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and the country’s political development. Nina Berman’s description of an experiment at the Universität Göttingen gives us an alternative map for negotiating the multicultural landscape of contemporary Germany. The two articles on film take up aspects of German cinematic history that have long gone been ignored, especially by American scholars. And, finally, Hella Hennessee’s contribution exhibits the refreshing energies required by all of us to reawaken interest in German studies in our classrooms.

German studies have frequently looked elsewhere for theoretical and historical inspiration. When I began my own graduate studies, the field spoke of itself as being fixated on a nationalist canonical understanding. This perspective ignored the field’s unique feminist organization, “Women in German.” It also ignored Germany’s long history of exploration, colonization, emigration, and immigration, the understanding of which demanded the critical skills of postcolonial scholarship. This limited and limiting self-perception prevented Germanistik both in America and Europe from fully integrating the important contribution of the German film industry both to Hollywood’s ways of seeing as well as to alternative constructions of the cinematic gaze. Much of the work in this issue as well as much current scholarship not only proves that German studies have broken out of their conservative restraints, but it also suggests that these impediments may well have been an excuse for our own creative failure. The institutional prestige our discipline may have lost is in all likelihood based on canonical conceptions of the field of study. I hope that this collection of essays opens new, more inclusive channels of communication in the academy.

Contested Jews: The Image of Jewishness in Contemporary German Literature

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In 1985, three years after the death of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Günter Rühle, the intendant of the Frankfurt Kammerspiele decided to produce Fassbinder’s provocative play, Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod [Garbage, the City, and Death], but instead he created a national scandal. The real play was never performed. Instead, another kind of dramatic spectacle occurred with German Jews in the audience taking the stage while simultaneously, a thousand people gathered outside the theater and protested against the production of the alleged anti-Semitic play. Charges and counter-charges followed with Rühle, who was also the play’s director, supposedly asserting that “Schönzeit für Juden in Deutschland vorbei war.” Or, in other words, Germans should feel free to make Jewish targets of criticism because they were no longer to be considered an endangered species.

Despite the nastiness and trauma of this event, the so-called Fassbinder scandal was important for the Jewish community in Germany because it was the first time in postwar history that Jews of different generations and political persuasions united to voice their deep concern of how Jews were to be portrayed on the stage and in literature. Though the political action of the Jews was successful in stopping the production, it did not, however, answer many crucial questions that the demonstration raised. For instance, is there a correct way to represent Jews critically and positively in art? Is the situation in Germany such that Germans must be more careful than, let us say, Americans or French, in the manner in which they depict Jews? Is every negative portrayal of a Jew to be associated with anti-Semitism? If, until recently, as Rafael Seligmann has claimed in his book, Mit beschränkter Hoffnung, Jewish writers in Germany have not risen to the task of depicting the situation of German Jews and Jewishness in Germany with candor, how can one expect Germans to represent Jews in a forthright and free manner? To put the problem more provocatively, were German Jews upset by the Fassbinder play because Rühle was depicting a contemporary Jew in a critical manner in a way that contemporary Jewish artists had not done and
perhaps should have been doing?

Obviously, there are no simple answers to any of these questions, but they do point to a special dilemma for German writers that has not existed in other countries in the West. Due to the Nazi past, Germans are under great pressure to depict Jews in such a positive light that they may unwittingly contribute to philo-Semitism, which is just as insidious as anti-Semitism. It is a German dilemma, created by Germans. Most recently, after he delivered his Peace Prize Speech on October 11, 1998 in Frankfurt am Main, Martin Walser discovered just how difficult it is to try to plea for a "normal" relationship between Germans and Jews. He criticized the instrumentalization of the Shoah and asserted that there was such a thing as "the banality of good," meaning that Germans have been saturated with depictions of their shame, and that it is time for Germans to feel as though they were a very normal people and should be allowed to declare that enough is enough. Walser was taken to task by many critics for his insensitive remarks that insinuated Germans had been suffering too long from images of the Nazi past and should be able to discard them and turn away. In fact, though there may be indeed a kind of Shoah business and an instrumentalization of German Jewish history, unavoidable in capitalist societies that will commercialize anything, there is also a moral imperative to keep dealing with the sins and truth of the past. Walser may no longer realize or accept this moral imperative as his speech and recent novel, *Ein springender Brunnen* (1998) reveal, but fortunately there are many German and Jewish writers in Germany who have continued to reflect seriously and sensitively about the past to sort out the present state of Germans and Jews in a united Germany.

