an attempt not only to break down cultural boundaries between eastern and western Jews, but also to explore the mutually fructifying relationship between the Jewish Orient and the non-Jewish Occident.

Inevitably, the question arises: who was the target audience? As with any Hebrew or Yiddish journal of the time, the obvious answer was the large pool of potential readers in eastern Europe. In the absence of an

actual subscription list, however, it is tantalizing to consider a smaller audience, of hundreds rather than thousands. Might *Milgroym* have been intended as an instrument of cultural edification for the Yiddish reading public residing in Berlin? The journal's attention to the most innovative artistic currents, as well as its frequent notices of gallery openings in Berlin, suggest at least in part a local audience. But even more interesting questions can be raised about *Rimon*. Its language of publication, Hebrew, was closely identified with a political and cultural ideology, Zionism, to which many—though not all—dissimilating German Jews subscribed. A considerable number of these German Jews had embarked upon the study of Hebrew as part of a more comprehensive plan to return to Jewishness through a "return" to Palestine. Given this inclination, might *Rimon* have provided a temporary meeting point in Berlin for a small but active group of Jewish intellectuals from East and West—of whom the former came west for refuge, while the latter came east, in a metaphorical sense, to find a more holistic Jewish identity? In the context of Weimar Berlin, *Rimon* seemed to offer the prospect for a more genuinely reciprocal cultural exchange between East and West than previous journals, or even than its companion *Milgroym*. In fact, it may well have represented the most tangible evidence of what Bialik identified in 1923 as "signs of (mutual) influence" between East and West in Berlin.

Unfortunately, Bialik did not provide a detailed elaboration of this mutual influence, nor did he specifically mention *Rimon*. Rather, his remarks appeared in another Hebrew journal, *Devir*, founded in Berlin in 1923. Like *Rimon*, this new journal (published by the Devir firm where Bialik worked as editor-in-chief) marked an interesting convergence of East and West. Its contributors including leading Jewish scholars from Germany and eastern Europe. More significantly, its editors were Jacob Nahum Epstein, the Polish-born scholar of the Mishna and Talmud, Harry Torczyner, the Galician researcher of the Bible and Hebrew language, and Ismar Elbogen, the German scholar of Jewish history and literature.

The joint labors of these men emanated from a shared desire to create a modern scholarly idiom in Hebrew. In light of this aim, the participation of Elbogen (1874–1953) is especially surprising. It would not have been unexpected for younger German intellectuals such as Gershom Scholem, Ludwig Strauss or Max Meyer to have been eager consumers of *Devir*. But Elbogen, at nearly fifty years of age, was a mainstay of early-twentieth-century German Jewish scholarship, and a professor at the liberal *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, whose faculty tended to oppose any form of Jewish nationalist expression.⁶⁸ His status

as a devoted practitioner of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and as a fixture at the Reform seminary in Germany would seem to have precluded involvement in a journal devoted to a revival of Jewish scholarship in Hebrew. What made his involvement even more incongruous was Bialik's letter to the editor in the opening number of *Devir*. Bialik, who originally proposed the idea of the journal, used this opportunity to excoriate western Jewish scholars—including, by implication, Elbogen—for having committed the cardinal "sin of language": abandoning "ivrit" for "loazit" (Hebrew for European tongues).⁶⁹ Elbogen's response in the second number of the journal was not anger, but rather contrition. His survey of the state of Jewish Studies concluded with a striking admission. No longer content to submit *Judentum* to a domineering *Deutschtum*, Elbogen declared:

Finally, the time has arrived for the national consciousness of the Jewish people . . . to begin to honor the national literature. . . . With this change . . . the question for Jewish Studies of using the Hebrew language becomes a question of survival. Only in it [Hebrew] can the proper expression for the development of each and every discipline and science be found; and only through its aid can a natural connection to living Judaism be found.⁷⁰

