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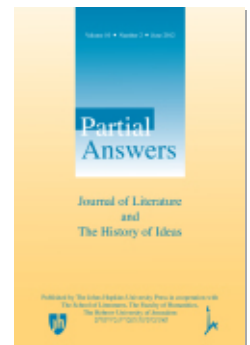
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## Between Ghetto and Zion: Margarete Susman’s Mediations of Germany, Jewishness, and Culture, 1906–1916

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### 1. Mediating Between Worlds

In a number of contributions to the liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung* between 1906 and 1916, the German-Jewish philosopher Margarete Susman (1872–1966) reflected upon three different matters of state that arose as political challenges in the process of modernization in Germany around the turn of the century. Two of these, the relation between state and community and that between citizenship and culture, are directly related to the position of the Jews in the German Empire. Remarkably, Susman does not address the precarious situation of the Jews as an issue that needs an urgent social solution — as, for instance, Theodor Herzl did in his numerous writings. Instead, she confronts the problem of minority

discourse and state power with an almost Schillerian belief in the humanist force of culture as the “*Bildung*” of the spirit and thus as the foundation of any long-term ethical and political construction. Against the background of the tensions caused by radical forces of modernization such as democratization and total war, Susman perpetuates the faith in the power of art and literature to remain unaffected by these forces, while she at the same time mobilizes an idealist concept of culture as a force that can address these tensions. The cross-fertilization of culture and civilization makes Margarete Susman, who has nearly disappeared from the canvas of cultural memory, an interesting figure in the gallery of German intellectual history.

Susman’s mobilization of the spirit for the sake of a humane modernity without renouncing the spirit’s autonomous purity casts her first and foremost as a “mediator,” both in a general and a specific way. As a rule Susman refuses to separate politics from culture, believing that the latter is an inalienable condition of social progress or successful liberal politics. The specific implementation of this belief consists in conveying to a broad reading public the philosophical or artistic legacy of thinkers whom she regards as the embodiment of this high ideal of culture. “Mediation” as a form of commenting or translating does not belong to the class of memorable acts commonly recognized in cultural historiography. Yet in view of the intellectual paralysis vis-à-vis socio-historical reality that prevailed in German high culture around the turn of the century, Susman nonetheless appears as a remarkable, even a crucial, thinker. She stands in the midst of a restless, relentlessly competitive, and most of all autonomous cultural field and manages to move artfully between different positions, while remaining eclectic yet systematic in conveying her message of the ethical force of culture and spirit.

Born in 1872 in a German-Jewish bourgeois family, Margarete Susman belonged to a generation and class that fostered the idea of a *geistige Kultur* that existed alongside and untouched by the realities of politics and society, an attitude that straddled spiritual freedom and civil restraint. In a profound review in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (1921) of a collection of letters written by German students at the front, she traces the ambiguities of this schizophrenic German habitus back to Luther and his ambivalent message of spiritual freedom and worldly obedience:

For centuries German history has been riddled with the inner conflict which Luther’s supreme genius established, when he could only compensate the assault of the world-changing forces [weltumgestaltende Kräfte] his own gospel unleashed by demanding total submission to power regardless of its nature or spirit. . . . Germany has paid the penalty of the doctrine that man’s free spirit and will have nothing to do with the organization of his exterior life . . . for centuries and it does so until the present day. (Susman 1921: 1)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This and subsequent translations are my own.

