Book Review: William Collins Donahue and Martha B. Helfer (eds): *Nexus: Essays in German Jewish Studies*
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What is This?
205b), Heidegger expounded his understanding of ‘occasioning’ (*aitia*), ‘bringing-forth’ or *Her-vor-bringen*, ‘poetry’ (*poiesis*), ‘nature’ (*physis*), ‘unconcealment’ (*aletheia*) and ‘technology’ (*techne*). The latter he glossed with the term *Gestell*, variously translated as ‘enframing’ and related to the idea of *Bestand* or ‘standing-reserve’ (cf. p. 107). (In this context, he famously contrasted the view of the Rhine taken by those who built a hydroelectric plant in the water, and Hölderlin’s address to the river: ‘For as you began, so you will remain’ (*Wie du anfiengst, wirst du bleiben*) (p. 104; cf. p. 1).) In his essay, Heidegger uncovered modern humankind’s central delusion (embraced by Heisenberg): ‘It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself … In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, i.e., his essence’ (cf. p. 111). While citing Hölderlin’s line from ‘Patmos’, ‘But where danger is, grows / The saving power also’ (cf. p. 113), Heidegger tellingly anchored his notion of ‘permanent enduring’ (*fortwähren, das Fortwährende*) in a ‘mysterious’ word (i.e., *fortgewähren*) found in the novella contained in Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*. From this combined phonetic echo of *währen* (to endure) and *gewähren* (to grant) Heidegger derived the following insight: ‘Only what is granted endures. That which endures primally out of the earliest beginning is what grants’ (cf. p. 115).

Thus the very notion of the turn or *Kehre*, found as early as 1930 in ‘The Essence of Truth’ (in which he declared that ‘the human being’s flight from the mystery toward what is readily available, onward from one current thing to the next, passing the mystery by – this is *erring*’ (cf. p. 141)) and later in ‘The Turning’ (1956), turns out (so to speak) to be the central theme throughout Heidegger’s writings as a whole. In this book, O’Brien cogently and persuasively underscores how this ‘revolution’ of our understanding is ‘achieved’ by ‘remaining true and fast to our human *vocation* (*vocare*), the calling we all have as humans’ (p. 117).

Paul Bishop


This welcome new series responds to the present state of German Jewish studies (dropping the hyphen because of its hierarchical implications) with a combination of theoretical reflections and cultural case studies. By focusing on literary and cultural studies, it complements the long-established *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, which specializes in heavily documented historical essays and gives relatively little space to literature. German Jewish studies today are no longer dominated by the Holocaust and exile; their practitioners include many non-Jews; they increasingly place their subjects in a global, rather than national, context; and they are hospitable to current themes in cultural analysis such as gender, the body and performativity.

The opening essays will stimulate discussion and often disagreement. Todd Samuel Presner draws attention to the new possibilities of presenting and extending scholarship offered by digital technology, suggesting links with the Talmud’s inventive use of the codex to juxtapose text and commentary. Lisa Silverman undertakes to sidestep insoluble questions about Jewish identity by arguing that people can perform Jewish difference
without identifying themselves as Jews; but if you can have ‘Jewish difference’ without being a Jew, then not only, as Silverman concedes, can there be Jewish non-Jews, but that anti-Semitic compendium, the Semi-Gotha, is confirmed in its view that Lessing and Thomas Mann, even if not Jews, are essentially Jewish. In the strongest article in this section, Katja Garloff addresses the metaphor of Jews’ unrequited love for German culture, and examines different models of such love formulated by Gershom Scholem, Moritz Goldstein and Hannah Arendt.

Since German Jewish studies owe so much to the creative energies of Sander Gilman, his presence is doubly appropriate. Discussing happiness, he contrasts Freud’s resolute pessimism with the attempts by plastic surgeons to increase their patients’ happiness by trimming their supposedly Jewish-looking noses, and concludes that it is easier to mitigate unhappiness than to produce happiness.

Of the remaining essays, on literary and cultural topics from Berthold Auerbach to contemporary cinema, it can safely be said that all reach a high academic standard and that many could be prescribed to stimulate fruitful debate at graduate seminars. Two stand out. Elisabeth Loentz’s fine, archive-based article presents the Bavarian Jewish writer Clementine Krämer (1873–1942) who had two simultaneous literary careers, one as essayist in the middle-brow German Jewish press, the other, pseudonymously, as author of Heimatliteratur in Bavarian dialect. Loentz describes the latter as ‘passing’, but was it not an obvious mode of expression, since Krämer affirms that in her village Jews and Gentiles alike spoke dialect? I also admired Agnes Mueller’s hard-hitting analysis of the implicit anti-Semitism in Grass’s Im Krebsgang and Walser’s Tod eines Kritikers.

This series can be expected to become a platform for important research and debates on German Jewish literary and cultural studies. Just two caveats. First, the editing needs to be more attentive. Richard Bernstein becomes ‘Richard Bernhard’ (p. 61); Susan Neiman becomes ‘Nieman’ twice (p. 245). Second, and more seriously, the editors, all the contributors and all the editorial board teach at US universities. Not even Canada features. To avoid becoming a parochial branch of US cultural studies, future volumes will need input from abroad, above all from Germany. Despite these gentle warnings, this is a series to which both readers and libraries would be well advised to subscribe.

Ritchie Robertson


In this challenging and broadly convincing book, Martha B. Helfer investigates anti-Semitism, not among the usual suspects, but in a range of mostly canonical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts by Lessing, Schiller, Arnim, Droste-Hülshoff, Stifter and Grillparzer, where animus against Jews is mostly latent and has to be uncovered by close reading. Even the great philosemite Lessing, whose conscious good intentions Helfer does not impugn, reveals unconscious ambivalence, not only in Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts but even in Die Juden and Nathan der Weise.