Elbogen was an exception to the rule among German Jewish scholars. Most did not share his belief in the vitality or necessity of Hebrew. Turning away from an earlier set of intellectual sensibilities, Elbogen, who had hitherto demonstrated few Jewish nationalist inclinations, sought to enter a new world, one shaped by cultural vectors from West and East. While Bialik expected that the primary benefit of *Devir* would be to introduce *wissenschaftliche* standards into Hebrew, Elbogen expected a different reward. He believed, along with his colleagues Epstein and Torczyner, that it was necessary to bring down the wall separating Jewish scholarship from vibrant Jewish life.⁷¹ Ultimately, this work of destruction, Elbogen intimated, would reach its most constructive potential not in Europe but in Palestine.⁷² Nonetheless, the sparks of vitality that first led him to rethink his role as a Jewish scholar were lit in Germany. In fact, it was the intense environment of Weimar Berlin, populated by Jewish scholars and intellectuals from the East, that induced Elbogen to celebrate the dynamic powers of Hebrew. The attraction of Jerusalem was never strong enough to draw him. Even in 1938, when Jewish life in Germany plunged to new depths, Elbogen rejected an offer from the Hebrew University; he chose instead to emigrate to the United States, where he received an appointment at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

IV

The example of Ismar Elbogen points to several extraordinary features of the Jewish cultural ambience in Weimar Berlin. First, the impulse to dissimilate, stimulated by the presence of Jewish cultural activists from the East, animated not only the young rebels against an "empty" German Jewish bourgeoisie. It also made inroads among older stalwarts of the German Jewish academic establishment such as Elbogen. Second, Elbogen's own "dissimilation" did not assume the form of a commitment to immigrate to Palestine. His recognition of the vitalizing powers of Hebrew derived from a Jewish nationalist ardor that was not identical to Zionism. In fact, Elbogen's case, and surely those of Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann and Nathan Birnbaum before it, hint at a wider spectrum of Jewish nationalist expression in early-twentieth-century central Europe than has previously been noted.⁷³ Third, Elbogen's infatuation with Hebrew as a living language was fleeting, as was his journal *Devir*, which lasted only two years. More broadly, the encounter between East and West in Berlin was brief. It resulted from a unique human blend created in the last years and immediate aftermath of the First World War. The fabric of this culture began to unravel by the mid-1920s, as those most devoted to a genuine reconciliation between East and West left Germany for Palestine in search of a more hospitable locus for their Jewish self-fashioning.

It is precisely the evanescent nature of this cultural moment that is of interest. For it calls attention to a range of Jewish cultural expressions that have yet to receive exhaustive scholarly scrutiny, partly because of their brevity and partly because of their esoteric and/or elitist quality. Future work must address the diversity, intensity and ephemerality of Jewish cultures in the Weimar period. Thus, it must not only take account of the many German Jews who believed that the Weimar regime represented the final stage in the process of Jewish emancipation. It must also focus on the spectrum of alienation and disaffection occupied by German Jewish intellectuals, as well as on the diverse forms of Jewish culture imported from eastern Europe.

The importing of cultural forms underscores and helps to explain the evanescent quality mentioned above. The moment that eastern European cultural traditions reached Germany, they were transformed by a constant process of mediation between East and West. The mediators were dozens of German Jews and scores of eastern European Jews whose meeting yielded not a deepening of their respective senses of marginality, but a shared culture, or, at least, a shared cultural possibility. The most intriguing property of this culture was its persistently

dialectical nature, its attempt to synthesize tradition and innovation, East and West, and to find a distinct idiom for cultural expression that was both modern and Jewish. Rather than one culture exerting a hegemonic influence over another, two discrete, though porous, cultures were melded into a new one which itself later generated its own sequelae.⁷⁴

The desire to meld East and West was a recurrent theme in Jewish cultural history of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Though fleetingly realized in Weimar Berlin, this cultural possibility usually occupied a literary rather than a geographic realm. Indeed, it was in journals such as *Ost und West*, *Die Freistatt*, *Rimon* and *Devir*—to name but a few—in which this possibility was raised and debated. In the absence of a stable territorial foundation, the Jewish literary journal truly served, to borrow an oft-quoted phrase, as a “portable homeland.” Recalling the role of earlier journals as a “seminaries” in which Hebrew writers and scholars were nurtured, the early-twentieth-century journal also became a home for European Jewish intellectuals. Our particular focus here has been on a number of such journals, and on one geographic locale which provided a home to Jewish intellectuals embarked on what was, in context, a most subversive project: the dislodging of fixed cultural identities in the hope of constructing a new national identity that was both dynamic and inclusive.