As pertinent studies of modernist culture by Wolf Lepenies and Stefan Breuer have revealed, Susman's sharp intellectual self-analysis was unusual in Germany at that time, when authorship and wisdom rarely functioned as forces of moral responsibility in the public domain.<sup>2</sup> The contrast with the role of British intellectuals as "public moralists" in the same historical period, as described by Stefan Collini, is remarkable. In Germany diverse aesthetic strands, from symbolism through classicist aesthetics up to supposedly more socially engaged art forms such as naturalism, showed a comparable inability — or unwillingness — to acknowledge a contiguity between art and politics. Poetry rather than civic discussion was considered the spirit of the nation. In this general culture of avoidance, Margarete Susman's verdict on the failed sense of democracy and responsibility of the German intellectual élite is all the more remarkable. In her analysis, this élite failed to use its symbolic authority at a time when it was sorely needed to make history change course:

But these very forces have never taken an external shape and were totally absent in the construction of our external lives. They belonged to a small — and in no way leading — upper class, and even if they indeed expressed much of the original forces of our national character [unseres Volkstums] they have never been connected with it in any active way. (Susman 1921: 1)

According to Susman, the German "national character" has an inclination to foster the purity of spirit and culture, but this "original force" has been usurped by a small élite that quarantined it and cut it off from reality. In many ways Susman herself was part of that indicted "small upper class" and a contemporary to protagonists of political skepticism such as Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, Oswald Spengler, Stefan George, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. While the causal relation that Stefan Breuer (1995, 1995) diagnoses between an idealist culture on the one hand and hatred of political liberalism on the other is undeniable in the case of many of these authors, they do not exhaust all the options available in turn-of-the-century Germany. Indeed, a closer look at the cultural field reveals that the sense of idealist culture need not always lead to a solipsistic frame of mind and holistic ideas about state power. It may also function as a spur to institute a more humane and ultimately democratic society. The career of Margarete Susman is a case in point. As a woman, she did not — indeed could not — have the same education that the men of her generation received, and her intellectual career, like that of many of her women contemporaries and precursors, was one

<sup>2</sup>The influence of this attitude on the process of modernization in Germany cannot be exaggerated. Wolf Lepenies accurately notes: "That subjective, inward Reich established by the philosophy of German idealism and the classic literature of Weimar . . . was for a long time eagerly misunderstood as being itself a political act — that of evading politics altogether — and as legitimating a withdrawal from society into the sphere of private life" (203).

of self-taught knowledge and influential friends.<sup>3</sup> Although this rendered access to the intellectual and high cultural élites more difficult (many of whose members regarded women as forces opposed to the spirit<sup>4</sup>), it may also have made her aware of a world outside the closet of pure thought and beauty. As a free student Susman attended courses on art, sociology, and philosophy at the universities of Munich and Berlin. Among her teachers was Georg Simmel, who invited her to his private seminars at his house (Susman 1966: 52ff). Simmel's environment was characterized by a highly spiritual ethos and the belief in the power of an idealistically inspired culture to counter the fragmentation of modern man by politics, social striving, and capitalism (Nordmann 232). In a pamphlet written on the occasion of the establishment of a club of supporters of the modern art of the *Sezession*, the neo-Kantian philosopher expressed the idea of art as a unifying yet autonomous world that stands apart from all other social forces:

[T]he only defense we possess against the specializations of science, the hostilities of political and economic existence, and the externalization of life by the dominance of economic and technical progress is our artistic interest that supports a culture that is inner and personal and also transcends the contrasts between individuals. (Simmel 450)

In an article that she wrote much later Susman explains Simmel's hard-fought search for truth between the absolute and "hard matter of the world" ("die harte Tatsache der Welt"; Susman 1959: 4) and his vision of that "pure inward Germany" which led to "a grand metaphysical yet politically unlivable freedom" (39). But at that time this exalted vision made her acquainted with a world of absolute aesthetics that was not only lived in Simmel's house and conveyed in his philosophy but also found a historical *praxis* in the work and life of the symbolist poet Stefan George and his circle (Breuer 1995: 169ff).