Given a situation in which German writers are morally obliged to include Jews if they want to deal with the past, a situation in which they know they will be damned because they cannot give an exact rendition of Jewish life, these writers have conceived Jewish figures in their fiction not to capture the essence of Jewishness but to define what it means to be German, just as Walser was endeavoring to do in his Peace Prize Speech. In short, the image of Jews in German literature is self-reflection. Here I am using the term reflection not only in the sense of mimesis but also critical contemplation. Since very little has been written on this particular issue, I want to review some of the key images of Jews in prose fiction as conceived by important German writers who have endeavored to come to terms with the past by treating the "Jewish question" as a "German dilemma," which needs to be resolved if Germany is to move beyond the shadow of its dark past.

**Preliminary Remarks**

In writing about the image of the Jew in German fiction there is the danger that a critic may claim to know implicitly or explicitly what the Jew and Jewish identity are or should be. Indeed, it is difficult to avoid using models or types taken from reality to analyze the representation of Jews in fiction. However, this essay is not an attempt to judge how well German writers have captured the "essence" of Jewishness and Jewish traits in their portrayals. Rather, I want to assess the manner in which postwar German writers have endeavored to break with Nazi stereotypes of Jews to deal with anti-Semitism and their own personal experiences vis-à-vis Jews. For the most part, Jewish figures in German literature are con-figurations; that is, they cannot be isolated as fixed types but are part of a process within the novel's plot movement. Concomitantly, they also figure in a socio-historical mode of reception that changes as relations between Germans and Jews keep shifting up through the present. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that there is no one current or movement in German literature that demonstrates a tendentious German way of portraying Jews in German literature.

In her important study, *Zur Gestaltung jüdischer Figuren in der deutschsprachigen Literatur nach 1945* [The Construction of Jewish Characters in German-Speaking Literature Since 1945], Christiane Schmelzkopf maintains that there are three discernible historical stages in the German representation of Jews in fiction. The first, approximately 1945 to 1960, is one in which German writers like Albrecht Goes, Walter Jens, and Luise Rinser undermine Nazi propaganda and depict Jews as noble and heroic symbols of humanity in keeping with the Lessing tradition of *Nathan der Weise*. Here Jews are, according to Schmelzkopf, too positive to be credible. The next phase, 1960 to 1972, is marked by the endeavors of German writers like Günter Grass and Alfred Andersch, who sought to overcome the Nazi past in their novels by means of the absurd. Whereas the characterization of the Jewish figures becomes more complex and differentiated in works by Grass and Andersch, Schmelzkopf argues that Jewish characters are used in an arbitrary manner more to expose the Nazi past and overcome it than to grasp the Jewish experience. In the third phase, 1973 to 1982, when Schmelzkopf completed her work, she sees the rise of old stereotypes like the ugly Jew in the works of Gerhard Zworenz, Herbert Achternbusch, and Passer that have been re-created to question the philo-Semitism of Germans and provoke greater reflection about the relationship of Jews and Germans. Summarizing these phases, Schmelzkopf comments:

If one looks at these examples of West German literature in which Jews are described, especially those of the ugly type depicted according to the old cliché as Gerhard Zworenz and Rainer Werner Fassbinder have done, and if one takes into account the explanations that these authors themselves have given—on the one hand the claim of an "objective" look at the historical situation, on the other, the rebellion against philo-Semitism that is felt to be imposed—then it may seem as if there has been a swing of a consciousness pendulum in the development of the literary thematicization of Jewishness from the good-intentioned figures of the early postwar times to the renewal of clichés of the 1970s. This swing indicates that, in spite of all the careful and thorough occupation with the past, we have not seen the development of a historically effective and thoughtful thinking and speaking about Jews and Jewish themes.

