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Jewish Women Writers in Germany and Great Britain from the Post-War Period to the Present

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In 2021, Christoph and I began working together on an essay about texts by contemporary Jewish women writers in Britain and Germany. Again and again, we discussed how we could bundle and compare such different literatures, perceive them in their own way and yet bring them into conversation with each other. We wrote various drafts of this essay, then put the text aside for quite a while before Christoph began to heavily revise his part at the end of 2021. We agreed that he would finish his part and then I, in turn, would revise my part. On 6 February 2022 he wrote to me that he was almost finished and that I would receive his text on the weekend. It did not come to that. Christoph died on Thursday, 10 February 2022.

The text as it is presented here is therefore not a finished essay, but our sketch on a topic that we had been working on together and that we wanted to develop further.

It does not contain Christoph's revisions, which are lying dormant in his computer. I have not yet been able to continue working on our common theme. I miss our dialogue.

But I am pleased that Anna Lena Westphal is continuing to work on German-language contemporary Jewish literature as part of her doctoral thesis.

Note by the editors of this volume: The following text is an unfinished version of Christoph Houswitschka's last article, jointly written with Iris Hermann. The editors of this volume left his section exactly as it was when he passed away, which means that it includes occasional typos and errors. To indicate this, his section has been printed in a different font.

In keeping with the format of the article, Iris Hermann's section also follows the original format for citations and uses footnotes instead of a works cited list. Her section of the article has been gently corrected by herself and the editors, but it also has not been rewritten.

Abstract

This essay aims to provide a European perspective on Jewish women writers from 1945 to the present. Jewish women writers had a significant influence on German literature before the war, whereas in Great Britain this was not the case. We focus

on Germany, the country that is responsible for the Shoah, the greatest catastrophe in the history of the Jewish people, and Great Britain, the country that saved thousands of Jews from the Continent and helped to liberate Nazi-occupied Europe. With regard to Germany, we focus on Jewish women authors who immigrated from the successor states of the former Soviet Union, the ‘contingent refugees’ who today enrich the literary landscape. Jewish British literature hardly had a voice of its own after the war, but since the 1990s it has also been recognized as an independent contribution to British literature. Today, young Jewish women writers in both Great Britain and Germany contribute to literary diversity both in their respective Jewish communities and their societies.

Jewish-British Women Writers

In Great Britain, Jewish post-war literature could hardly develop independent of a “monolithic Britishness”. While American Jews could always reinvent themselves in literature with great self-confidence, British Jews were merely observers of a ready-made culture in which they participated but could not change anything.¹ This difference was explained by Linda Grant in her novel, *When I Lived in Modern Times* (2000): “I was a Jewish child in a country where, unlike America, there was no contribution I could make to the forging of the national identity. It was fixed already, centuries ago.”²

Jewishness is not a topic in British literature, at least not until the 1990s. Jewish writers were barely known as such in the United Kingdom throughout the postwar period, unless they explicitly wrote about the Shoah,³ but in her seminal study on *Holocaust Fiction*, Sue Vice discussed not a single Jewish-British writer.

Phyllis Lassner points out that Anglo-Jewish women writers such as Anita Brookner, Diane Samuels, Elaine Feinstein, and Julia Pascal write about Jewish immigration in the 1930s, “none of whom is a refugee or Holocaust survivor,” but their “creative imaginations are compelled by the persistent presence of the lost and rescued.”⁴ Julia Pascal published *The Holocaust Trilogy* (2000) and introduced an explicitly feminist voice in her theatre projects, many of them about Jewish topics or from a Jewish perspective.

¹ Bryan H. Cheyette, “British-Jewish Literature,” in *Jewish Writers of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Sorel Kerbel (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003), p. 10.

² Linda Grant, *When I Lived in Modern Times* (London: Granta Books, 2000), p. 12. See also Axel Stähler, “Introduction. Jewish literature(s) in English? Anglophone Jewish Writing and the ‘Loquation’ of Culture,” in *Anglophone Jewish Literature*, ed. Axel Stähler (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 11.

³ Vice discusses Martin Amis, D.M. Thomas, Jerzy Kosinski, Thomas Keneally, William Styron, and Helen Darville.

⁴ Phyllis Lassner, “Exiles from Jewish Memory. Anita Brookner’s Anglo-Jewish Aesthetic,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 29/1 (Spring 2010), p. 59.

Other writers such as the *kindertransport* writer Karen Gershon (1923–1993) have only been discovered in recent years, particularly since her autobiographical texts *A Lesser Child* (publ. 1994) and *A Tempered Wind* (publ. 2010) were published posthumously. Another hardly fictionalized account of a *kind* (child) is Lore Segal's *Other People's Houses* (1964). Ruth Praver Jhabvala's work often tells of uprooted German-Jewish exiles.⁵

Jewishness did not have a self-conscious voice in postwar British literature. This changed in the nineties, but especially after 2000, when (with the exception of Harold Jacobson) mainly Jewish women writers followed the example of the so-called (postcolonial) New English literatures or ethnic literatures in Great Britain and claimed their own Jewish voice, neither postcolonial nor at the center, but more and more arriving there from the margins.

By contrast, if one reads the novels of postwar women writers such as Muriel Spark (1918-2006), Bernice Rubens (1923-2004), Ruth Praver Jhabvala (1927-2013), Anita Brookner (1928-2016), and others, one will find them only randomly concerned with Jewish topics. If they are, they offer clues to the Jewish identity of their protagonists without giving them a Jewish voice, at least not one that speaks in the public.⁶ The reader will search largely in vain for words and terms that would mark these references as political portraying and discussing Jewish identity. Cheyette describes the dilemma of Jewish-British literature: “The perception that Jewish writing in Britain is outlandish at best and an impossibility at worst runs deep and has created an understandable sense of inferiority.” British culture, Cheyette argues, “saps the confidence of its writers who happen also to be Jews.”⁷

Lassner speaks of Brookner's and other Jewish women writers' “oblique references to modern Jewish history and identity” when she tries to characterize their contribution “to dramatize the displacement, haunted memories, and living spaces that constitute their Anglo-Jewish characters' lives.”⁸ In Brookner's novels, her main characters are often lonely women and Jewish. Reading about their loneliness also establishes a good sense about how they might feel as Jews in British society. Therefore, a Jewish voice is recognizable in Brookner's novels, but it is not introduced as a recognized one. If one asks why, one encounters another absence in literature, which Anthony Julius explores in his monograph *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (2010): “English literary anti-Semitism was not

⁵ Sorel Kerbel, ed. *Jewish Writers of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003), p. 488.

⁶ This is different with novels that are less British than Anglophone. Bernice Rubens *The Sergeant's Tale* (2004), for example, takes place in the British Mandate in 1947 (see Stähler 2007: 12).

⁷ Both quotation in Cheyette, “British-Jewish Literature,” p. 10 (above, note 1).

⁸ Lassner, “Exiles”, p. 59 (above, note 4).

on any syllabus; it was not taught; it was not 'examined'; fundamentally, it was not noticed."⁹

Anita Brookner grew up in London as the child of Jewish-Polish immigrants.¹⁰ Although she was born and raised in England, Brookner never felt completely at home in England and never lost the feeling of being a stranger in her own country.¹¹ She could never fully come to terms with the conventions of her English homeland.¹² This state of mind has been understood in research as a conflict between conformity and trying to stand by her Jewish heritage, one "seemingly irreconcilable with the other."¹³ While encouraging her parents to stand by their Jewish identity, they would have failed to familiarize their daughter with her English environment.¹⁴ This conflict would have triggered fear of loss and alienation trauma. Sylvester finds this negotiated primarily in her 1988 novel *Latecomers*.¹⁵ But *Latecomers* tells a different story. Two boys who manage to escape Nazi Germany on the *kindertransport*, Fibich and Hartmann, remain bound in friendship throughout their lives although they remain outsiders in England.

In her stories, Anita Brookner avoids clear references or statements about Jews or Jewish identity. Although *Latecomers* is an exception, it shares a literary concern with other of Brookner's novels about memory and "the continuing action of the past within the present" as Helen Dunmore writes in her introduction to the Penguin edition of *Latecomers*.¹⁶ The fictional characters that personify this memory are women. They are single and their silent search for Jewish identity is represented in the lostness and loneliness as women. The authenticity of the female narrative voice implicitly represents that of the Jewish narrative. As a result, Brookner's novels are not feminist; as feminist representations of social isolation and loneliness they would mute the Jewish voice. The absence of a feminist narrative voice at a time when it had already been constructed in society and literature creates a literary proxy space that makes Jewish voicelessness recognizable in its absence as a political discourse.