<sup>3</sup> Women were admitted to German universities in 1908, which made Germany the last European country to effect this change. On the consequences of this policy for the history of female intellectualism and women's presence in academia, see Hahn.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Gundolf, a member of Stefan George's circle, noted in *Jahrbuch für die geistige Bewegung* (1911/1912) that modern women, and intellectual ones especially, are *kulturzersetzend*, linked to a leveling down of culture (qtd. in Oelmann and Raulff 7). But even in less rigid environments the notion of the "special" nature of the female mind and thus her "different" access to culture was generally accepted in Germany. A random but representative example is sociologist and women's rights activist Marianne Weber (1870–1954), who wrote in the introduction to her volume *Frauenfragen und Frauengedanken* in 1919: "Never will those women who want to be and achieve more than a mere sexual being [bloßes Geschlechtswesen] be exempted from the fight for development and recognition as full human beings [Vollmenschentums]. No 'just' social order can relieve a woman who feels called to participate creatively in the construction of a culture that transcends the individual level [schaffende Beteiligung an der Gestaltung überpersönlicher Kultur] . . . from the heavy burden to harmonize that which is in conflict [Zwiespältiges zum Einklang zu bringen]" (iii–iv).

Susman herself had started as a poet in the line of the classical aesthetics and symbolism that were dominant around the turn of the century. Her best-known volume was published in 1901 and is called *Mein Land*. This land refers to no identifiable political reality, either German or Jewish. Rather, it evokes the metaphorical landscape of the German poetic tradition and is far removed from the ordinary course of daily politics and society. Karl Wolfskehl (1869–1948), whom Susman met in Simmel's house and who belonged to Stefan George's inner circle, introduced her to the poetry of George. Susman had not known the mysterious master poet of the German *l'art pour l'art* movement until then, but she renounced her own poetical activities after getting acquainted with his. She was overwhelmed by the artistic discipline and depth of George's poetry, which she considered the embodiment of true art. She then took up a different role in the realm of culture (Susman 1964: 47–48): by writing reflective and explanatory essays on modern art, poetry, and philosophy, she became a mediator between the closed world of high culture and the constituency of middlebrow newspaper readers. In 1907 Heinrich Simon, owner and Editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, asked her to become an editor of its cultural pages, a position she held with some interruptions until 1933, when the newspaper was appropriated by the Nazis, Simon was forced out of office, and Susman had to flee the country. At the turn of the century, however, and in spite of a persistent anti-Semitic undercurrent in the mainstream of society (see Rubinstein et al. 117ff), there was little to anticipate the course German history would take in the following decades. Without inhibition, Susman could commit herself to the mission of translating ideals of pure aesthetics and thought into the common language of community.

## 2. The Ghetto and the State

In 1907, shortly after being hired by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Susman set out to address a vexed problem in the realm of public affairs: the place and condition of Jews and Jewish culture in European society. As the title of her article “Judentum und Kultur” makes it clear, she characteristically linked the possibility of a solution for this problem to the notion of culture. The article is a probing review of the controversial autobiography of Jakob Fromer, Semitist and Talmud scholar and director of the Jewish community library in Berlin (Wiese 293). His self-published life story, *Vom Ghetto zur modernen Kultur* (1906), recounts the grim struggle of a Polish Jew to escape the confines of the Ghetto in Lodz and to acquire not only citizenship but a respected position in modern society. As such achievements are straightforwardly impossible for Jews in (Russian) Poland, Fromer heads for Germany as some “heretics” did before him in order to realize his dream of spiritual and civil freedom. His image of the Lodz Ghetto, state of the stateless, is bleak. Fromer's youth passes under the sign of extreme poverty, and he grows up in a world full of superstition and bigotry mixed with

religious devotion, limited formal education, an anxious warding off of foreign influences, and the constant threat of abuse by the Polish population and its official authorities. The wish to overcome this state of cultural confinement and what Hannah Arendt called “civil death” starts to grow in Fromer after the untimely death of his father, the only truly pious sage in his life. The young man becomes acquainted with non-religious literature. The first lay text he reads is Friedrich Schiller, whose annotations to the Pentateuch have a strong impact on him: “I knew many beautiful and wise interpretations of biblical passages out of Talmudic literature. Yet what I read from Schiller appeared as a revelation to me. I was stunned by the sharpness of the thought and the clarity and grace of his representation” (31). When he goes on to read Schiller’s *Don Carlos*, he is shocked by the immorality of the theme, yet the protagonist’s beautiful speech and noble behavior enrapture Fromer to the point that he decides to overcome the conditions of his existence and become part of the nation that had spawned Schiller’s genius. Yet the road to the new nation proves to be extremely hard and leads through despair:

What was the name of the great Yiddish poet [Jargondichter] who sang “Rise my people, wake up from your slumber!” and pointed to the cultures of the West, where the sun stood already high on the horizon? Cursed be you, cursed the apostles of Enlightenment, cursed Western European culture. Why have I been woken up? . . . Here I, Tantalus, lie; I see the goods I long for so near me and yet I have to perish. (143)

Fromer succeeds in the end and is granted German citizenship by the Emperor. This excerpt from a letter to a friend makes it clear that he has not only mastered the language, but has acquired the rhetorical props that constitute his new identity, even if they seem to express the opposite. In spite of the religious tropes that structure his thoughts, he declares his Jewishness to be a thing of the past. To be more accurate, Fromer did not believe in Liberal Judaism and was convinced that “Jews who did not maintain the Orthodox ways of life, therefore, would have no right to continue their separate existence” (Wiese 293). His answer to the “Jewish question” was radical assimilation: “Submerge! Disappear! . . . Accept the morals, customs, and religion of your host nation, try to blend with them, and be careful to assimilate into them without a trace” (Fromer, qtd. in Wiese 294).

As this conclusion suggests, Fromer’s life story was controversial even though its radical tone was less peculiar in his time than it appears today (Otto Weininger is another case in point). It is interesting to reflect why Margarete Susman chose for her first contribution as a journal editor to review this autobiography. Jakob Fromer was to become a well-known Talmudic scholar, but at that point it was his life story, his first book in fact, that placed him at the center of public discussion. What comes to mind is Susman’s own Jewish descent that probably made her conscious of this issue and the prejudices held

by various sides of the public debate. As Wiese points out, Fromer's book was heavily criticized in liberal Jewish circles, which formed part of the readership of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and he was dismissed from his position as director of the Jewish community library in Berlin after the publication of his views on Judaism (293). Still, Fromer's fate may also have appeared alien to the daughter of an established Hamburg bourgeois family, German citizen, and messenger of high culture. A certain absence of immediate identification is indicated by the fact that Susman refers to European culture as "our culture" throughout the article. She also confirms her belonging to Western culture when she remarks on Fromer's exaggerated embrace of it: "He does not even see clearly in our Western culture [abendlandische Kultur], which he worships so ardently, the Christian foundation on which it is based; he considers Christianity a formal institution of the people instead of realizing how deeply it has penetrated into all its [Western culture's] teachings, knowledge, its art, its strongest desires, and salvation" (Susman 1907: 2). Although she speaks of "we" and "us" in juxtaposition to "the Jews," she may all the same have been irritated by Fromer's awkward conclusion that Jewry has added virtually nothing to the development of humanity. Considering Susman's position in the field of culture and the overall tendency of her writing, it seems that Fromer's testimony was more than an interesting case in an ongoing debate that may have attracted readers — it was a challenge to answer the question what precisely culture is and how it could have an impact on the humanization of society, an issue that surfaces here in the guise of the question of the position of the Jews within Western society. This first piece of cultural journalism, in other words, appears more as a sample of the way Susman mobilizes culture, art, and spirit in matters of high political and social immediacy than as a claim to identity.