On the other hand, Schmelzkopf proposes that this is only one possible interpretation of German images of Jews. It is also possible to see an evolution in
the depiction of Jews that has enabled German writers to overcome their inhibitions and deepen their approach to the problems involved in depicting Jews. Moreover, the “negative” portrayal of Jews has its positive side, for it is crucial for German writers to have a certain Unbefangenheit [spontaneity] if they are to render Jews in their writings as complex individuals with different kinds of histories and backgrounds. Schmelzlelzenfobby tends herself to believe that, if one includes depictions of Jews by Jewish writers such as Friedrich Torberg, Nelly Sachs, Hilde Domin, Jeanette Landar, and Jurek Becker, the portrayal of Jews in German literature is positive, because the very nature of a one-dimensional Jewish identity is questioned, and these questions compel German and Jewish writers alike to reflect carefully about how they intend to use and characterize Jewish figures in their writings.

Although Schmelzkopf is helpful in describing certain tendencies in the manner in which Germans depict Jews, her approach to the problem of Jewish images is too schematic and literary, for she makes it appear as though there were a causal literary evolution that was somehow separate from social-political events and other cultural phenomena. For instance, the portrayal of the Jew in fiction cannot be separated from the way Jews are depicted in film, drama, poetry, television, and the mass media by non-Jews and Jews from 1945 to the present. The image of the Jew after Auschwitz was a contested figure in its configuration, and its configuration consisted in the manner in which the figure plays out its role in a particular work of art and at the same time is received by a reading/viewing audience that identifies or empathizes with this figure or rejects it. For instance, in the 1949 film Der Ruf, Fritz Kortner played a Jewish professor who returns to Germany and finds that he is a contested Jewish figure. His body or existence literally becomes the battlefield over which Germans and Jews are intent on defining their identities in post-Auschwitz society. In 1949 there were fierce protests by Jews against the showing of the British film Oliver Twist and the portrayal of the Jewish figure Fagin. Street demonstrations led to actual violent fights. Jewish bodies on and off the screen were marked by these occurrences. Throughout the postwar period to the present there have been significant political events and cultural productions forming the socio-historical public parameters and conditioning the way Germans and Jews perceived and portrayed Jews: “Anne Frank Week” in 1950 and the production of the play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett based on The Diary of Anne Frank in 1956; Max Frisch’s Andorra (1961); the Eichmann Trial (1961–62) in Israel as depicted in the mass media and in books such as Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann in Jerusalem; Rolf Hochhuth’s Der Stellvertreter [The Deputy] (1963); Peter Weiss’s Die Ermittlung [The Investigation] (1965); the Seven Days War in 1967; the 1979 telecast of the American television film “Holocaust”; the attacks on the Palestinians in Sabra and Schatilla in 1982; the Bittburg Affair (1983); the Historiker Streit (1986); the destruction of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989; the Persian Gulf War and German reactions to Israel (1990); the debate about the Jewish Memorial in Berlin (1995–present); and the Martin Walser affair (1999). The list could continue. All of these major events—and many others—fostered a charged atmosphere in Germany in which prose fiction was only one genre that contributed to the formation of a public image of Jews and Jewishness. However, one thing is clear in the prose fiction, no matter what the image is or who the author is—the figure of the Jew is a contested figure, an embattled individual, over whose body Germans seek to come to terms with the past and to project potentially new and more harmonious relations with Jews. In this regard the contested Jewish figure is also a figure of redemption. German authors are not interested in defining Jewish identity or capturing the essence of Jewishness in their works, and therefore, it would be wrong to analyze their Jewish figures on the basis of whether they appropriately depict Jews in a realistic or recognizable manner. Their Jewish figures are more significant for the manner in which they reveal German values, attitudes, and behavior and the ways that Germans have used Jews to identify themselves. As a Kunstfigur, the Jew in German fiction is a construct employed in the author’s narrative strategy to explore the relations between Germans and Jews at a certain time in history and to reflect upon the possibility of altering the relations so that Germans and Jews do not have to operate on each other’s bodies to attain a sense of their identities. The possibility for mutual recognition is often projected through the configuration of the Jew in German fiction so that the Jew’s body no longer has to be a battlefield of identity.