When Brookner speaks about a lack of social recognition of Jews in interviews, she compares herself to her Polish parents: "I think my parents' lives were blighted –

⁹ Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. xxiv.

¹⁰ Louise Sylvester, "The Trauma of Assimilation: Anita Brookner as Jewish Novelist," in *Jewish Women Writers in Britain*, ed. Nadia Valman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014), p. 157.

¹¹ Sylvester, "Trauma," p. 158 (above, note 10).

¹² Lynn Veach Sadler, *Anita Brookner* (Woodbridge, CT: Twayne Publishers, 1990), p. 1.

¹³ Sylvester, "Trauma," p. 170 (above, note 10).

¹⁴ Sylvester, "Trauma," p. 171 (above, note 10).

¹⁵ Sylvester, "Trauma," p. 164-166 (above, note 10).

¹⁶ Helen Dunmore, "Introduction," in Anita Brookner, *Latecomers* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. viii.

and in some sense mine is too - largely by this fact of being outside the natural order, being strangers in England ... I've never been at home here."¹⁷ In her novels, protagonists describe themselves in such a way not as Jews, but women.

Family Romance (1993) tells the story of two women who could not be more different. While Dolly (also the title of the American edition) is extroverted and fun-loving, this behavior is both repulsive and attractive to her niece Jane. Dolly and Jane are related to one another, but their characters gain individual authenticity in this antagonism. Dolly's charismatic nature is a provocation to Jane, from whose perspective the story is told. Jane dislikes Dolly's old-fashioned attitude as a widow who lives of the money of her deceased husband. Later in her life, Jane expresses disapproval of the feminist young professors she meets on her reading tours as a successful writer in the United States:

They are so convivial that it would be churlish to refuse. But I find them exhausting, these women of goodwill, with their agenda of wrongs to be righted, of injustices to be eliminated. I want to stand still in the dusk and contemplate the lake, seeing only mist, hearing only a brief ripple where the wing of a bird disturbs the surface of the water, but I must respond intelligently, employ a certain kind of feminised argument, feel myself to be the victim of a monstrous wrong which has been passed down to me from generation to generation.¹⁸

Jane's problem is a cultural one. While American women do not hesitate going public as feminists, Jane's defensiveness looks like a reaction characterizing British middle-class Jews refraining from voicing their particular interests, but also from passing judgements on others. When Jane's attitude to Dolly changes later, one might even see this against the backdrop of her discussion of the feminism of younger women. At the end of the novel, she speaks of her love for Dolly, her aging niece, and criticizes her feminist friends: "My feminist friends would not recognize the woman I became in Dolly's presence, nor could I explain to them the great revelation to which she made me a party, and for which I am indebted. [...] I realised then that love was unpredictable."¹⁹ Brookner's stance on feminism has been repeatedly criticized pointing out that the relationship between women in her novels belong to an "unstructured sub-plot": "They are neither lovers, nor friends, nor sisters, nor consciously rivals in love, and thus, for Brookner, deprived of traditional and hence predictable patterns of behavior."²⁰ Kurz weighs different terms that might characterize Brookner's portrayal of women. She is not feminist, more

¹⁷ John Haffenden, "Playing Straight'. Interview with Anita Brookner," *The Literary Review* (September 1984), p. 25.

¹⁸ Anita Brookner, *Family Romance* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1993, US Title: *Dolly*), p. 210.

¹⁹ Brookner, *Family Romance*, p. 217-218 (above, note 18).

²⁰ Helga Kurz, "The Impossibility of Female Friendship. A Study of Anita Brookner's Female Characters," *AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 15/1 (1990), p. 15.

than “feminine” and certainly female in her perspective.²¹ Malcolm points out that by the end of the novel, Jane has transformed herself on her reading tours in the United States finding the courage to speak out in her own voice thus also finding acknowledgment for Dolly who muddled through her entire life while facing hostility from all sides. While she finds the young professors’ political feminism shallow, she is impressed by their older colleagues, “placidly dignified women, mostly in their fifties, mostly long divorced or else widowed, [who] pursued a life of study in an all-female atmosphere as if they were nuns in a mediaeval abbey.”²²

This attitude corresponds strikingly with the refusal to foreground the literary construction of Jewishness and thus contribute to the reinterpretation of what Cheyette calls “monolithic Britishness.”²³ Jane is not only a single and lonely woman, but also Jewish, an aspect elaborately concealed by the narrator.

The narrator's voice reports that Jane's mother did not get along with her mother²⁴ and that her grandmother was subjected to “a mild strain of anti-Semitism” from her husband, who despised Toni's visits “at the largely Jewish weddings” and considered his son's (Dolly's future husband) dancing with his mother “un-English”, but “the more he disapproved of her the more perversely attractive he found her to be.”²⁵ Jane's gentile paternal grandmother met her Jewish grandmother with a “violent antagonism” because she considered her “a frivolous and unworthy woman.”²⁶

Dolly also comes from a Jewish family originally from Frankfurt that immigrated from France after the war and met the Ferbers and their son Hugo in a London hotel.²⁷ Mr Schiff, Dolly's father, disappeared in German-occupied Paris: “The disappearing husband had also been Jewish, but that was easy to overlook.”²⁸

To establish the Jewish identity of Dolly's and Jane's families requires a diligent reader. The clues are scattered, as are the references to the antisemitism of the non-Jewish paternal families. It is also thoroughly striking that Jane's narrative voice leaves the antisemitic hostility of her maternal grandfather and paternal grandmother unmentioned upon and even suggests, almost apologetically, that her grandmother's behavior might have provoked this reaction. Jane, her mother

²¹ Kurz, “Female Friendship”, p. 14 (above, note 20).

²² Brookner, *Family Romance*, p. 209 (above, note 18); also see Sheryl Alexander Malcolm *Understanding Anita Brookner* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p. 150.

²³ Cheyette, “British-Jewish Literature,” p. 11 (above, note 1).

²⁴ Brookner, *Family Romance*, p. 28 (above, note 18).

²⁵ Brookner, *Family Romance*, p. 32 (above, note 18).

²⁶ Brookner, *Family Romance*, p. 7 (above, note 18).

²⁷ Brookner, *Family Romance*, p. 54 (above, note 18).

²⁸ Brookner, *Family Romance*, p. 50-51 (above, note 18).

and her uncle Hugo (Dolly's late husband) are Jewish according to Halacha. Discussing this openly in the novel, however, seems hardly recommendable vis-à-vis English society and even problematic in the two fictional families because it breeds antisemitism in the family suggesting that enjoyment of life is reprehensible and Jewish. Jane's disdain for Dolly's lifestyle also appears in a different light against the backdrop of her grandmother's story. Jane disapproves of Dolly's behavior because she denies her own Jewish identity and even worse appears to join the antisemitism of those who reject the lifestyle of Dolly and Jane's grandmother Toni. Against this background, Toni's reaction to her son's Catholic funeral is not a religious statement, but one that voices her frustration about the antisemitism she encountered in her own family, even more so that her Jewish daughter-in-law Dolly organized it: "‘A Mass?’ [...] ‘But Hugo wasn't a Catholic.’ ‘Well, I'm sure he would have wanted it. In any case, it was more or less expected. Everyone was there.’"²⁹

Dolly prefers the social recognition she believes to receive from the Catholic burial of her Jewish husband. Shortly thereafter, the narrator recounts the conversation between Jane's mother Henrietta, and her father Paul Manning who is surprised to hear about Toni's reaction to the Catholic burial suggesting that she "never seemed to me a woman of profound religious conviction." Manning's Jewish wife responds in an awkwardly apologetic way: "Yes, darling, but she is Jewish. One tends to forget it: she is so untypical." Manning in quite an English manner does not want to discuss this further: "I doubt if I should want to go that far."³⁰

Paul Manning, who may be aware of the late Ferber's "mild" antisemitism, sees no connection to the reaction of his mother-in-law because he cannot even recognize this antisemitism. He therefore reduces Toni's reaction to being religious, when the Catholic funeral of her son must look to her like an endorsement of the antisemitism she endured in her own family. This interpretation is still absent from research on Brookner because the narrator allows the contemporary reader nothing more than English society including most Jews would have recognized in this narrative as antisemitism, namely hardly anything. Obviously, the novel presents the scattered pieces of information to suggest antisemitism to today's readers' sensibilities in spite of its oblivious narrator. This proves Cheyette's thesis of "monolithic Britishness" which considers Jewish otherness "un-English" unless it is well-disguised.