Notes

- 1 Waxman was specifically referring to the maskilic journal, *Bikurei ha-itim*, published in Vienna from 1821 to 1832. See *A History of Jewish Literature*, vol. 3 (New York, 1936), 158.
- 2 *Mi-mizrah u-mi-maarav* 1 (1894): 7.
- 3 See, for instance, Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison, 1982), 32–57.
- 4 In 1925, foreign Jews, the overwhelming majority of whom were eastern European, constituted 19.1% of Germany's Jews; in Berlin, they represented 25.4%. See the statistics in S. Adler-Rudel, *Ostjuden in Deutschland, 1880–1940* (Tübingen, 1959), 165.
- 5 Aschheim, 52–53.
- 6 See Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Fin de Siècle Orientalism, the *Ostjuden*, and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation,” in idem, *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Detroit, 1991), 77–109.
- 7 Rosenzweig's letter of 23 May 1918 is excerpted in Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York, 1961), 74.
- 8 This is not to suggest that other Jewish centers produced a mono-

- lithic and homogeneous Jewish culture; Warsaw, for instance, was home to a large and diverse body of Jews who formed a complex cultural “polysystem.” See Chone Shmeruk's discussion of this “polysystem” in “Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture,” in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman et al. (Hanover, 1989), 283–313.
- 9 In this respect, the encounter between East and West was different than in the United States. There the desire to create a native Hebrew culture under the rubric of “amerikaitut” did not succeed in attracting American-born Jewish intellectuals. Hence, the dynamic tension present in Germany between East and West was largely lacking in the United States. See the essays by Alan Mintz and Ezra Spicehandler in *Hebrew in America: Perspectives and Prospects*, ed. Alan Mintz (Detroit, 1993), 29–104.
- 10 An interesting figure who held a life-long aspiration to join East and West was the American Reform rabbi, Judah L. Magnes, who spent an important and formative period of his life in turn-of-the-century Berlin where he came into contact with eastern European Jewish culture. See David N. Myers, “In Search of the ‘Harmonious Jew’: Judah L. Magnes between East and West,” *1992 John S. Sills Memorial Lecture* (Berkeley, 1993).
- 11 See the expanded Hebrew version of Scholem's memoirs, *Mi-berlin li-erushalayim* (Tel Aviv, 1982), 88–89.
- 12 Scholem recalled his youthful skepticism regarding the equiva-

- lence of Zionist and German interests during the war in an interview with the Israeli writer Muki Tsur. See Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York, 1976), 11–12.
- 13 See Jehuda Reinharz, *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of the German Jew, 1893–1914* (Ann Arbor, 1975), 156.
- 14 Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, 2.
- 15 For the term “dissimilation,” see Shulamit Volkov, “The Dynamics of Dissimilation: *Ostjuden* and German Jews,” in *The Jewish Response to German Culture from the Enlightenment to the Second World War*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg (Hanover, 1985), 195–211.
- 16 See Ludwig Strauss' biographical introduction to Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1923), 7–19. A précis of Strauss' account can be found in Aschheim, 117. It should be noted that Leipzig, in 1910, was a city whose Jewish population was more than two-thirds eastern European. See Adler-Rudel, 164.
- 17 See, inter alia, Joshua A. Fishman, *Ideology, Society and Language: The Odyssey of Nathan Birnbaum* (Ann Arbor, 1987). On Birnbaum's break with Zionism, see Josef Fraenkel, *Mathias Achers Kampf um die “Zionskrone”* (Basel, 1959).
- 18 *Die Freistatt* 1/1 (April 1913): 3.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 1/2 (15 May 1913): 73–83. This essay and its continuation, “Alljüdische Kritik II,” in *ibid.*, 1/4 (15 July 1913), included a stinging response to Arthur Ruppin's presentation of diaspora

- Jewish life in his *Die Juden der Gegenwart*.
- 20 *Die Freistatt* 1/2 (15 May 1913): 76.
- 21 According to the opening statement, the journal aimed to induce "a radical revision and reconstitution of (western Jewry's) perception of the Jewish present." *Ibid.*, 1/1 (April 1913): 4.
- 22 See, for instance, Kaufmann's *Das jüdische Volkslied: Ein Merkblatt* (Berlin, 1919), and *Die schönsten Lieder der Ostjuden* (Berlin, 1920).
- 23 See Ludwig Strauss' introduction to Kaufmann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 17-18.
- 24 The mission of *Ost und West*, according to its opening statement, was more general: "to pave the way to a uniform (Jewish) community." See *Ost und West: Illustrierte Monatsschrift für Modernes Judentum* 1 (1901): 3. On the difference between *Ost und West* and *Die Freistatt*, see Aschheim, 117.
- 25 Aschheim, 120.
- 26 See the discussion in Ruth Louise Pierson, "German Jewish Identity in the Weimar Republic" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1970), 147. Despite a shared concern for the condition of German Jewry, Blumenfeld was somewhat bewildered by Kaufmann's infatuation with eastern European Jewry and Yiddish, and ultimately, by Kaufmann's departure from the Zionist fold. See Blumenfeld's recollections in his *Erlebte Judenfrage* (Stuttgart, 1962), 122-23.
- 27 This diagnosis also coincided with the persistent antisemitic claim that Jews were rootless cosmopolitans. The overlap between antisemitic and Jewish nationalist