Let us turn now to some of the portrayals of Jewish figures in German fiction to examine how the contested Jew has and continues to shed light on German social life and attitudes. My examples are selected historically from 1948 to the present. This chronological account is not intended to show the evolution of an image or the growth of German consciousness about Jews or Jewish identity. More important, I believe, is to reveal the variations of how the contested Jew is used to explore German cultural and social values within a historical context.

Variations of the Contested Jew

Forgotten by the public but not by Wolfgang Koeppen, Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch [Sketches from a Hole in the Ground], a documentary novel written by Koeppen under the pseudonym Jakob Littner and published in 1948, was reprinted in 1992 as part of the Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag. As Koeppen explains in his new preface, a Berliner by the name of Herbert Kluger founded a publishing company in Munich and needed someone to write an account about the experiences of Jakob Littner, a Munich stamp collector, who had somehow escaped the hell of Nazi persecution.

The Jew told the new publisher that his God had held his hand over and had protected him. The publisher listened. He took down notes about places and dates. The survivor was searching for a writer. The publisher reported all the incredible things to me. I though I had dreamed it. The publisher asked me: ‘Do you want to write his story?’ The tormented man wanted to get out. He emigrated to America. He promised me an honorarium of two care packages a month. I ate American food from tin cans and wrote the story about the sufferings of a German Jew. Thus it
There is a similar situation in Luise Rinser’s story, *Jan Lobel aus Warschau* (1948). Here a Polish Jew escapes from a camp in Bavaria and is saved by Frau Olenski, who is in charge of the Gärtner family while her husband is fighting in the war. The intrusion of the Jew as der Fremde [the stranger] in the household causes each of the figures—the stepdaughter Julia, the young son Thomas, the old mother-in-law, the farmhand Franz, and the female narrator, who is a painter—to assume some position of tolerance or hostility toward Jan Lobel. The time is 1945, and at one point, Jan must flee SS troops. However, he returns when the war is over and begins living openly with the Olenski family, which becomes stigmatized by the villagers because a Jew is living on the farm. When the man of the family returns from the war, he is disturbed by Jan’s presence but does not want to throw him off the farm. Nevertheless, Jan himself realizes that he cannot stay without “destroying” the entire family. So, he departs, and we learn through the narrator that Jan Lobel drowned while trying to gain illegal entry to Palestine two years later. Interestingly, we also learn that the narrator is probably Jewish and had concealed her identity during the Nazi period, for when Julia Olenski asks her whether she is crying for Jan at the end of the story, the narrator responds: “No, no,” I said rashly. ‘I’m crying about all the homeless people.’ She looked at me attentively and then deeply horrified, and I realized from her look that it was no longer necessary for me to tell her the truth.”

The ironic twist at the very end of the story compels the reader to reflect whether it is possible to know who a Jew is. But, the Germans in this tale do define themselves via the Jew Jan Lobel, and it is this process of defining “Germanness” that interests Rinser. Written and set in 1947, Rinser’s narrative reveals that order has been restored in Germany. The nursery business is flourishing; the family is intact; the villagers are once again friendly toward the Olenskis. However, Jan Lobel has perished, and the narrator, anxious about her identity, remains homeless. It appears that Germany’s resurgence after World War II will be at the cost of Jewish suffering and trauma. The behavior of Germans toward the Jews has already been repressed by 1947, and the Jewish narrator is apparently afraid to make herself known, except for unusual circumstances.