Jane's decidedly apolitical stance regarding her role as a woman as well as a British Jew is striking. Nevertheless, *Family Romance* is shown to tell the story of two British Jewish women who insist on their right to stand out and find their own voices. The generational difference between Dolly and Jane is crucial here. While Dolly

²⁹ Brookner, *Family Romance*, p. 21 (above, note 18).

³⁰ Brookner, *Family Romance*, p. 23 (above, note 18).

consumes herself in protest and can't really find purpose in life, indeed can be a provocation to feminists because she has no income of her own, Jane certainly succeeds. Her success as a writer carries her into the public eye and makes it the political statement of a Jewish woman writer. This is denied to Dolly, who insists throughout her life on being who she is, despite the misogynist and antisemitic society she has to live in. In the end, Jane realizes that she, too, stands on Dolly's shoulders, and that this generational courage not to let "monolithic Britishness" impose a role on them as women and Jews binds them together in love.

All this starts changing when authors of the second generation such as Anne Karpf, whose parent had escaped Nazi Europe, begin to write about the public silence of their parents and the silence of the majority of people in the society surrounding them. In *The War After* (1996), Karpf explicitly distances herself from English politeness, which regarded survivors as "begetters of embarrassment."³¹ The step of making her Jewish voice heard in the British public sphere, was huge for Karpf: "I was like an astronaut stepping out on to the moon, but it was a small step for humankind, and a vast one for me."³² From the nineties, to talk about Jewishness in the public is no longer represented as embarrassment. This argument about voicing differences shifted into (postcolonial) migration literature.³³

Post-2000 novels that show a different attitude towards Jewishness, include Linda Grant (born 1951), Deborah Levy (born 1959), Charlotte Mendelson (born 1972), Naomi Alderman (born 1974), and Natasha Solomons (born 1980), among others.

Linda Grant (born 1951) escapes this dilemma when she chooses Israel as a setting of her novel *When I Lived in Modern Times* (2000). In this novel, she writes about Jewish identity differently from the novels that take place in Great Britain. In the 1998 memoir, *Remind Me Who I Am, Again*, Grant writes about the decline of her mother, who suffered from dementia. In doing so, she writes about her mother's loss of memory as an individual as much as a collective loss: "My mother, the last of her generation, was losing her memory."³⁴ This autobiographical text deals with the pain of losing her mother, but attempts to connect the personal experience with a central concern of her Jewish identity: "Memory, I have come to understand, is everything, it's life itself."³⁵ The autobiographical text about dementia becomes a representation of how Grant believes Jewish women experience their roles as mothers, as the carriers of memory in the maternal line.

³¹ Anne Karpf, *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* (London: Minerva, 1996), p. 199.

³² Karpf, *War After*, p. 50 (above, note 31).

³³ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000), p. 439; see Bryan H. Cheyette, *Diaspora of the Mind. Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (New Haven and London), p. 258-259.

³⁴ Linda Grant, *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (London: Granta Books, 1998), p.15.

³⁵ Grant, *Remind Me*, p. 17 (above, note 34).

Deborah Levy was born in South Africa in 1959. Her family emigrated to London after the release of her father, a member of the ANC, from prison in 1968. He was married to a woman from an "upper-class WASP family" who had the courage to love "a penniless Jewish historian"³⁶ because she wanted to fight with him for human rights. Levy tells her experiences as a Jewish student in South Africa in her two autobiographical texts, *Things I Don't Want to Know. On Writing* (2014) and *The Cost of Living. A Working Autobiography* (2018).

For her novel, *Swimming Home*, Deborah Levy was nominated for the Booker Prize in 2012. The novel presents the past as something that exists in the present but must first be tracked down. The task of uncovering Joe Jacobs' past falls to Kitty Finch, who finds herself deeply connected to him, a way of depicting the coexistence of past and present, a particular concern Levy addresses in her novels. The question of whether Joe or Kitty is the main character in the novel cannot be answered because of "the coexisting past and present," Levy suggests in *The Cost of Living*.³⁷

Levy's narrative recognizes this coexistence of past and present defining the power of memory. *The Jewish Chronicle*'s brief description of this novel's subject therefore might miss the point when Marina Gerner writes: "a novel on the insidious harm depression can have on apparently well-turned-out people, Levy is the only female British author to be nominated this year, and the only Jewish one."³⁸ The Holocaust survivor Joe Jacobs suffers a trauma disrupting his character and causing life-long depressions. Kitty feels attracted to the author and womanizer. This can be understood as a story of attraction between two depressed people, but this would not take into account the extent to which the narrative opens up the horizon of a survivor's experience step by step, connecting the present and the past, the suffering of loss and the hope of relief and a return home.

Levy, who in the interview with Marina Gerner names Kafka and Freud, among others, as her favorite authors,³⁹ enters the world of the subconscious in *Swimming Home* having Kitty acting as a catalyst on several levels of the narrative. On the one hand, Kitty is the stranger who breaks up a marriage, as Julia Pascal writes in her poignant summary in the *Independent*: "Deborah Levy's storytelling is allusive, elliptical and disturbing. Her gift is to show how one person can raise the substructure under a husband and wife's relationship [...]; it is also a probing into the nature

³⁶ Deborah Levy, *The Cost of Living: A Working Autobiography* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018, Kindle).

³⁷ Levy, *The Cost of Living* (above, note 36).

³⁸ Marina Gerner, "It's not the worst thing that has ever happened to me," *Jewish Chronicle* (21 October 2016), at: <https://www.thejc.com/culture/books/looking-for-the-answers-1.54254>.

³⁹ Gerner, "Not the Worst Thing" (above, note 37).

of childhood trauma, exile, depression and creativity."⁴⁰ On the other hand, Kitty reaches out to Joe Jacobs wounded subconscious.

On the first page of the novel, the story is actually told: "He [Joe] asked her again to please, please, please drive him safely home to his wife and daughter. 'Yes,' she said. 'Life is only worth living because we hope it will get better and we'll all get home safely.'"⁴¹ The different expectations of what "home" denotes eventually unfold in a tragic manner. Joe shoots himself, while Kitty, who seeks to overcome her life's sadness in this sexual relationship, survives.⁴² Suicidal thoughts plague Joe and Kitty.⁴³ Levy refers to the surrealists when she prefaces the novel with a quotation from *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924). It described the dream as a path to suicide, not consciously chosen by us, but longed for as a solution: "On vit, on meurt. Quelle est la part de la volonté en tout cela? Il semble qu'on se tue comme on rêve."⁴⁴ In the end, Joe also succumbs to this temptation because he does not realize that he owes it to himself to bring the power of the dream into his consciousness: "We are all at the mercy of the dream and we owe it to ourselves to submit its power to the waking state."⁴⁵ In his afterword, writer Tom McCarthy provides the clue to an understanding of Kitty's function in the narrative as a "teenage girl who will emerge as the novel's real protagonist, inheritor of its historical traumas."⁴⁶ Joe Jacobs (real name: Jozef Nowogrodzki) can barely cope with the trauma of his childhood. Kitty gives Joe her poetry to read and then seduces him. Joe is aware of what is happening, but cannot resist because he is virtually addicted to love: "It shouldn't be happening, his search for love in her, but it was. He would go to the ends of the earth to find love. He was trying not to, but the more he tried not to search, the more there was to find."⁴⁷

Returning from a reading tour in Poland, Joe is asked at the border if he has any caviar to declare: "I'm taking my black oily past out of the country and it belongs to us both. It goes like this. My father said goodbye, etc. My mother said goodbye, etc. They hid me in a dark forest in western Poland, etc."⁴⁸ Kitty insists on Joe reading her poem "Swimming Home", and explains that she wrote it to reach out

⁴⁰ Julia Pascal, review of *Swimming Home* by Deborah Levy. *Independent* (24 October 2011), at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/swimming-home-deborah-levy-2373451.html>.

⁴¹ Deborah Levy, *Swimming Home*. Afterword by Tom McCarthy. (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p. 26.

⁴² Levy, *Swimming*, p. 156 (above, note 40).

⁴³ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 21 and 77 (above, note 40).