- depictions of diaspora Jewish existence has been noted by a number of observers. See inter alia Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore, 1986), 298.
- 28 See the excellent discussion by Eva G. Reichmann, "Der Bewußtseinswandel der deutschen Juden," in *Deutsches Judentum in Krieg und Revolution, 1916-1923*, ed. Werner E. Mosse (Tübingen, 1971), 537-45. See also Aschheim, 151, who nonetheless adds the caveat that for many German Jewish soldiers, "the meeting did not lead to a reawakened pride in their Jewishness, but instead, reinforced the classic dilemma of Jewish conspicuousness."
- 29 Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem* (New York, 1980), 87.
- 30 Rubashov reports on this small group named "Tsvat" in a recollection of Ludwig Strauss in his *Orishim*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv, 1964), 212.
- 31 Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 93.
- 32 See Stanley Nash, *In Search of Hebraism: Shai Hurwitz and his Polemics in the Hebrew Press* (Leiden, 1980), 170-75.
- 33 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993), 317. A strong challenge to essentialist notions of culture or ethnicity has come from cultural anthropologists such as James Clifford, Michael Fischer and George Marcus. The highly reflexive practices of these scholars is also evident in a series of parallel scholarly discourses which focus on the cultural construction or "invention

- of identity. See, for instance, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983); and Werner Sollors, ed., *The Invention of Ethnicity* (Oxford, 1989).
- 34 The attribution of a subversive function to European languages in a colonial context informs Appiah's critique of "nativism" in his *My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford, 1992), 56.
- 35 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York, 1994), 401-402.
- 36 It is interesting to note the relative dearth of articles on the Jewish diaspora in the interdisciplinary journal *Diaspora* published by Oxford University Press. This dearth is especially ironic in light of the fact that the term "diaspora" was first applied to the dispersion of the Jews following the destruction of the First Temple. An interesting exception to this neglect is the sociologist Orlando Patterson, whose work has focused attention on the paradigmatic qualities of the Jewish diaspora experience. Patterson identifies the Jews as the classic example of a "symbiotic ethnic group," constantly mediating between its own interests and those of the host society, and serving as an economic and cultural intermediary between discrete societies. See his interesting book, *Ethnic Chauvinism: The Reactionary Impulse* (New York, 1977), 63-66. I owe thanks to Nomi Maya Stolzenberg

- for sharing this citation with me and, more generally, for her customary wisdom in reviewing a draft of the present essay.
- 37 The stature of Edward Said, eminent critic and passionate advocate of Palestinian nationalism, virtually assured the presence of Zionism on the agenda of postcolonial theorists. For a rather lachrymose attempt to sever Jews from the tradition of European imperialism, see Michael Lerner, "Jews are not White," *The Village Voice*, 18 May 1993, 33-34. This essay appears as part of a series of contributions on the "White Issue" in *The Village Voice*. Elsewhere, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman have recently proposed that the category of "whiteness," so often understood by postcolonial thinkers as an essentialist foil to the hybrid identities of people of color, be reevaluated. See their introduction to *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, 17.
- 38 Peter Gay notes that "Yiddish words, pronounced in impeccably German fashion . . . are wholly at home in the Berliner's vocabulary." See *The Berlin-Jewish Spirit: A Dogma in Search of Some Doubts*, Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture 15 (New York, 1972), 8. An inventory of loan words from Yiddish into Berlin German can be found in Walther Kiaulehn's revised edition of Hans Meyer, *Der richtiger Berliner* (Munich, 1965), 63-188.
- 39 See David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (New York, 1987), 5ff.
- 40 Stuart Hall notes that it is "not a fixed origin to which we can