The title of Susman's article, "Judentum und Kultur," is indicative of her argument. Jewry and culture are different entities that should nevertheless be thought of together, because the profoundly theological *habitus* of Eastern European Jewry is comparable to the transcendental force that inhabits culture. Judaism may therefore provide energy and inspiration for the development of culture. Fromer, who has forsaken his Jewishness, fails to grasp the essence of (European) culture: "Fromer achieves European culture. Or rather, he achieves everything that is the opposite of the Ghetto: order, objectivity, fixed categories, and a strict sense of science, as well as the participation of every individual life in the free and human affairs of state, such as is embodied by the Prussian citizenship he eventually acquires" (2). Just as he does not seem to understand that the fundamental ethical being of a Jew is rooted in his belief, neither does he understand that culture does not coincide with an established order. In Susman's philosophy both ethics and culture are driven by a desire for the transcendental and constitute eternal dynamic processes:



It is obvious that for contemporary people the road to culture inevitably has to go via our [European] culture. For Fromer, however, this road has become the aim; to him modern culture, indeed culture in general, is identical to our existing European culture. Blinded by its glimmer, he totally overlooks the fact that culture is something different from individual cultures and that all those are but a means to realize the meaning and essential demand of all culture [den Sinn und die Grundforderung aller Kultur]. For culture as a matter of sowing and reaping, of shaping and creating [des Bildens und Schaffens], is a creative inner act that can never remain by that which has been created [und kann nie bei einem bereits Geschaffenen stehen bleiben]. Transformation and further development of that which exists is its first condition. (2)

If Susman profoundly shares the idealist view of culture that was fostered by contemporaries such as George and Simmel, here at least she reveals that it does not coincide with aesthetic (or even spiritual) orthodoxy. Rather, in a truly transcendental vein it surpasses the particular and opens up towards a plurality of human practices. Whereas Fromer scorns the conviction that the Jews are the chosen people and will thus always be a nation within any state, Susman considers this view from a historical-cultural perspective somewhat reminiscent of Schiller's analysis in "Die Sendung Moses" ("Moses' Mission," 1790).<sup>5</sup> When the people of Palestine turned to monotheism several thousand years ago, so her argument goes, it needed available expressions to grasp this new idea. In order to enable identification with the new faith, notions of family, patriarchy, and exclusive belonging were invoked and became central topics. What matters to Susman is not whether the Jews should remain a people. In her article she underscores the enormous zeal with which Jews have identified themselves with an *idea* and have committed their entire history to it while resisting all possible external forces. Although Judaism does not represent a culture as such, its conduct in accordance with a theological ideal functions as an historical example of the dialectic between spirit and life, thus revealing the impact that ideals of beauty and thought — i.e., culture — may have on human conduct.

In Susman's analysis, the ghetto from which Fromer escapes appears as the epitome of human misery in which, nonetheless, some live the life of the pure spirit and "can be compared with all those who truly seek and enhance culture" (2). Fromer's radical requirement that Jews assimilate in modern society appears as the absolute opposite of Zionism, which was another remarkable voice in the Jewish discourse of that time. The Zionist movement underscored the

<sup>5</sup> Schiller calls the "establishment of the Jewish state by Moses . . . one of the most memorable facts in history," not only because of its consequences for human history but also "because of the power of reason [durch die Stärke des Verstandes]" that characterizes this new direction.

individual national character of the Jews and aspired to transcend their diasporic and minority status by establishing a Jewish home country, an internationally recognized nation state. This was the fundamental conviction of the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), who believed that “[s]overeignty over a piece of the earth’s surface’ is the only salvation of the Jews” (qtd. in Likin 142). Herzl’s protection and preservation of the Jews by means of a *Judenstaat* in Palestine in fact implied the continuation of European modernization. As Matti Bunzl notes, his “Zionism was hardly the expression of anti-European irrational collectivism, but rather the product and embodiment of the liberal humanism underlying the German Enlightenment” (280).