⁴⁴ *La Révolution Surréaliste* (December 1924), at: http://melusine-surrealisme.fr/site/Revolutionsurrealiste/Revol_surr_1.htm (accessed 10 January 2021).

⁴⁵ Motto of *Swimming Home* from *La Révolution surréaliste*.

⁴⁶ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 160 (above, note 40).

⁴⁷ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 89 (above, note 40).

⁴⁸ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 91 (above, note 40).

to him: "My poem is a conversation with you and no one else."⁴⁹ Falling in love with Kitty, Joe talks more and more about his trauma: "His father had tried to melt him into a Polish forest when he was five years old. He knew he must leave no trace or trail of his existence because he must never find his way home. That was what his father had told him."⁵⁰ While Joe wonders what "catastrophe lived inside Kitty Finch"⁵¹, he tells her that "he had read her poem and that it been ringing inside him ever since."⁵²

In the end, Kitty leads Joe to an avoidable suicide. He feels understood by her and believes he can free himself from the past. Kitty announces this to him early in the novel, without fully foreseeing the consequences: "you tried and you did not get home safely. You did not get home at all. That is why I am here, Jozef. I have come to France to save you from your thoughts."⁵³ Joe knows the hidden power of the past in the present. Kitty's nudity, so often celebrated in the novel, thus represents not only sexual seduction but also vulnerability. This vulnerability makes her a catalyst of change: "Standing next to Kitty Finch was like being near a cork that had just popped out of a bottle. The first pop when gasses seem to escape and everything is sprinkled for one second with something intoxicating."⁵⁴ Although, neither Joe's wife nor his daughter, let alone Kitty behave like self-conscious feminist women, it would be wrong to assume that the story does not link Joe's search for relief from his suffering to a liberation of women from roles that were imposed on them by Joe's destructive tampering with his traumatizing past. Therefore, the catastrophe of Joe's suicide does not conclude the story. After his death, Isabel talks publicly about his trauma as a child,⁵⁵ because she does not have to fight him any longer. His daughter starts reassessing the relationship to her father and when she gets rid of her anger, does not live in denial any longer. At the end she accepts that the memory of her father's trauma continues to live on in the conversations with her father about the past: "I have never got a grip on when the past begins or where it ends."⁵⁶

The Jewish backdrop of the story in *Swimming Home* is much more explicit, but not necessarily more important than in Brookner's novels. Kitty suffers a different trauma, but she is connected to Joe and therefore eventually also helps his wife and his daughter to reconnect to his past and to accept it in their present. Kitty becomes a mediator of generations. This gives Isabel and Nina the freedom to

⁴⁹ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 89 (above, note 40).

⁵⁰ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 143 (above, note 40).

⁵¹ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 145 (above, note 40).

⁵² Levy, *Swimming*, p. 146 (above, note 40).

⁵³ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 26 (above, note 40).

⁵⁴ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 36 (above, note 40).

⁵⁵ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 153 (above, note 40).

⁵⁶ Levy, *Swimming*, p. 157 (above, note 40).

liberate themselves as women. As much as the reader feels pity for Joe's traumatizing fate as a survivor, it is also obvious that his trauma becomes part of a patriarchal oppressiveness that victimizes the subaltern women in his life. Therefore, the novel ends with Nina's emancipation not only from her father but also from his past. At the end of the novel she is a Jewish woman connected to the past but not ruled by it any longer. The true survivors of this novel are its female characters. They are no longer ruled by dreams in the sense of Levy's motto, but live a self-determined life.

The third generation of Jewish women writers do not abandon the traumatizing past of the Shoah, but Jewish life is made a visible and recognized topic of their novels. While the novels of Brookner, Grant, Levy and others could be read as British novels that happen to have Jewish characters and topics at a closer look, this changes in the generation of Charlotte Mendelson, Naomi Alderman and Natasha Solomons.

All three writers are characteristic of what Gilbert says about the fluidity of Jewishness in 21st-century British literature:

In twenty-first-century Britain, Jewishness is one difference among many. Contemporary British Jewish writers highlight the desire to identify the particularity of their difference, while acknowledging that such difference is neither fixed nor final, but always open to change, re-signification and reinterpretation. In this context, Jewishness is an evolving term.⁵⁷

Charlotte Mendelson (born 1972) received prestigious awards for several of her novels. *Almost English* (2013) was not only longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, but won the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction. *Almost English* is a coming-of-age story of a Jewish adolescent whose family immigrated from Hungary. Marina is the third-generation child to a family that has never entirely 'arrived' in England. Her grandparents were "born in Czech towns in the Trans-Carpathian mountain region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, educated in Russian, citizens of extinct Ruthenia, cooking and talking and sounding entirely Magyar but considering themselves simultaneously Hungarian Czechs, grateful Labour-voting English citizens and loyal subjects of the *Kveen*."⁵⁸

Marina does not feel really English when she sees her grannies' hand gestures, which are "a little more extravagant than those found in Surrey, their eyebrows more dramatic, their hair swept back like something from *Nosferatu*."⁵⁹ The narra-

⁵⁷ Ruth Gilbert, "Jewish, Half-Jewish, Jew-ish: Negotiating Identities in Contemporary British Jewish Literature," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Modern Jewish Fiction*, ed. David Brauner and Axel Stähler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 220.

⁵⁸ Charlotte Mendelson, *Almost English* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2013), p. 396.

⁵⁹ Mendelson, *Almost English*, p. 6 (above, note 58).

tor uses the stereotypical references to English anxieties of the Continent associated with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.⁶⁰ Marina does not even know where her grandparents' homeland is situated.⁶¹

Marina feels lost and whenever she tries "to joke them into revealing something" she never gets an answer.⁶² The conflict between 'rational' England and 'superstitious' Eastern Europe also represents her experience of Jewishness. Marina's problems in defining her Jewishness resonate with similar statements about Jewish-British literature. David Brauner (following David Cesarani) comes to the conclusion that Jewish-British culture is "characterized by 'a tradition of self-deprecation and a lack of collective self-esteem', paralyzed by the deeply-ingrained fear that to assert itself would be to risk raising the spectre of anti-Semitism, and awed by American-Jewish culture into a perennial inferiority complex."⁶³ Mendelson does not deny this feeling but rather ridicules it by positioning it in the wider context of British xenophobic concepts about the Continent and Eastern Europe in particular.

To become a grown-up, Marina must liberate herself not only from antisemitic assumptions she encounters in society but also from her grandparents: "The problem is that Marina has changed. She can bear their scrutiny no longer because her life is a disaster, and it is her fault."⁶⁴ Mendelson's approach to her Jewishness and also to the Shoah is more independent than both Grant or Levy might have allowed for, because she uses irony. "She is small and primitive, like someone in a Brueghel."⁶⁵ She realizes that she looks like a foreigner to British people and not like a Jew: "What else are you? [...] You look like you should be ululating at Mafia funerals. Spanish? I don't know. Not Greek?" [...] 'English,' she says. 'Is that so?'"⁶⁶

English xenophobia and the matriarchal traditions that still root her in Eastern Europe create an environment of mutual alienation. Eventually, it is the relationship with her mother that helps Marina to accept conflicting origins and to find her own position in society.

Naomi Alderman (born 1974) gained a reputation with her novel *Disobedience* (2006). The novel's main character, Ronit Krushka, is a bisexual Orthodox Jew who leaves her family in Hendon, London, but returns home from New York when her father, a renowned rabbi, dies. The Orthodox Jewish community at Hendon rejects

⁶⁰ See Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 73-87.

⁶¹ Mendelson, *Almost English*, p. 131-132 (above, note 58).

⁶² Mendelson, *Almost English*, p. 41 (above, note 58).

⁶³ David Brauner, *Post-War Jewish Fiction: Ambivalence, Self-Explanation and Transatlantic Connections*. (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) p. 20.

⁶⁴ Mendelson, *Almost English*, p. 7 (above, note 58).

⁶⁵ Mendelson, *Almost English*, p. 128 (above, note 58).

⁶⁶ Mendelson, *Almost English*, p. 129 (above, note 58).