- make some final and absolute Return." See Hall, 395.
- 41 While both published numerous books of poetry, Strauss and Lasker-Schüler also contributed poetry to *Die Freistatt*. See *Die Freistatt* 1/4 (15 June 1913): 116–20. For a recent evaluation of their respective merit as artists, see Lothar Kahn, *Between Two Worlds: A Cultural History of German-Jewish Writers* (Ames, 1993), 145–47, 241–42.
- 42 Gay, 6.
- 43 The poet Gottfried Benn's description of Weimar Berlin is quoted in Gay, 3.
- 44 Of course, Berlin was not alone as a center of eastern European Jewish culture. Recently, Dan Laor has recalled the importance of the town of Bad Homburg as a meeting point of leading figures in Hebrew literature, especially Agnon. See Laor, "Agnon in Germany, 1912–1924: A Chapter of a Biography," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 18 (1993): 75–93.
- 45 See Nash, 168.
- 46 See the figures quoted in Trude Maurer, *Ostjuden in Deutschland, 1918–1933* (Hamburg, 1986), 72.
- 47 Shalom Adler-Rudel estimates that 35,000 eastern European Jews served as laborers in Germany. See Adler-Rudel, 60. The existence of this large pool of foreign Jews triggered xenophobic fears among Germans (and even among some German Jews), and prompted a decision by the Prussian Reich Chancellory to close borders to Jewish workers in April 1918. See Aschheim, 177.
- 48 See Ismar Elbogen, *A Century of Jewish Life* (Philadelphia, 1944), 453–502.
- 49 For a partial list of distinguished eastern European Jewish intellectuals, see Adler-Rudel, 106–107.
- 50 Some have seen this mix as leading to a neomessianic sensibility. See, for instance, Michael Löwy, "Jewish Messianism and Libertarian Utopia in Central Europe," *New German Critique* 20 (1980): 105–15. Zalman Rubashov has suggested that the period of 1915–1918 in Germany was also marked by such a mix of alienation and hope, at least in the Jewish circles with which he associated. See Rubashov, 125.
- 51 Delphine Bechtel, "Les revues modernistes yiddish à Berlin et à Varsovie de 1922 à 1924. La quête d'une nouvelle Jérusalem," *Études germaniques* (April–June, 1991): 164. In the early 1920s, Germany was the second-largest publisher of Yiddish books in the world. See Adler-Rudel, 108.
- 52 *Devir* published original and translated works by leading Jewish authors and scholars including Scholem Aleichem, Y. L. Peretz, Moshe Smilansky, Ben-Zion Dina-burg, Yehezkel Kaufmann and Simon Dubnow.
- 53 See Jost Hermand and Frank Trommler, *Die Kultur der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 1978), 35, and Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York, 1992), 164.
- 54 See Lee Congdon, *Exile and Social Thought: Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria, 1919–1933* (Princeton, 1991), 304. See also Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigra-tion, 1919–1939* (New York, 1990), 43–44.
- 55 Robert C. Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Emigrés in Germany, 1881–1941* (Ithaca, 1972), 245–46.
- 56 Geiger's comments in the *Jüdische Rundschau*, 4 October 1918, 314, are quoted in Reichmann, 577.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 541–42.
- 58 The quest for a *Volksgemeinschaft* was part of a broader postwar German search for community and national identity. See Keith Bullivant, "The Conservative Revolution," in *The Weimar Dilemma: Intellectuals in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Anthony Phelan (Manchester, 1985), 52. Within the German Jewish community, Zionism was the primary, but not the only, ideology urging the creation of a Jewish *Volksgemeinschaft*. In the Weimar period, a new political party—the *Jüdische Volkspartei*—advocated the creation of autonomous communities, Jewish *Volksgemeinden*, at the local level. See Michael Brenner, "The Jüdische Volkspartei: National-Jewish Communal Politics during the Weimar Republic," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 35 (1990): 219–43.
- 59 See *Devir* 1 (1923): xii. Interestingly, a similar question was posed almost a decade earlier in *Die Freistatt*. In a report on eastern European students in the West, Abraham Charasch asked: "Könnte . . . nicht eine engere Verbindung zwischen Ost und West hergestellt werden?" See *Die Freistatt* 1/4 (15 July 1913): 258.
- 60 The design, layout and length of *Rimon* and *Milgroym* were identical. Moreover, both the artistic reproductions and the articles on art, which occupied the majority of the forty to fifty pages in each number, were identical. Articles on literature, however, varied: in *Rimon* they tended to focus on Hebrew authors, whereas in *Milgroym* the emphasis was on Yiddish literature.
- 61 For all six of the volumes of *Rimon-Milgroym*, Mark Wischnitzer served as general editor and his wife Rachel Wischnitzer-Bernstein served as art editor. The first two volumes of *Rimon* were coedited by Baruch Krupnik. The authors Dovid Bergelson and Der Nister served as literary editors for the first volume of *Milgroym*. From the third volume of *Rimon-Milgroym*, Moshe Kleinmann served as co-general editor with Mark Wischnitzer.
- 62 These include the turn-of-the-century *Ost und West* and the prewar *Die Freistatt*. The multimedia approach was also quite common in Hebrew periodical literature of the nineteenth century, including journals expressly devoted to *Hokhmah Yisrael*. See David N. Myers, "From Zion will go forth Torah': Jewish Scholarship and the Zionist Return to History" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1991), 28–40.
- 63 On the earlier attempt in *Ost und West*, see the article by Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, "Defining 'Jewish Art' in *Ost und West*, 1901–1908: A Study in the Nationalisation of Jewish Culture," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 39 (1994): 83–110.
- 64 V. R. Berghahn, *Modern Germany: Society, Economy and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1982), 83.