While Rinser shows how the marks of German anti-Semitism were erased or repressed after World War II through German treatment of the figure of the Jew, Albrecht Goes’s story, “Das Brandopfer” ["The Burn Victim"] (1954) reveals that the scars will never go away. Goes’s story takes place during the 1950s in a small southern German city. A young assistant librarian has rented a room in the house of the Walkers, who own a butcher shop referred to as the “Judenmetzger” by people in the town. Through conversations with Frau Walker, who has a scar from *Brandmal* [a burn] on her face, he learns that, in 1942, the butcher shop had been turned into the only place that Jews could buy their meat once a week on Fridays. Since Herr Walker had gone to war, Frau Walker was placed in charge of the shop and had such great empathy for the Jews, who are beaten and humiliated before her eyes, that she tried to sacrifice herself during a bomb raid to take on the sins of the Germans. However, she was saved by a Jewish acquaintance, Herr Berendson, formerly a publisher, who risks his life to rescue
her and then escapes to London the very next day. Frau Walker believes that God was unwilling to accept her sacrifice, and in the postwar years she devotes herself to various causes intended to bring about better understanding between Germans and Jews. At the same time, the assistant librarian learns by chance that the man who saved Frau Walker is the father of his colleague, Sabine Berendonk, and this Jewish exile writes a letter in which he explains what happened to him during the war and how he saved Frau Walker. But he does not send greetings to Frau Walker, nor does he express any desire to return to Germany. The librarian concludes, after piecing together Frau Walker’s story, that the scar on her face reveals that no one can take the sins of the world on his or her shoulders. Indeed, he states, “that they have all been preserved for some other service—he, too, the complicitor, also Sabine, who was miraculously involved, and Sabine’s father, the saved savior. Of course, it should remain erected in the scar on the face of the woman, the sign, and it should not be read other than as a sign of love, that love which holds the world together.”

Once again, Goes is not concerned with portraying noble and suffering Jews, but through different types of Jewish figures he wants to convey a religious message of redemption. The Jews are configured into the plot to illuminate the German crimes and sins of the past through the Brandmal, and the young narrator is Goes’s hope for the future because he acts and reacts to the Nazi past and the Jewish figures in a manner that may help him build a different type of Germany. As symbol, the Brandmal is now burned into his conscience, and through the Jewish figures and the German involvement with the Jewish figures, that is, through the configuration, he has an opportunity, as do German readers, to redefine “Germanness” in the postwar years.

All three authors, Koeppen, Rinser, and Goes, have written other works that incorporate Jewish figures to reflect upon German attitudes and behavior during and after the Nazi period. Koeppen has a character named Henriette in Tauben im Gras [Pigeons in the Grass] (1951) refuse to return to Munich, portrayed almost like the inferno, because of what happened to her and her family during the Nazi regime. Indeed, she will not have her Jewish body and soul tormented again, and as we witness the strange and sordid chain of events in Munich, we realize that Miriam is correct in keeping her distance from Germany. Rinser, too, has also confronted the Nazi past in other novels such as Der schwarze Esel [The Black Ass] (1974) and Mirjam (1983), in which Jewish figures play a pivotal role in determining the integrity or perversion of Germans. Goes has written several poems such as “Davids Traum” (1960), “Die Langverstossene” [“The Castaway”] (1961), and “Gespräch mit dem Rabbi” [“Conversation with the Rabbi”] (1961), in which Jewish characters are employed symbolically to suggest a reconciliation between Germans and Jews.