Ronit. Things get worse when Ronit discovers that her former lover Esti is supposed to marry her cousin Dovid, her father's successor. Ronit's statement about the situation of women in Hendon's orthodox community is full of bitterness and irony:

We don't condone wife-beating here, or genital mutilation, or honour killings. We don't demand head-to-toe coverings, or cast-down eyes, or that a woman must not go out in public unaccompanied. We are modern. We live modern lives. All we demand is that women keep to their allotted areas; a woman is private, while a man is public. The correct mode for a man is speech, while the correct mode for a woman is silence.⁶⁷

Esti knows that Ronit is "fleeing from silence"⁶⁸ rather than her Jewish faith⁶⁹ and that she rejects the notion that only marriage makes a woman "a full human being".⁷⁰ Upon her arrival at Hendon, Ronit defends the decision to have left her family.⁷¹

Alderman makes her orthodox origins the topic of her first novel. The discrimination of women in the Orthodox community is discussed in the context of a diverse society reminiscent of Deborah Feldman's *Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots* (2012). Jewishness is introduced here as one of many examples of how religion restricts gender roles. Politically speaking, Alderman fights for women's rights as a feminist first and then as a Jew. Her novels partake in society's discourse on feminism redefining Jewishness.

Natasha Solomons was born in 1980 and lives in Dorset where *The Novel in the Viola* (2011, published in the US as *The House at Tyneford*) is situated. It is reminiscent of *Jane Eyre* in its plot where the master of the house falls in love with the maid (who is not actually a maid) and of Du Maurier's *Rebecca* in its style and Manderley-esque country house. It is a romance and a coming-of-age novel, where at the beginning religious identity, faith and sense of belonging are almost non-existing, except for the strong belief in family. With the aim to save her life, Elise Landau is sent by her Viennese bourgeois family to Dorset, where she suddenly goes from being her family's "pet, their *liebling*, to be cosseted and adored"⁷² to the house maid of the Rivers family, ordered to be invisible by the other servants, forced to cut her hair and considered an uncomfortable embarrassment for her German accent and Jewishness. Her overall otherness (assisted by the arrival of the war in England) manages to disrupt and to cut a rift through all layers of class and social mores she comes across. A lady who is jealous of her exemplifies this: "You've cast some spell over Kit. You Jewesses. You're nothing special to look at.

⁶⁷ Naomi Alderman, *Disobedience* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2006), p. 242.

⁶⁸ Alderman, *Disobedience*, p. 221 (above, note 67).

⁶⁹ Alderman, *Disobedience*, p. 221 (above, note 67).

⁷⁰ Alderman, *Disobedience*, p. 139 (above, note 67).

⁷¹ Alderman, *Disobedience*, p. 14 (above, note 67).

⁷² Natasha Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola* (London: Sceptre 2011), p. 12.

But men can't resist."⁷³ On the so-called *Kristallnacht*, the same lady, Diana, rubs it in even further: "I hear there are problems with your kind at home. Such a shame for you. Not wanted there. Not wanted here."⁷⁴ The fact that Elise is neither a servant nor middle-class in England, but in a painful state of stuck in-between, makes her question her identity, as an Austrian, as a woman, and as a Jew.

Elise's family is "not religious in the slightest"⁷⁵. She comes from a world where music and literature are prioritized and intertwined with religious snippets that make the stories from the Torah and the Bible sound like "the wild and unlikely plots of operas"⁷⁶. She tells of her mother Anna, an opera singer, that she

wanted Margot and me to understand a little of our heritage and at bedtime told us stories from the Torah alongside tales of 'Peter and the Wolf' and 'Mozart and Constanze'. In Anna's hands, Eve was imbued with the glamour of Greta Garbo, and we pictured her lounging in the Garden of Eden, a snake draped tantalisingly around her neck, a besotted Adam (played by Clark Gable) kneeling at her feet.⁷⁷

They are not practicing Jews, never going to the synagogue, eating non-kosher food, "Viennese-Jews but, up till now, the Viennese part always came first."⁷⁸ The first Passover the Landaus really celebrate is a farewell for their daughter the evening before Elise leaves for England on a 'domestic service visa',⁷⁹ and it is met with some astonishment by the Landau daughters. But in Dorset, as soon as Elise is put in the position of having to say Grace with the other servants, she refuses to, and calls herself a Jew for the very first time in her life, fearing that prayers from the wrong God would distance her from her family even further.⁸⁰ Later on, her Jewishness becomes a source of frustration, powerlessness and rage: "Because I'm a Jew. I am so tired of it. It's all I am anymore and I don't even know what it means. I eat pork and I hate God. But that's all I am to them."⁸¹

Elise functions as an omniscient narrator *and* a writer who is always tempted to change the events, be it the steps in the plot - and in history - that lead to the tragic fate of her family or for the simple wish to hold time still, but she always manages to refrain from doing so. What she does, though, is to transform memory into a tangible truth, and she writes down the events as they actually unfolded in the now blank novel that her father left her hidden in the viola, which becomes thus twice a

⁷³ Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 141 (above, note 72).

⁷⁴ Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 150, 151 (above, note 72).

⁷⁵ Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 23 (above, note 72).

⁷⁶ Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 23 (above, note 72).

⁷⁷ Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 23 (above, note 72).

⁷⁸ Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 24 (above, note 72).

⁷⁹ As did Solomons' great-aunt Gabi who inspired her character, see author's note Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 390 and 391 (above, note 72).

⁸⁰ Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 72 (above, note 72).

⁸¹ Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 203 (above, note 72).

palimpsest. Her character does change formidably throughout the novel, in the fast-forward way that war seems to accelerate growth and understanding. Elise at first loves the young man of the house Kit, and after he dies in France, she takes on a new identity as Alice Land, encouraged by Kit's father, who wants to protect her. 'Something English. So they won't take you away.'⁸² She accepts this because she has indeed become another person, or, as she puts it when at the end she finds herself loving Mr Rivers, she accepts her doubleness: "I am two women and I love two men."⁸³

Natasha Solomons' *The Gallery of Vanished Husbands* (2013)⁸⁴ is also worth mentioning, since her protagonist, with the telling name of Juliet Montague, who is arguably the most feminist of Solomons' heroines, undergoes a process of detachment from Jewishness, the opposite to that of several characters in novels discussed above. Emancipation as a woman, the discovery of sexuality and finding someone's true call, which for Juliet is art, drives her away from the Orthodox Jewish community.

The following chapter presents an overview of a very different Jewish literature. Post-war Germany showed hardly any interest in Jewish novels, particularly about the Shoah. This changed slowly until, for reasons different from the development in Great Britain, Jewish literature found a new voice in the period from the 1990s, when the so-called contingent refugees arrived, Jews from the successor states of the Soviet Union.

Jewish-German Women Writers⁸⁵

When one speaks of Jewish women writers in Germany before and right after the war, the first names that come to mind are those of great poets. Before 1945, these are, first and foremost, Else Lasker-Schüler, Nelly Sachs, Mascha Kaléko, Hilde Domin (who did not begin writing until after 1945), and Rose Ausländer and Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, who was born in Czernowitz (Bukovina). Some escaped the Nazis into exile and not all of them survived the Shoah. After 1945, the question arises whether one can speak of a continuation of this great tradition of female Jewish writing. Or did the Nazis succeed in irrevocably destroying this tradition?

⁸² Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 294 (above, note 72).

⁸³ Solomons, *The Novel in the Viola*, p. 377 (above, note 72).

⁸⁴ Natasha Solomons. *The Gallery of Vanished Husbands* (New York: Penguin, 2013).

⁸⁵ All translations of the German novel texts are by Christoph Houswitschka. The titles of the novels quoted in this section are translated verbatim into English unless there is an official translation of the novel available. In this case, the official title of the novel has been used.

A few years after the war, Jewish German-speaking women writers re-enter the German public sphere. Ilse Aichinger from Vienna wins the prize of the influential Gruppe 47 with her *Spiegelgeschichte* (*Mirror Story*). In her novel *Die größere Hoffnung* (*The Greater Hope*), she describes the persecutions by the National Socialists from the point of view of a child: Ellen's surreal visions tell of the fear and subversive hope of "children with the wrong kind of grandparents, children with neither a passport nor a visa, children who had no-one left to vouch for them."⁸⁶

In the following, I will focus on Jewish-German novels from the post-war period to the present. In his postdoctoral thesis *Die andere Erinnerung* (*The Other Memory*), Stephan Braese (2001) made it very clear that Jewish authors, particularly those who were traumatized by what had happened, were met with incomprehension by Germans in postwar society. In this context, Braese examined the work of Grete Weil, who tended to remain on the margins of the literary establishment in the Federal Republic.⁸⁷ She had survived persecution by the Nazi dictatorship in a hiding place in Amsterdam. In her novel *Tramhalte Beethovenstraat* (*Last Trolley from Beethovenstraat*, 1963), she tried to cope with her memories of Dutch exile. In the 1980s she became known to a wider public after all when she received the prestigious Geschwister-Scholl-Preis (a prize named after the Scholl siblings, who belonged to the non-violent resistance movement). Encouraged by this success, her work grew significantly.