The Jewish state Theodor Herzl imagined in his famous Zionist novel *Altneuland* (1902) indeed preserves the best elements of the European tradition of liberalism in the new continent with conspicuously few traces of a specific Jewish spirit. In *Altneuland* a highly educated Austrian young man, Friedrich Löwenberg, grows tired of life because of the persistent anti-Semitism he encounters. He retires into reclusion as the companion of a rich man who wants to live in loneliness. When he returns after a long time they pass on their way home the new Palestinian state that is introduced to him by David, a child whose family he rescued from starvation in Vienna a long time ago. The young man has not forgotten this debt and uses this new encounter to acquaint his former savior with all aspects of life in “Altneuland.” One of its most striking features is the strict separation between the citizens’ spiritual preferences and the state: “Whether one sought the contemplation that connects with the absolute in the temple, church, mosque, or philharmonic concert was no matter of the state. It was left to every individual to decide on this” (Herzl 382; my translation). The historical example of this society is France: “Art and philosophy had their independent centers in the Jewish academy, which could hardly be called a new invention, but rather was established after the time-honored example of the Académie française” (382). In his novel Herzl stresses the importance of culture against “some modern people who have criticized the Zionist movement as a chiliastic terror” (381). Thus ample space is given to the description of the protagonist’s visit to the painter Isaak, whose house appears as a haven of art and good taste in the classicist spirit with its marble statues and a garden with colonnades and fountains. But in spite of the effort to reinforce the importance of culture in the Jewish state, the image that dominates is that of a modern republic, pluralist and democratic in its foundations, yet not primarily guided by ideals of pure thought and aesthetic beauty.

Fromer’s demand for total assimilation on the one hand and Herzl’s project for a Jewish state on the other are two extreme voices in the Judaist discourse in Germany, in which the majority of participants spoke in a much more moderate tone (Gräfe 203–207). Yet in fact these two intellectual antagonists are comparable in their conception of culture in terms of *Bildung* and the perfection of human potential, yet without immediate political significance. It is a matter

of private investment beyond the public domain. Susman offers a remarkable third possibility between these two trends. From the point of view of her belief in spirit and culture as the condition for a humane and truly liberal state, and without showing any particular form of identification with Judaism in her analysis, she carefully selects and preserves an essential aspect of Jewish culture and integrates it in her idea of culture as the foundation of community. This practice of mediation between different schools of thought rooted in an adherence to high cultural ideals reveals an uncommon openness toward different ideas. It does not eradicate that which seems incompatible with human “progress” at first sight, such as religious devotion, but appears as intrinsically receptive to the religious, cultural, or ethnic “other.”

### 3. The Aesthetic State

One year after her analysis of Judaism and culture, Susman published a major article on the poet Stefan George and his significance in recovering a lost transcendent form of poetry in a world bereft of myth. In that same year she also wrote on modern poetry, outlining in general terms what readers might expect from artful language constructions. In an article written in March 1908 and loosely called “Neue Lyrik,” she expresses in simple terms the guiding value of poetry in life: “it needs to impart to us what we do not know yet, it needs to give us a *Weltanschauung*” (1). While poetry does not carry an epiphany in the strict theological sense, it nevertheless unites all the forces that are at play in human life and constructs new thoughts that function as scripts for further conduct:

We do not demand that [poetry] should always speak about the last things in life, but we do expect that it should have a connection with them; that it should stand at a unique crossroads of worldly threads [*Weltfäden*]; and that life and death, God and life, and all the creative and destructive forces should have their own life in it. (1)

A similar conception of the high worth of poetry in life is taken up in her survey article on George, in which she compares poetry with prose and drama and underscores that “only in poetry is the immediate relation to the world in its entirety the essential element.”<sup>6</sup> In the case of Stefan George, poetry is not a mere expression of “thought, ideas, or feelings”; rather, his artful and disciplined poems transcend the ordinary and evoke the idea of a perfect humanity. Aesthetics and ethics merge, as this poetry expresses “the absolute immanence of all values in life.” The poet “sees the eternal coherence of things as he shapes them . . . it

<sup>6</sup> On the ethical meaning of poetry and the emblematical role of George in Susman’s political discourse, see Gilleir 499.

