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Philo-Semitism in Nineteenth-Century German Literature
(review)

Katharina Gerstenberger

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section of her study, Klingenstein focuses on three scholars, Robert Alter, Ruth Wisse, and Sacvan Berkovitch, whose Jewishness is manifest either in a preoccupation with *Yiddishkeit* and Biblical narrative as acceptable loci of literary and critical inquiry or (in the case of Berkovitch) in a more analogous preoccupation with the religious and typological underpinnings of American culture.

Absent in this study, unfortunately, is any sustained consideration of either Leslie Fiedler or Harold Bloom. This is a real deficiency because these two highly influential critics were not merely mindful of their Jewishness in a myriad of ways and applications, but also capable of appreciating with an extraordinary degree of self-consciousness the meta-critical narratives (identitarian and otherwise) on which their criticism necessarily opens. The revised introduction to *The Visionary Company*, which makes explicit the cultural stakes for both "New Criticism" and its authoritarian canon versus Bloom's version of criticism and its canon, is probably the single most revealing work of Jewish literary scholarship in the last fifty years. For here, as perhaps nowhere else, the critic's religio-cultural identity is so thoroughly assimilated to the task of reading Romanticism (and reading against T. S. Eliot and his followers) that it reemerges, somewhat like Freud's uncanny, in an otherwise alien body of writing which is suddenly indivisible from—or unreadable without—the Jewishness of its retrospective admirer. This sort of enlargement, however tendentious and self-serving, is precisely what *Enlarging America* would have done well to examine more.

William Galperin
Rutgers University, New Brunswick

Philo-Semitism in Nineteenth-Century German Literature by Irving Massey. *Condicio Judaica* 29. Studien und Quellen zur deutsch-jüdischen Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000. Pp. 199. 98,00 DM paper.

Irving Massey's study aims to offer analyses of a "number of nineteenth-century works of literature, mainly in German, by Gentile authors, in which Jews and/or Judaism are presented in a favorable, or at least not unfavorable light" (9). The topic presents a dual challenge because the corpus of philo-Semitic literature is rather slim, and, moreover, the literary quality of these texts is often lacking. Statements such as "it is hard to extract much of interest from such mediocre fiction" (127, in reference to Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's *Der Kreisphysikus*) abound in the book. At times the author declares himself to be surprised to find any philo-Semitism at all in nineteenth-century German literature; more often than not, even comparatively positive descriptions of

Jews do not fully meet his definition of philo-Semitism as “writing about Jewish characters in a relaxed and natural way” (12, footnote 16). Throughout the study one senses an unresolved conflict between the author and his material which he finds, perhaps rightly so, sorely deficient in quantity as well as quality. For the reader, however, this raises the question why Massey chose to formulate his topic the way he did. His passionate search for positive Jewish characters in an anti-Semitic culture confirms yet once more than nineteenth-century Germany was indeed largely hostile to Jews.

Massey's book, it turns out, is as much about anti-Semitism as it is about philo-Semitism and at times it seems that the former is really the topic, spanning the range from nineteenth-century anti-Semitism to the Third Reich to neo-Nazism. The first section of the introduction, for instance, ends with a brief yet scathing indictment of the philosopher Carl Schmitt's hatred of Jewish converts to Christianity. While Massey's critique is more than justified, it is not clear how Schmitt's diatribes tie in with the declared goal of the study. Nineteenth-century anti-Semitism—and the corresponding lack of consequential philo-Semitism—is a precursor to Nazism, and anti-Semitism in contemporary Germany and Poland must be seen in relation to the *shoah*. Given the study's focus on a specific phenomenon in literature, however, a more detailed discussion of philo-Semitism in its nineteenth-century variant might have been helpful to place the authors in question in their respective cultural contexts. The contemporary reader cannot but relate Fontane's anti-Semitic wish of a “schwere Heimsuchung” (serious misfortune) on the Jews to twentieth-century history but the analysis of texts by nineteenth-century non-Jewish writers who offered their largely gentile audience sympathetic portrayals of Jewish characters could have been enriched by a discussion of the scope and meaning of philo-Semitism during this time period.

Philo-Semitism in Nineteenth-Century German Literature impresses through the number of sources it presents despite the relative scarcity of texts professing a positive attitude toward Jews. After a substantial chapter on a story by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Massey discusses works by other nineteenth-century authors, including well-known writers such as Wilhelm Hauff, Wilhelm Raabe, Karl Gutzkow, and Bettina von Arnim, but also lesser known ones such as the Austrian Ada Christen. In the chapter on Sacher-Masoch, Massey is able to show that the writer plagiarized large sections of his story “Pintschew and Mintschew” from the early nineteenth-century scholar Peter Beer, suggesting that Sacher-Masoch was less of an expert on things Jewish than commonly assumed and, more gravely, less of a philo-Semite than Sacher-Masoch himself wanted his audience to believe as he seems to urge his Jewish characters toward religious conversion. Massey concedes, however, that Sacher-Masoch managed to “provide a beautiful interpretation” of the plagiarized material (45). A separate chapter is dedicated to the Alsace-Lorrainian writer team

Émile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian, who published numerous stories with Jewish themes and figures. Their long-term collaboration ceased over the Franco-German conflict over Alsace-Lorraine, with Erckmann, who adopted a pro-German position also being the more philo-Semitic of the two. A discussion of their works is included in the study because Alsace-Lorraine's status as a cultural and geographic border region mirrors the position of Jews as middlemen between cultures.

Methodologically, Massey combines literary and personal statements by the authors in question and then assesses the writer's position toward Jews. Since literary creation and personal remarks often do not concur with one another Massey finds it impossible to arrive at unambiguous conclusions. His treatment of Theodor Fontane might serve as an example here. The discussion begins with a reference to Fontane's often quoted poem concerning the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, the one in which Fontane regrets the absence of the Prussian aristocracy and somewhat grudgingly welcomes his Jewish admirers. "Any Jew" familiar with Fontane's poem wants to say "I don't need him, and I don't want him" (108), Massey states emphatically. He then offers a sympathizing reading of Fontane's Jewish figures in *L'Adultera*, attesting "broad-minded tolerance" (113) in the author if it were not for his hostile statements elsewhere. One can only speculate how Fontane himself might have responded to someone pointing out these inconsistencies, but such conjectures could shed some light on nineteenth-century German culture and its contradictory treatment of Jews. A more detailed discussion of the phenomenon of philo-Semitism in nineteenth-century Europe could have helped to understand how the comparatively few nineteenth-century writers who chose to create positive Jewish characters at all reconciled pro- and anti-Jewish positions. In the concluding chapter Massey offers an explanation for the incongruities inherent in philo-Semitic literature. Gentile guilt, he argues, is at the core of the contradictory treatment of Jews. In his innovative reading of Droste-Hülshoff's *Judenbuche* Massey suggests that the murder of the Jew comes back to haunt the perpetrator because it is so "easy" to commit. As a result, gentile writers find Jewish characters more useful in their absence rather than their presence, as is the case with Fontane's figure of the duped Jewish husband Van der Straaten. The absent Jew, then, becomes the embodiment of gentile guilt. Massey's book ends with a quote from Theodor Fontane. In giving the "Philosemantic Antisemite" (Wolfgang Paulsen's phrase) the last word, Massey suggests that Fontane's writings reflect nineteenth-century Germany's attitude toward Jews not despite but because of their contradictions.

Katharina Gerstenberger
University of Cincinnati