In the following years, the so-called second generation of Jewish women writers emerged, among them Barbara Honigmann (born 1949), Esther Dischereit (born 1952), and, still somewhat younger, Eva Menasse (born 1970) and Gila Lustiger (born 1963).

Barbara Honigmann was born in East Berlin after her parents had returned from emigration to England. Before her birth, her mother was married in her first marriage to the double agent Kim Philby, who spied for the British and Soviet secret services. Barbara Honigmann's book *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* (*A Chapter from my Life*) tells this story. After studying performing arts, she first became a dramaturge and theatre director, then a freelance writer and painter after 1976. In 1984, the religious Jew left the GDR and moved to Strasbourg with her family. In 1999, she published the novel *Damals, dann und danach* (*Then, Then and After*), an episodic novel from which the idea of a childhood in the GDR emerges devoid of past and present:

Like so many Jews, I have my origins in almost all the countries of Europe, and I am sometimes a little proud of that, although there is no reason for it, because most of these

⁸⁶ Ilse Aichinger, *The Greater Hope*, translated from the German by Geoff Wilkes (Würzburg 2016), p. 7.

⁸⁷ Stephan Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung: Jüdische Autoren in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsliteratur* (Berlin/Wien: PHILO, 2001).

origins have long since been extinguished. They loom in the memory, like islands in the sea of exile. Migrations, expulsions, the desire to discover or simply business interests have brought my ancestors from one of these islands to the next, and there they have fared well or badly, until time had run out also on this island of exile. . . . So, almost all of these islands have already perished in a distant past, and exist only in legends and tales or fragments of tales about previous generations in an earlier time. Some of these islands, however, are still clearly visible in the present, or at least in a still very near past, in my parents' life stories and that of my own life.⁸⁸

Esther Dischereit has also been able to establish herself in the literary world: she was born in Heppenheim in 1952, and her works include many essays in addition to novels and poems. Her collection of stories with the incomplete title *Der Morgen an dem der Zeitungsträger* (*The Morning the Newspaper Carrier*)⁸⁹ shows her to be a brilliant storyteller. The first story stands out in particular: every morning, a woman listens for the newspaper carrier's footsteps in the stairwell. With a flourish, he throws the paper directly in front of the door. At first, the woman feels annoyed by this permanent noise, but soon she eagerly awaits him. The unknown messenger becomes a play on her imagination: what does he look like? What kind of character is he? One winter morning, when the fruit that the woman hung on the door handle in the evening has disappeared, she begins to send out hidden messages. It is not long before the woman is standing at the door's peephole in her nightgown, anxious, agitated. All the stories in this volume are similarly enigmatic. They are flashes of light related to unnamed characters that abruptly illuminate situations without resolving them. Often the narratives break off abruptly, remaining 'endless' stories in the literal sense of the word, which develop their existential effect precisely because of this. In addition, they almost always develop an erotic tension eventually unfulfilled but never entirely abandoned.

Gila Lustiger, the daughter of the historian Arno Lustiger, and Eva Menasse connect the second with the third generation of Jewish women writers.

In *So sind wir* (*That's How We Are*, 2005), Gila Lustiger traces her family history. Inspired by personal objects such as a paperweight, the novel is composed of concrete traces of memory and fictional passages. The European history of the Jews is examined in individual episodes. All of this is done with irony and a language that is casual and sometimes comical. This microcosm provides an unmistakably ironic view of European history, which is not in the least a history of the Jews: "The fact is that we, those born later, are haunted by the fear that we could prove ourselves unworthy, even the last whiner, the moment we give in to our worries and desires. Therefore, all those born after, believe they must take up the legacy

⁸⁸ Barbara Honigmann, *Damals, dann und danach* (München: Hanser, 1999), p. 89.

⁸⁹ Esther Dischereit, *Der Morgen an dem der Zeitungsträger. Erzählungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007).

of the saved and murdered by mastering even the most meaningless everyday life.”⁹⁰

Eva Menasse also belongs to the generation of those born after the Shoah. In her debut novel *Vienna*, she tells the life story of her Jewish-Catholic family.⁹¹ The focus is on her father, who was sent on a *kindertransport* to England where he forgot his parents and lost his language before going on to a great career as a national soccer player. The novel consists of a whole lot of anecdotes, each of which is very funny on its own and, all of them, together with the other short amusing stories, form a loose textual fabric that is held together mainly by the special rhetorical code of the anecdotal. In her second novel, *Quasicrystals*, Eva Menasse brings together thirteen chronologically arranged stories that tell the life of Roxane.⁹² First, she appears to be a minor character but finally grows into a more and more elaborated, major character. In the first chapter, Roxane is a schoolgirl; in the last chapter, she is a grandmother of two. From the seventh chapter on, Roxane becomes a first-person narrator. The last chapter consists of letters and e-mails written by the son Amos to his mother Xane (Roxane). The novel’s structure is extremely artful, imitating the physical structure of quasicrystals. Only recently, it was discovered that there are not only crystals with a clearly symmetrical structure, but also aperiodic and seemingly irregular ones. The story is told from a variety of perspectives, each of which intensively illuminates one facet of Roxane’s life journey. Only from some distance do these stories form a recognizable structure.

Which features are characteristic of Jewish-German women’s literature of the second generation? Thomas Nolden writes about the entire Jewish literature in Germany: “The stories and narratives stage . . . conversations between generations of Jews that so often could not take place in the real world because of the trauma of annihilation. The post-Holocaust authors establish . . . a relationship to the past of their ancestors reaching out into the silence. There, they encounter those who did not survive the Shoah and those who lack the words to tell about it.”⁹³

In the case of women authors, it is noticeable that their works predominantly deal with family stories. Female characters dominate their novels and stories. More and more, life stories unfold in these narrative experiments. Jewish characters after the Shoah are hesitant to plan their lives in a way to build stable conditions in one place. Rather, the texts discussed here emphasize aspects of female remembering and begin to find narrative forms that allow for multiple perspectives.

⁹⁰ Gila Lustiger, *So sind wir* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2007), p. 85.

⁹¹ Eva Menasse, *Vienna* (München: btb, 2007).

⁹² Eva Menasse, *Quasikristalle* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2013).

⁹³ Thomas Nolden, *Junge jüdische Literatur: Konzentrisches Schreiben in der Gegenwart* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1999).

Because memory remains incomplete, fictions fill the void left by the missing generation. To do this, second generation Jewish women writers have developed a variety of ‘tones’ that range from wit and irony to melancholy-tinged reflection.

What changes in the third generation?

We are made acquainted with a completely new generation of Jewish women writers who benefit considerably from the fact that the Jewish communities in Germany have grown since the 1990s. These immigrants from the former Soviet Union were called “quota refugees” recognizing that Germany in the 1980s did not see itself as an immigration country. The Law on “Maßnahmen für im Rahmen humanitärer Hilfsaktionen aufgenommene Flüchtlinge” (HumHAG) (“Measures for Refugees Taken in as Part of Humanitarian Aid Operations”) created an opportunity for Jews from the former Soviet Union to immigrate. The law did not determine how many would be allowed to come. Proof of Jewish descent was sufficient to enter Germany until 2005 when immigration laws became more restrictive again. About 230,000 people immigrated, but only half of them became active in Jewish communities.⁹⁴ Two groups arrived from Russia and the Successor States of the Soviet Union, Russians with German ancestry and Jews who wanted to escape growing anti-Semitism.⁹⁵ Among them are significant numbers of young women who came with their families as children and usually grew up bilingually, sometimes writing in two languages, but increasingly choosing German as their literary language.⁹⁶

It is amazing how quickly they established themselves in the literary world: Katja Petrowskaja, for example, won the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 2014 with *Vielleicht Esther* (*Maybe Esther*), a story from her collection of stories of the same title. Petrowskaja was born in Kiev in 1970 and started learning the language only two years before arriving in Germany.

