

Editorial

Central European Jewish Émigrés and the Shaping of Postwar Culture: Studies in Memory of Lilian Furst (1931–2009)

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This volume grew out of a conference on “Jewish Émigrés and the Shaping of Postwar Culture,” organized by the Triangle Intellectual History Seminar and the Duke-UNC Jewish Studies Seminar to commemorate the late Lilian Renée Furst (1931–2009), the Marcel Bataillon Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. The conference was held at the National Humanities Center on 3 April 2011. Furst grew up in Vienna, and emigrated with her parents to England, via Belgium, after the German annexation of Austria in 1938. The family spent World War II in Manchester, England. Furst earned her BA in Modern Languages from the University of Manchester and went on to Cambridge to complete a doctorate in German in 1957. She taught for more than a decade at Queen’s University in Belfast, and then became the head of the Comparative Literature Program in Manchester. After her mother passed away in 1969, she moved with her father to the U.S., and taught in several programs, holding, among others, visiting appointments in leading universities. She ended up, in 1986, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she taught until her retirement in 2005. Brought up in a traditional Jewish family, Furst was never a practicing Jew, or a member of the Jewish community, but she retained a robust sense of her Jewish identity and fate. An intellectual adventurer, whose work tied together diverse academic cultures and national literatures, Furst found no intellectual home. In *Home is Somewhere Else: An Autobiography in Two Voices* (1994), she paired her memories of emigrating from Austria to England with those of her father. The *Autobiography* became the most widely read of her more than twenty books, which ranged from Romanticism and Naturalism to illness in modern literature.

Furst’s story is one of a generation of Central European émigrés who became the makers of postwar culture, and of the alienation from home and nation that was the source of their innovation. She was a pioneer of comparative literary studies, and hoped that U.S. academic life would help her break out of the confines of national culture she experienced in Austria and even in Britain. She broke through professionally, but, personally, the U.S. academy never became a home. After her father passed away in 1983, a group of friends, students, and a family of teddy bears she collected and named were her closest company. A genetic illness, impacting also her vision, made her final years difficult, but she carried through with her usual dignity and good humor. She was buried next to her father according to Jewish rite but without a funeral. This writer may be the single reciter of *kadish* and *yizkor* after her.

The nexus between innovative intellectual contributions and the émigré experience was at the center of the conference in Furst’s memory. European Jewish émigrés from Nazi Germany and Europe have become in the last two decades a major interdisciplinary research field, and their contributions to twentieth-century culture are well known. This conference focused on the émigrés’ role in the formation of postwar trans-Atlantic culture. We asked: How, why, and in what fashion did émigré dislocation, identity dilemmas, and Holocaust experience shape intellectual paths and utopias promising new homes that have, ironically, become highlights of European culture? We were mindful that we needed

to explore religion and ethnicity among mostly secular intellectuals, who often no longer identified themselves as Jewish. We anticipated receiving a range of answers to the “Jewish Question”: a series of explorations of the Jewish European disaster, ending with portrayals of prospective new homes, whether in Europe, the U.S. or Israel, whether on Popper’s model of an Open Society, or on Furst’s model of home is somewhere else. Unexpectedly, the vision of Judeo-Christian civilization emerged as a focal interest for participants, reflecting the contemporary European search for identity and the historical interest in Jewish Catholics. We hope that we have provided in this volume new ways for understanding religion and ethnicity among the Jewish émigrés, and new directions for searching for the émigré impact on the shaping of postwar culture.

David Kettler and Volker Meja’s essay on sociologist Karl Mannheim pointedly raises the question bedeviling émigré scholars: Mannheim made social location determinative of ideology yet he never contemplated that his own Jewish origins had a role in shaping his sociology of knowledge. How does one illuminate the impact of unacknowledged, and even rejected Jewishness? Kettler and Meja use the assimilation theory advanced by Mannheim’s student, historian Jacob Katz, to explain Mannheim’s ideal of a “free floating intelligentsia.” Assimilation consisted, among others, in the formation of groups of intellectuals who relinquished their particular (religious) identities, at least in public debate. Mannheim was committed to such groups, to intellectuals bracketing their own (Jewish) identities, so they can negotiate among ideological standpoints. Writers in this volume deploy diverse stratagems in attempts to decode elusive Jewishness that is neither religious nor ethnic or national nor entirely a product of antisemites marking assimilated Jews as Jewish.

Daniel Bessner’s essay on the New School for Social Research queries the silence of both its founder, Alvin Johnson, and the émigrés appointed as faculty on their Jewish origin. The University in Exile accepted more German and European exiles than any other American institution of higher education, yet the most open statement on their background insisted that “a full one third had no Jewish blood.” Bessner suggests that shared transnational interests and cosmopolitan values created a common academic agenda for American progressives and German-Jewish intellectuals. They knew all too well that this agenda was only marginally acceptable to current antisemitic academic culture and preferred not to burden it with the Jewish Question. American progressives helped Jews wishing to escape their Jewishness create a trans-Atlantic academic culture that “solved” the Jewish Question by pretending that it did not exist outside Nazi Germany.