In other German fiction of the 1950s, Jewish figures are provocatively employed to keep the past alive so that German memory will not be allowed to relapse into amnesia. If suffering occurred during World War II and many Germans were victimized, the Jewish figures are depicted intentionally to point out that it was first and foremost over Jewish bodies that Germans brought about their own suffering. This is the case in Heinrich Boll’s Wo warst du, Adam? [Where were you Adam?] (1951), Walter Jens’s Der Blinde [The Blindman] (1951), Hans Werner Richter’s Sie fielen aus Gottes Hand [They Fell from God’s Hand] (1951), and Alfred Andersch’s Sansibar oder der letzte Grund [Sansibar or the Last Reason] (1957). Of course, the Jewish figures are developed in different ways to point to the senselessness of the Nazi brutality, as in the case of Boll’s work, or toward reconciliation of Germans and Jews in the present as in the case of Jens’s story. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, that is, during the height of the economic miracle, many other authors such as Martin Walser, Siegfried Lenz, Wolf-Dietrich Schnurr, and Alexander Kluge used Jewish figures to critique the prosperity of the West Germans and to draw parallels to show that the German welfare state was based on the destruction of European Jewry.

Among the authors of the “new generation,” intensely critical of the continuities between Nazi Germany and the Bundesrepublik, Günter Grass became the author who continually incorporated Jewish figures into his novels to demonstrate how Germans perverted history to make it seem that they suffered more than the Jews. In Die Blechtrommel [The Tin Drum] (1959), Sigmund Markus, the owner of the toyshop, is a key figure throughout the novel, even though he commits suicide in 1938. It is Markus who provides Oskar with all his drums that will enable him to play the music that exposes the hypocrisy and deceit in Nazi Germany and in West Germany. Symbolically, Markus incorporates the German-Jewish symbiosis: he is in love with Oskar’s mother and the city of Danzig, but this love is unrequited, and due to the rejection he eventually takes his own life. This loss, according to Grass, must be made good somehow by Germans, stirring German amnesia and complacency. In Die Hundekopfe [Dog Years] (1963), Grass creates another strange but significant German-Jewish symbiosis between Edi Amsel, a Jew, and Walter Matern, the son of a miller. It is Matern who, during the early 1930s, protects Amsel and then turns against him. Beaten and deceived, Amsel transforms himself and conceals his identity during the Nazi period as a ballet director named Haseloff, and after the war he undergoes another metamorphosis as a businessman named Brauxel. Compelled to abandon his “Jewish” identity in the 1930s, Amsel rises during the postwar period to question the degradation of German identity. It would seem that his function, like that of Oskar’s drums given to him by Markus, is a critical artistic one that will use all kinds of subterfuge and artifice to depict how Germans have not overcome the past. In Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke [From the Diary of a Snail] (1972), Grass raises questions again about the Nazi past. He argues that the German-Jewish symbiosis that must be reformed and become a living part of the German future, if Germans are to recreate their society along democratic and humanistic lines. Based on his diary notes that he took as he campaigned for the Social Democratic Party during the 1969 elections, Grass sets up a narrative structure that enables him to describe contemporary political battles and those of the Nazi period. Since he returned home to Berlin on weekends during the election campaign to be with his children, he gives them reports about his experiences and
also answers his children's questions about his youth in Danzig and how the Jews were driven out and persecuted. The major character in his story is the teacher Hermann Ott, whose nickname is Dr. Zweifel. Since he helps and befriends Jews and eventually teaches at the Jewish high school in Danzig, Ott must flee the city in the early 1940s. He takes refuge in the cellar of a Polish bicycle shop, where the owner Stomma mistakes him for a Jew and mistreats him in a sadistic way. Since Ott collects snails and is as patient as a snail, he eventually triumphs over Stomma, cures his own daughter of an illness, survives his underground existence, and goes to the Bundesrepublik to begin a new, but skeptical existence. While Grass relates Ott's life, which is somewhat based on the Jewish literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki's life, he also documents his narrative with facts and statistics from Erwin Lichtenstein's book, Die Auswanderung der Danziger Juden (1968). However, Grass is not so much concerned with portraying authentic history and authentic Jews as he is with showing how reform in Germany must be slow and steady. Though not Jewish, Ott is often mistaken for a Jew, and it is through the non-Jew as Jew, through his humane acts and the vicissitudes of his existence, that Grass outlines a program for transforming Germans and German society.