The stories in *Vielleicht Esther* are only loosely connected; the subchapter “Ariadnefaden” (“Ariadne’s Thread”)⁹⁷ tells the story of her grandmother Rosa writing down her memories almost blind. Therefore, Rosa keeps overwriting the sheets of paper in a way that reminds one of a palimpsest: “One line ran into the next,

⁹⁴ See the figures in Sonja Haug, *Soziodemographische Merkmale: Berufsstruktur und Verwandtschaftsnetzwerke jüdischer Zuwanderer* (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. Workingpaper 8 der Forschungsgruppe des Bundesamtes, 2007), at: <https://archive.jpr.org.uk/download?id=2318> (accessed 3 January 2021).

⁹⁵ See in particular the anthology by Dmitrij Belkin and Raphael Gross, *Ausgerechnet Deutschland! Jüdisch-russische Einwanderung in die Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt am Main: Nicolai Publishing, 2010).

⁹⁶ See Sylvia Battegay, “Sprache der Stummen: Katja Petrowskajas *Vielleicht Esther* als literarische Praxis der Desintegration,” in *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies* 5 (2018), pp. 51-66.

⁹⁷ Katja Petrowskaja *Vielleicht Esther* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), pp. 61-69.

and another one lay atop earlier writing like waves of sand on the beach, obeying a force of nature, tangled up in the interlaced and interwoven pencil scribblings.”⁹⁸

The narrator gathers the sheets in a pile, initially hoping to decipher and interpret them. The structure of the palimpsest symbolizes the multiplicity of overwritten life stories, which make one thing clear above all else: that they do not continue the narrative of the victim-Jew but offer a multiplicity of very different Jewish ways of life.

In the following, I would like to briefly introduce further authors and further aspects of Jewish women’s writing and, finally, discuss the accomplishments of Jewish-German women’s literature discussing whether it makes sense to speak of Jewish-German literature any longer and, if so, in what context.

Olga Grjasnowa was born in 1984 in Baku, Azerbaijan, and came to Germany with her parents when she was eleven years old. In 2012, she published her debut novel, *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (*All Russians Love Birch Trees*). It became a bestseller and made this author almost as famous as Bachmann Prize winner Katja Petrowskaja. Soon after her second novel *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* (*The Legal Indeterminacy of a Marriage*), she published her third novel *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* (*God Isn’t Coy*) in 2017.

Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt (*All Russians Love Birch Trees*)⁹⁹ features a complex narrative structure of multiple story lines; it is also told using an analeptic form. Mascha mourns her suddenly deceased partner Elias, but even after his death she often imagines him next to her, and the reader is invited to understand this either as an analeptic memory or as a fantasy of the protagonist. Another narrative thread revolves around the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia; ultimately, a multitude of personal and socially relevant themes are brought together: experiences of war, flight and expulsion, language changes, questions of origin and belonging, but also characteristic problems of identity among young adults. The novel refuses a clear genre classification and plays with forms of memory culture, pop literature, and coming-of-age literature.¹⁰⁰ The novel deliberately works with exaggerations; its characters rather resemble psychologically unconvincing types.¹⁰¹ The novel is characterized by the fact that it does not allow

⁹⁸ Katja Petrowskaja, *Maybe Esther*, translated by Shelley Frisch (New York: Harper, 2018), p. 37.

⁹⁹ Olga Grjasnowa, *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (München: Hanser, 2012). In English: *All Russians Love Birch Trees*, translated by Eva Bacon (New York: Other Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ See Annabelle Jänchen, *Die dritte Stimme: Migration in der jüngeren deutschen Literatur* (Baden-Baden: Tectum, 2019), p. 55.

¹⁰¹ In this context, Chris Wilpert speaks of types that aim for the grotesque in “Traumatische Symbiose: Juden, Moslems und ein paar einsame Christen in Olga Grjasnowas *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*,” in *Heimat – Identität – Mobilität in der zeitgenössischen jüdischen Literatur*,

any notions of homogeneity but consistently pursues hybrid and transcultural writing strategies. Consequently, homeland is a problematic category, which sometimes arrives unexpectedly at abrupt sensory impressions giving way to a great dynamic of permanent change. The sensory impressions consist of sounds and smells triggering childhood memories and quickly dissolving again. Her Jewish origins do not define Mascha's life entirely. When Elias dies unexpectedly, she once again comes to terms with them but does not gain any orientation or comfort from them. She even wants to burn the Talmud in her stove.

Nora Isterheld writes the following about this novel:

Grjasnowa's first-person narrator vehemently resists identitarian attributions of any kind. Yet her contradictoriness consists precisely in the fact that she cannot do without them. Mascha does not look German or Jewish (cf. GrR 167, 265), but at the same time her physiognomy is indirectly characterized by these criteria. She neither belongs to a religious community (cf. GrR 266) nor does she want to be the representative of a nation, let alone the state of Israel (cf. GrR 63, 65). After Elias's death, she wants "something" right there, nevertheless (GrR 139). Mascha herself seems to keep putting fake play money into circulation in the grotesque "Jewish monopoly" (GrR 241) in which a Tel Aviv airport manager involuntarily involves her.¹⁰²

Not only is the multifaceted Jewish self-reflection a recurring theme in the texts of these Jewish women writers, but also everyday antisemitism and its consequences.

Mirna Funk's novel *Winternähe (Close to Winter)* places the antisemitic threat at the center of her narrative. The main character, Lola, grows up in Germany with her Jewish grandparents. As a photojournalist, she witnesses her photo being posted on Facebook with a Hitler moustache on it and takes legal action against it. She loses the case because in the eyes of the court she is a so-called Father-Jew. In this context, we encounter the novel's second layer of problems, which, as in many other novels, revolves around modern Jewish identity: who is a Jew? How do Jews live as Jews in the Diaspora today? How do young Jewish women, in particular, understand themselves? Among other things, the book deals with this:

Throughout her life, every person Lola had met decided her identity. Among Philo-semites she was Jewish, also among German Jews, because they were always surprised that apart from them more Jews had survived, and equally pleased not to have to be alone with their traumatic family constellations, into which absolutely every European Jew is

ed. Christina Olszynski, Jan Schröder and Chris Wilpert (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), pp. 59-73.

¹⁰² Nora Isterheld, "In der Zugluft Europas," in *Zur deutschsprachigen Literatur russischstämmiger AutorInnen* (Bamberg: Bamberg University Press, 2017), p. 354.

born. Only the Orthodox in Israel and the German anti-Zionists always gruffly pointed out that their Jewishness was entirely one of their imagination.¹⁰³

After various antisemitic incidents, Lola decides to go to Tel Aviv and meet Shlomo, a left-wing Israeli who attends funeral services of killed Palestinians out of shame and as a political commitment. The novel is set against the backdrop of the 2014 events in Israel: three Israelis kidnapped and killed, the death of a Palestinian teenager, and Palestinian bombs on Israel. Consequently, Shlomo's secret is revealed: as an Israeli soldier, he once shot a Palestinian boy and has therefore developed a guilt complex.

The character of Lola is reminiscent of Olga Grjasnowa's protagonist in *All Russians Love Birch Trees*. Both belong to a generation that thinks of itself in terms of its origins and explores them in a critical way and sets out to radically redefine them in the context of a globalized world.

Lena Gorelik is one of the more significant Jewish women writers from the former Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴ Born in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) in 1981, she came to Germany in 1992 and lived there for more than 18 months in a refugee home in Ludwigsburg (Baden-Württemberg). Her debut novel, *Meine weißen Nächte* (*My White Nights*, 2004), was called the best new novel about Germany. Her second book, *Hochzeit in Jerusalem* (*Wedding in Jerusalem*; 2007), was nominated for the German Book Prize. *Die Listensammlerin* (*The Collector of Lists*) earned Lena Gorelik another prestigious book award in 2014, the Buchpreis der Stiftung Ravensburger Verlag (Ravensburger Foundation Book Prize). Most recently, her novel *Mehr Schwarz als Lila* (*Rather Black than Purple*) was published by Rowohlt Berlin. This was considered to be a novel for both young people and adults. It uses a simple and witty language and develops a particular perspective on the culture of memory: what are the consequences of our actions when they go viral on social media? This is what happens with a calculated kiss that two teenagers exchange at Auschwitz, which then circulates in the media and causes fierce outrage. Lena Gorelik adds an important extension to the discussion about an appropriate culture of memory by talking about those who are confronted with it at schools: what defines a place of memory such as Auschwitz? How does one deal with it appropriately? What is a good way of dealing with the history of Auschwitz in the first

¹⁰³ Mirna Funk, *Winternähe* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2015, Kindle), pos. pp. 292-294. Translation was found on the homepage of the editor Fischer Verlag (12.10.2021); it has now been removed.