is his destiny, to be the eye and mouth of the world in his own way" (1). In her function as a mediator between the world of exclusive art and the larger reading audience, Susman cannot stress enough the ethical agency of poetry that appears esoteric and hermetic, but that in fact gives expression to thoughts that are not available "in the confusion of common life, which is made up of a million threads" ("in der Verworrenheit des allgemeinen millionenfädigen Lebens"):

The intensity of this person cannot be lost from our life. The violence of ethical concentration [Zusammenfassung] in a period that threatens to fall apart on all sides, the great seriousness and belief in a period of unbelief have become forces of our moral life, and should our time ever be questioned for its moral contents, it would be saved by the fact that this man lived among us. (1)

That Susman presents the meaning of George's poetry in its absolute and purest force, suggesting that his personality embodies this high value, underscores the unity between art and life. In other words, George appears in Susman's essay not only as a prophet — a title that was frequently awarded to him in the critical discourse of the time — but also as the historical embodiment of the dialectics between art and man in Susman's world, a true example of the osmotic interchanges between the spiritual and material world, which culture should ideally achieve.

Not only for Margarete Susman did Stefan George embody the redemptive force of art: a whole generation of young intellectuals looked up to him as a master of spirit and aesthetics in face of the turmoil of modernity. As Grete Schaefer, the editor of Martin Buber's letters, points out, it is difficult to overestimate the influence of George in the field of culture at the beginning of the century (41–42). Indeed, it was not only his poems that provoked fascination (and imitation); so did his reclusive and exclusive lifestyle, which seemed to be the extension of his art. As was witnessed and commented upon by numerous contemporaries, George completely designed his environment in accordance with his purist aesthetic principles. He was the center of a poetic-Apollonian circle, participation in which was a *sine qua non* for aspiring young poets, while George himself considered it a state in which his devotees became his citizens.<sup>7</sup> For many, he represented the majesty of the German spirit in all its purity above the "low" life of the merely political. In spite of this "state" rhetoric George was the last person in Germany who wanted to have anything to do with the reality of state politics, let alone with the larger national community. This became clear when in 1926 the Prussian Academy of Arts established a section for poetry in an

<sup>7</sup>"Probably even greater than his talent to separate was his power to connect. It was so strong, that within a few years . . . the loose group of followers had become a body that from then on was simply called 'the state'" (Breuer 1995b: 53).

attempt to consolidate the presence of poetry in public life and to lead literature out of its isolation so that it might be involved in the dynamics of the democratic community (Jens 10ff). The first poet the government wanted to engage as a regular member of the Academy was Stefan George, but he turned the offer down before it was even officially extended; instead, he chose to remain in the splendid isolation of his aesthetic state (Fügen 6).

The challenge faced by Susman in her review of George is to mediate between the poet's Olympian world and the common readership rather than to try and represent the recluse as a public intellectual, which would have been pointless. Her idea is to explain to the people the complex functioning of his aesthetic language so as to reveal the profoundly humanist and ethical dimensions of his art. Susman herself did not feel completely drawn to George's ritualistic world. In her autobiography she underscores the value of his poetry but remarks that "there was something odd about his solemn, esoteric way of reciting and about the fact that only a few listeners were admitted to him" (Susman 1966: 47). Yet in her description of his personality in the context of his poetic aesthetics he becomes a condensed example of a life dedicated to the spirit. In that sense George is comparable to Jakob Fromer's father, a Jew whose reality is dictated by a theological ideal and who will not yield to the pressure of material life.

#### 4. The State of Zion

In 1916, ten years after "Judentum und Kultur" and two years after the outbreak of World War I, Susman wrote an extensive essay called "Wege des Zionismus" ("Roads of Zionism"). Her article is an analysis of Cultural Zionism and is based on her readings of the work of two of its protagonists, the Ukrainian-born Hebrew author Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg, 1856–1927) and the German-Jewish philosopher of religion Martin Buber (1878–1965), whom Susman had met at Simmel's house. This change of focus toward a more markedly political theme must have been caused by the circumstances of the war. By that time the war was long past its initial phase of euphoria, and the uncertainty of its outcome went hand in hand with a growing anti-Semitism (Gräfe 213ff). Susman, however, does not address the political subject with the practical immediacy one might expect. She remains within the contexts of her work as a cultural mediator and, in spite of the political urgency of the topic, does not significantly alter her position on the relationship between art and the state.