- 65 See *Rimon* 1 (1922): 2–6. See also *Milgroy* 1 (1922). A description of the journal's mission relates that it is to be devoted to "art, music, theater, and especially Jewish art of the past and present." See *Rimon* 1 (1922): iv.
- 66 *Rimon* 1 (1922): 4.
- 67 Delphine Bechtel suggests that the journal reflects a "double orientation," attempting both to fuse Jewish and non-Jewish culture and to call attention to eastern European Jewish culture on its own terms. See Bechtel, 165.
- 68 It must be noted, however, that Elbogen was a member of a group of German and eastern European scholars that assembled on five occasions as the *Jüdische Wissenschaftliche Vereinigung*. See Simon Dubnow's recollections in *Dos bukh fun mein leyben*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires, 1963), 45. For a reverential portrait of Elbogen, see Erwin Rosenthal, "Ismar Elbogen and the New Jewish Learning," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 8 (1963): 3–28.
- 69 *Devir* 1 (1923): ix.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 2 (1923): 15.
- 71 See *ibid.*, 1 (1923): iv.
- 72 See *ibid.*, 2 (1923): 15. See also Ismar Elbogen, *Ein Jahrhundert Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Berlin, 1922), 45.
- 73 In his analysis of twentieth-century central European Jewish intellectuals, Michael Löwy has written that "their aspiration for a Jewish national revival does not (necessarily) lead to political nationalism." See his *Rédemption et Utopie: Le judaïsme libertaire en Europe centrale* (Paris, 1988), 62. See also note 50 above.
- 74 The very idea of hegemonic cultural influence has fallen victim to more nuanced understandings of cultural exchange in recent postcolonial writings. An interesting attempt by a Jewish scholar to overcome the deficiencies of an "influence" model of culture is Robert Bonfil's research on Jewish culture in Renaissance Italy. In discussing the relationship between Italian Christian and Italian Jewish cultures, Bonfil objects to a scheme "that opposes the stronger to the weaker culture, and implies . . . a value judgment in favor of the former." See Bonfil's *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Anthony Oldcorn (Berkeley, 1994), 145.

"How shall we sing of Zion in a Strange Land?": East European Immigrants and the Challenge of Zionism in Britain, 1897–1918

Stuart A. Cohen

Between 1880 and 1915 some 150,000 Jews emigrated to the British Isles in intermittent waves from scattered parts of eastern Europe.¹ Largely as a result of that influx, and of the relatively high birthrate of the new arrivals, the Jewish community of late Victorian Britain was transformed. Its population rose about five-fold (to approximately 300,000 souls by 1920); its occupational structure became distinctly more working-class; and its residential distribution was affected by the emergence of specifically immigrant Jewish quarters in the East End of London and several provincial cities and towns.

Research into the effects of those phenomena has generally focused on two principal dimensions. Broadly speaking, one is societal: the influence which so large a group of strangers exerted on British mores in general and on local Jewish-Gentile relations in particular.² The second is more specifically communal: the checkered chronology of relationships within Anglo-Jewry between the new arrivals on the one hand, and the indigenous community on the other.³ Somewhat neglected, by comparison, has been a third facet of the case: the effect of the experience of migration on the inner lives of the immigrants of 1880–1920 and on their modes of cultural and political expression during that formative period.⁴

This paper attempts to address this last issue. It will suggest that the hesitancy which most Jewish immigrants to the British Isles evinced