Erich Auerbach (1892–1957) is the subject of three of the volumes’ essays, reflecting his stature as a leading intellectual émigré, the recognition of his *Mimesis* (1946) as an epochal work, and recent interest in Judeo-Christian visions of European culture. Matthias Bormuth highlights the differences between Karl Löwith and Auerbach’s responses to modernity. Löwith, nominally a Protestant, viewed the French Revolution negatively as reflecting secularization of Christian eschatology, and sought escape in Goethe’s self-cultivation. Auerbach, who remained Jewish, bemoaned secularization’s dissolution of the Christian worldview but implicated Goethe’s rejection of the French Revolution in Germany’s failure to confront modernity. The “Jewish” Jew was more a Christian and a democrat than the “Christian” one. Malachi Hacoheh, Avihu Zakai and David Weinstein look at *Mimesis* and “Figura” as a response to Nazi racialized Europe, which endeavored to reintegrate the Jews into European civilization as progenitors of Christianity. Whereas Zakai & Weinstein regard the project as Jewish (as does the majority of Auerbach scholars), Hacoheh views Auerbach as a cultural Christian. While perusing biographies and works for hints of the Jewish experience, he argues, we must not reify the “Jewishness” of German acculturated intellectuals—it could be Christian in character.

If “Figura” and *Mimesis* presaged postwar Judeo-Christian visions of Europe, *The City of Man*, published in 1940 by a group of American public intellectuals and European émigrés, did so for the U.S. The group included, among others, Reinhold Niebuhr and Lewis Mumford among the Americans, and Thomas Mann, Hermann Broch, Hans Kohn, and Oscar Jaszi among the émigrés. They urged an isolationist U.S. to assume global leadership in the struggle against fascism and communism and lead a spiritual transformation of democracy into a modern political religion. They called for a rejuvenation of

conservative values, anchored in the Judeo-Christian tradition, in support of a global reconstruction of modernity, threatened by totalitarianism. The pamphlet signaled, say Adi Gordon and Udi Greenberg, the first act of postwar conservatism, and the trans-Atlantic making of Cold War culture.

Julie Mell's essay sketches the intellectual work of five émigrés investigating the origins of European capitalism. She illuminates how their formative works in the fields of Jewish history, economic history, and economic sociology were shaped by the crisis of WWII, their Jewish identities and their émigré experiences during and after the war. The two openly Jewish protagonists, Guido Kisch and Toni Oelsner, sparred over the legacy of the German Historical School and the Jews' role in the rise of capitalism: Kisch affirmed it and Oelsner denied it as an antisemitic construct. The two assimilated Jewish intellectuals, Robert Lopez and Michael Postan, fashioned the Cambridge Economic History and elaborated the concept of the "medieval commercial revolution," which had little need for the Jews at all. Finally, the Catholic Jew, Karl Polanyi, presented capitalism as a historically aberrant and catastrophic attempt to free the market from its social embeddedness.

The final three essays represent "homecomings" of the Jewish émigrés and analyze the shaping of utopias that re-envision Jewish integration. Ofer Ashkenazi explores the manipulation of *Heimat* (homeland) images in the postwar films of Konrad Wolf, a high profile East-German filmmaker who returned from his WWII Moscow exile as a Red Army soldier. In the autobiographical film *I was Nineteen* (1968), Wolf documented his return, and Ashkenazi sees his exposition of the violence embedded in *Heimat* imagery as a plea for a new society united by a universalist ideology, providing a home for Jews that the national community of *Heimat* could not.

Unlike Wolf, remigrés to Austria could not even pretend that their country was making a fresh start. Friedrich Torberg and Hilde Spiel availed themselves of the Central European past to elaborate visions of Austrian literature that, contrary to their own expectations, became blueprints for a new European culture. They mourned the loss of Central European Jewry but neither, says Birgit Lang, endeavored to represent the Holocaust. They seemed free of the tensions that noble-prize winner, Imre Kertész, discerned in Jewish intellectuals' postwar use of German. Kertész himself was able to confront the linguistic conundrum of Jewish use of German by self-conscious depiction of the émigré experience of language loss (which he discovered in Jean Améry). Torberg and Spiel's depictions of a Golden Age gone did not reflect this survivor's experience of linguistic loss.

Arie Dubnov ponders the leading postwar liberal thinker, Isaiah Berlin's ambivalent stance towards nationalism. To Berlin, nationalism constituted, at one and the same time, a threat to liberty and a desired community. Having immigrated to England as a boy from Riga, Latvia, Berlin cultivated the persona of a Russian Jew and supported Zionism. Diaspora Zionism was his solution to the nationalist riddle, and to the problems of an Oxford Don, who wished to live as an admired Jewish outsider, support Israel, yet remain the Queen's loyal and knighted subject. Good nationalism was a Diasporic national community, pluralizing the postwar nation state and enabling a Jew to be a British Zionist.

An unpublished autobiographical excerpt on growing up in wartime England, pulled from Lilian Furst's archives, and introduced by her literary executor, Anabel Aliaga-Buchenau, completes the collection. Furst shows a very different path of Jewish acculturation in Britain from that of Berlin, one that led to Cambridge, but never made the British academy a home. Home is somewhere else, perhaps in heavenly Jerusalem. The Shoah Foundation's visual history archive contains a spectacular interview with Lilian Furst, recounting her life, in speech and pictures: <http://vha.usc.edu.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx>. The Girton College archive at Cambridge has Furst's remaining personal papers, including the manuscript of the excerpt published here: <http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0271%2FGCPP%20Furst>.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.



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