In Grass's work, there is a panorama of Jewish types who cast doubt on the nature of democratic changes in West Germany while at the same time, they are figures of hope. In contrast, Gerhard Zwerenz's novel, Die Erde ist unbewohnbar wie der Mond [The Earth is as Uninhabitable as the Moon] (1973), is more pessimistic, for he conceives a ruthless character named Abraham Mauerstamm, based on the real life of Ignatz Bubis, the present head of the Jewish Central Council in Germany who operates as a real estate speculator in Frankfurt without a moral or political conscience. Unwittingly, he therefore contributes to the worst aspects of West German capitalist society.

Abraham was obsessed by the desire of dominating other people so that he would not be dominated. He was the first real estate owner to raise rents and thought up new charges and expenses. His mind functioned superbly. His thinking was directed toward security in the present and the future. His feeling was finely tuned to the slightest change in the climate that suggested a threat. In the city there was a rumor spread about what his mother, the teacher was supposed to have said one time as she shook her head: what an attitude—a cutthroat, who instead of stabbing with knives, he stabs with apartments.23

Though this image of Abraham may serve anti-Semitic sentiments, Zwerenz did not intend to write an anti-Semitic book. His major purpose was to demonstrate how a Jew, whose sufferings under the Nazis transformed him into a brutal individual, had to become as ruthless as his German contemporaries to survive in the Bundesrepublik.24 In this respect, Abraham is one result of the Nazi experiments and figures into the postwar configuration in which Jews are often exploited by Germans either to show how philo-Semitic the Germans are or how the capitalist/communist Jews have not changed.

As we know, the experiments on Jewish bodies were vast during the Nazi period; one of the most powerful portrayals of how Jewish figures were devastated in excruciating ways is Alexander Kluge's short story "Liebesversuch" in his book Lebensläufe [Case Histories] (1962).25 Told in Nazi jargon in the form of an objective interview between a reporter and doctor, Kluge depicts how the German scientists sterilized two persons of the opposite sex and then brought them together with champagne and soft music to see if they would have sexual intercourse and if their sterilization worked. If it does not and the woman becomes pregnant, it is clear that the Nazis will exterminate her. However, in this case, the two "guinea pigs," a Jewish man and a German woman, who had been lovers before their incarceration, refuse to cooperate, and the doctor is worried more about the experiment than the human beings whom he is destroying.

Kluge raises the question of the banality of evil during the Nazi period and in postwar Germany. To what extent have Germans become so detached from their feelings that they have lost sight of their humanity? To what extent do Jews in West Germany figure into the German configuration still as figures of an experiment? Other writers such as Uwe Johnson and Peter Härtling have also posed these questions in their works. Johnson's Jahrestage [Anniversaries] (1970–83)26 includes many different Jews in America and Europe who all bear witness through Johnson's multi-faceted perspective to the way Jews became contested figures because of the great Nazi experiment. Thus Oskar Tannenbaum's eight-year-old daughter is killed on Kristallnacht in Jerichow, and he and his wife flee in terror. Arthur Semig, the Jewish veterinarian, is compelled to take refuge in France. And, in New York, Gesine Cresspahl meets victims of concentration camps whose stories are still part of their everyday lives. In Härtling's Felix Gutman (1985),27 there is another survivor of the Nazi period, a lawyer, who had defended anti-fascists and fled to Palestine in 1939. Härtling describes how Gutman returned to Frankfurt in 1948, resumed his practice as a lawyer, and did good works until he died in an accident in 1977. Härtling's point is that there are many Jews, everyday German citizens, who figure in German society without Germans realizing it. Consequently, he forces readers to ask why Germans want to distinguish themselves from Jews. That is, aren't Jews just as good Germans as the Germans themselves if not better?