¹⁰⁴ On her work in the context of integration, see Ortwin Beisbart, "Was heißt gelingende Integration? Lena Goreliks literarische Wege der Selbstbestimmung," in *Identitätsdiskurs im deutsch-jüdischen Dialog*, ed. Norbert Honsza and Przemysław Sznurkowski (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2017), p. 77-95. (Polnische Studien zur Germanistik, Kulturwissenschaft und Linguistik, 7).

place? The subject didacticists immediately took up this suggestion, and in many schools this novel is now being read and discussed.

Among the immigrant authors from the former CIS states, arguably the largest group of young Jewish authors, the names of Olga Martynowa, Marina Frenk, and Julia Rabinowich should also be mentioned. Andrea Hünninger is especially worth mentioning here.

Andrea Hanna Hünninger was born in Weimar (1984), studied history and philosophy in Göttingen and Berlin. She emerged early on as a journalist (for *Die Zeit* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, among others). In her first book, *Das Paradies – Meine Jugend nach der Mauer* (*Paradise – My Youth after the Fall of the Wall*, 2011), she recounts the major changes of the 1990s from the perspective of children in East Germany:

I can't think of anything to say about God. But East Germany is full of churches. In elementary school, slips of paper were handed out. Two thirds of the second grade, in 1993, said they were Protestant. One could also have ticked either the 'Catholic' or the 'nothing at all', i.e. 'atheist' box. No cross was provided for 'Jewish'. I think because nobody believed that there still were any Jews here. And without this box available to be ticked off, Jews did not exist properly. My mother complained about this to the class teacher, who replied that her children should consider attending 'ethics classes'. At that time, I had no idea why my mother missed a box for the Jews on that form, she told us only much later.¹⁰⁵

Jewish life was probably not intended to exist in the GDR, as suggested by the protagonist in this novel, yet the thesis that there was no significant examination of the Shoah in GDR literature is now considered as at least partially refuted.¹⁰⁶ As striking and telling as this passage is, however, it is also clear that the book does not remain silent about Jewish traditions, but neither does it make it the focus of the confrontation of a young person in the GDR.

If what has been said so far still resembles a disorganized potpourri of remarks on current works by Jewish women writers in Germany (and possibly Austria), it seems nevertheless quite necessary to systematize what has been said.

The writing strategies pursued by Jewish Russian-German women writers demonstrate a very differentiated concept of Jewish life. Arguably, the concepts of identity as presented here overlap with other concepts in a globalized world.

¹⁰⁵ Andrea Hanna Hünninger, *Das Paradies – Meine Jugend nach der Mauer* (Stuttgart: Tropen, 2011), p. 145.

¹⁰⁶ See Carola Hähnel-Mesnard and Katja Schubert, eds., *Störfall? Auschwitz und die ostdeutsche Literatur nach 1989*. (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2016). Among the authors examined in this context are Barbara Honigmann and Jenny Erpenbeck, whose work is a constant examination of the Shoah. This aspect is taken into account in Friedhelm Marx and Julia Schöll, *Wahrheit und Täuschung: Beiträge zum Werk Jenny Erpenbecks* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014).

They negate any homogeneity and they show only little interest in religion. Female characters are highly contradictory in these novels and short stories and therefore are often presented as psychologically incoherent. They are sometimes typecast, exchanged, and replaced a little later and recourse to other set pieces of Jewish cultural memory. This includes the fact that the Jewish identity of young female protagonists is no longer seen in the context of Auschwitz, as Lena Gorelik shows. These novels imagine a comparatively multifaceted Jewishness that tends to leave the victim narrative behind. Nevertheless, it is not oblivious to history, as Katja Petrowskaja in particular makes clear in *Maybe Esther*. Here, the family traumas are explained before the backdrop of world history, when she relates the events in the Babi Yar ravine and the extermination machinery of the Mauthausen concentration camp.

In her study on authors of Russian descent in Germany, Nora Isterheld primarily dealt with Jewish women writers. In the last third of her extensive analysis, she introduced the concept of diaspora.¹⁰⁷ The term corresponds with fundamental questions to be asked of Jewish-German literature, such as whether it still seems reasonable to advocate the binary nature of the term at all. Isterheld writes:

If Jewishness in the texts of Russian-German writers is thus staged as a universal fate of the ephemeral and minority and not (any longer) a ‘bipolar interculturality,’ does this then result in the end of so-called ‘German-Jewish literature’ – to return to the opening question? Does its classification in such a category (still) make sense, or should it be rejected in analogy to ‘migration literature’ and its terminological offshoots because of its exclusive character, its formal binary logic, or because of altered lifeworld experiences and aesthetic innovations?¹⁰⁸

She replies to this question in the following way:

The strict bipolarity of this ‘negative symbiosis’ now seems to be gradually dissolving after the end of the Cold War. At any rate, writers from the former Soviet Union no longer see themselves as part of a community of victims. Rather, their texts illustrate ‘that the Holocaust is not a grand unified narrative, but consists of multiple layers of experience.’ In this respect, Braese is right when he believes that the term ‘German-Jewish literature’ has hardly analytical potential any longer, but that this generational concept ought rather to be understood metaphorically anyway.¹⁰⁹

In this sense, it is nevertheless important to point out that the young Russian-born Jewish women writers enrich the Jewish discourse in Germany as they con-

¹⁰⁷ See Isolde Charim and Gertrud Auer Borea, eds., *Lebensmodell Diaspora: Über moderne Nomaden* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012) and Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, eds., *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), pp. 19-20.

¹⁰⁸ Isterheld, “Zugluft Europas”, p. 357 (above, note 99).

¹⁰⁹ Isterheld, “Zugluft Europas”, p. 358 (above, note 99).

nect it with modern concepts of identity, which are able to feed on so many different elements and are no longer bound to only one or even two nationalities. Jewish female identity, as we could read in the novels and stories here, feeds on differences and diversities that are not negated but rather, by and large, stand for modern Jewishness in the Diaspora where Jews do not suffer any longer but gain in strength and cultural richness.

I would like to give the concluding words of my segment to Anna Schapiro. She is a visual artist in Berlin. She was raised by her Jewish-Russian grandmothers in the spirit of those who defeated Nazi-Germany:

For me, being Jewish means enduring seemingly incompatible things. To allow and live more than one thing. To live paradoxes. I find that enriching. After all, I am a Jew who lives in Germany and who is quite German, but also somehow Russian. What results for me from this is not a smooth picture, not a clear position, but always a weighing and questioning of my position, but also that of my counterparts or the situation in which I find myself.¹¹⁰

In conclusion, a comparison of Jewish literature in Great Britain and Germany since the Shoah shows great differences but also some significant similarities. Jewish literature gained a distinctive, but quite independent voice in the country of the perpetrators. Those who survived the Shoah initially found it difficult to make themselves heard and were easily overlooked or not understood by the literary establishment. This only changed when more and more literary texts about the Shoah were published and it was impossible to overlook them any longer. In post-war Great Britain, Jewish literature had no place in the nation's challenges of transforming the Empire into the Commonwealth. In the absence of a Holocaust memory, writing about the Shoah had not yet become part of the national narrative, with the exception of the foundation of Israel, which was interwoven with British colonial politics. Writing a Jewish voice was very often based on feminist accomplishments in the work of Jewish-British women. After the end of the Cold War, Jewish literature saw a growing number of women writers establishing themselves in the very diverse national literatures of both European countries. As a contribution to the rapidly changing British and German societies, Jewish literature provides just another voice among many representing diversity. Retaining its specific places in both national cultures, Jewish women writers have kept working to give Jewish voices more audible places in society. The future will show what impact Brexit and the emergence of Europe, a nationalist and supranational project, will have on Jewish literatures in Great Britain and Germany.

¹¹⁰ Mirna Funk, "Wir lebenden Juden, Deutschland vermisst jüdische Kultur? Hier sind wir und so denken wir. Ein Gruppenporträt der Dritten Generation, der Enkel von Holocaustüberlebenden in Berlin," *Die Zeit*, 31 July, 2016, at <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2016-07/juden-dritte-generation-kultur-intellektuelle-deutschland> (accessed 3 January 2021).