The Unresolved German Question in the Contested Jewish Figure

To answer Härtling's implied question in his novel, one must first define what it means to be German in the period from 1945 to the present. Since this is next to impossible but nevertheless crucial for conceiving a notion of national identity, many German writers have used Jewish figures in their works to project images of what Germans should or should not be. In some respects, Härtling's Gutman or "guter Mann" is an exemplary symbolic model of the redeeming Jew as German. But, as we have seen, not all German writers are in agreement with Härtling or are as optimistic. The Jewish figures also reflect to what extent Jews are used and abused for philo-Semitic and anti-Semitic purposes in postwar Germany. Jewish figures can be found in numerous works of prose from 1945 to 1999, and as I have
tried to show in my short selection, most of the authors do not intend to reflect Jewish identity or Jewishness. Rather they are concerned with Germans and with their own German position vis à vis Jews. The authors conceive Jewish Kunstfiguren to work through their own personal views regarding the Nazi past and the position of Germans toward Jews in contemporary society. Certainly, in the process they draw Jewish stereotypes and fail to capture "authentic experiences" of Jews. Yet, in many instances, their works are highly significant because they point to the impossibility of categorizing Jews according to stereotypes and they insist that the Jewish question is really a German question. That is, to return to the present and Walser's quandary when faced with continual reminders of the Holocaust, Germans have problems with their own identity, and their struggles over what constitutes a good and pure German have been fought on the bodies and images of Jews.

Recent events in Germany indicate that Germans are still trying to discover who they are and what constitutes German national identity. Unfortunately, many Germans are still endeavoring to define themselves by extinguishing Jews, foreigners, and ethnic minorities. The consequences, as depicted in great novels such as Siegfried Lenz's Heimatmuseum [Heitage] (1978) and Uwe Johnson's Jahrestage [Anniversaries] (1970–83), are ironic and grotesque: normality in Germany is based on marred and ruined German existences and identities. The path to a new German national identity, as German writers have tried to depict in various ways, cannot be over and through Jewish figures in reality, and yet, it is crucial that Jews are depicted by German writers as contested figures, for as Gerhard Zwerenz has stated: "When we talk about Jews after Auschwitz, we are talking about ourselves. We must all come clean with ourselves, each one of us, entirely alone."29

NOTES

1. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Der Moll, die Stadt und der Tod. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1981.
2. He writes "The longer Germany's Jewish writers do not dare to declare their 'ugly' hate for the murderers and their people, the more their souls will be destroyed, while the fear of expressing their own feelings will leave their hearts cold. The terrible silence of Germany's Jews signals their spiritual and social extinction." See Seligmans, Mit beschränkter Hoffnung. Juden, Deutsche, Israelis (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1991), 137.
4. Among the critics were Henkry Broder, Rafael Seligmans, Saul Friedländer, and Michaea Brumlik.
10. Ibid., 39.
11. Luise Rinser, Jan Lobel aus Warschau (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1952), 83.
23. Gerhard Zwerenz, Die Erde ist unbewohnbar wie der Mond (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1973), 104.
24. "The aesthetics of the Erde novel is close to Jünger's writing, which is a seemingly unemotional writing, the endeavor to achieve extreme objectivity of observation. Those Jews who take offence are missing the usual confessions of sympathy for their kind which I have suppressed out of antipathy against the traditional idyllic writing. My Abraham should not appear as a victim. He does not need sympathy. This prohibited me from writing stylistically in the old trilling manner. Abraham becomes active without being able to know where this activity will lead him. This is why I had to take away all his crutches, even the synagogue and the community." Gerhard Zwerenz, Die Rückkehr des toden Juden nach Deutschland (Munich: Max Hueber, 1986), 214.