Initially the general draft issued by the state at the outbreak of the Great War had some leveling influence on religious, ethnic, and cultural differences. In the summer of 1914 the German Empire appealed directly to the state loyalty of its Jewish citizens, who suddenly received the civil equality that had been awarded to them legally at the institution of the German Empire in 1871 but had never been fully extended in reality. The War also broke through the spiritual

isolation of high culture. Stefan George, who, as his letters from this period show, felt worried about the dramatic descent of history into the barbarism of war, observed the patriotism of his main disciples with unease. Letters full of nationalist sentiments revealing a commitment to the political state that had been impossible to imagine only months earlier were sent to him. Something comparable happened in the circle of Jewish culture around Martin Buber. Buber was a dedicated advocate and philosopher of the Jewish Renaissance, a German strand of Cultural Zionism that arose around the turn of the century (Gelber 2000; Laqueur 162–71). Cultural Zionism distinguished itself from the political Zionism of Theodor Herzl in considering the pursuit of a Jewish nation first and foremost at the level of Jewish culture and spirit. Although Cultural Zionism was inspired by Ahad Ha'am, the “Jewish national cultural enterprise in German” (Gelber 2009: 171) was in many ways rooted in the idealistically inspired tradition of German cultural history with its faith in the regenerative power of the spirit (Gelber 2000: 32). But whereas the aesthetic school of George declined any socio-historical reification, Cultural Zionism was politically more concrete as it believed in a common culture as the precondition for the realization of a (national) community.

In many respects Martin Buber was a critic of Stefan George. His ideal of a renewed Jewish culture and his socialist-spiritual Zionism were at odds with an aesthetic ideology that based its poetics on a near-religious epiphany and the essence of the German soul. Yet when Buber writes to Karl Wolfskehl that he has discontinued his subscription to George's periodical because he considers it an “intrusion” (Buber 272), this metaphor reveals some sense of competition between two different spiritual movements. This is also obvious in an exchange of letters between Martin Buber and the German-Jewish poet Else Lasker-Schüler, in which she brings both protagonists together:

Most venerable Lord of Zion, a wolf was with you — a high priest with sharp teeth, a Basileus with a wild heart, a fist that prays, a sea without a beach that drank itself — and you spoke of literature. You read poetry, and I do not like it. You are ashamed that George is a Jew — and you are the Lord of Zion? (Lasker-Schüler, qtd. in Buber 272)

Whereas Lasker-Schüler in her own peculiar way expresses a merging of the Georgian ideal of pure aesthetics with Jewish identity, Buber's irritated answer draws a line between the two: “Can you not understand that someone who loves Judaism [*das Judentum*] with anger and longing does not use the method of naming people Jews who are not? George is not more than a Jew, but he is different from a Jew” (Buber 545). And yet in spite of this denial the difference is smaller than he might have wanted to admit. In both cultural groups nationhood and culture were intertwined in the sense that both strove for a form of spiritual regeneration against the background of modern society. George did so in social reclusion, Buber at the level of a virtual national community, and both encoun-

tered a similar problem when the war broke out. Just like George, Buber was faced with a new zeal among some of his followers, who were enraptured by the force of the state in which they lived. Thus Ludwig Strauß wrote to Buber:

I was so surprised and it was new to me to discover that the feeling for a state could be so passionate as I experience it now. . . . This great and clearly structured empire with its thousand promises of future perfection has become so alive that dying in its service appears easy. (qtd. in Buber, 372)

Buber himself was not entirely immune to the political zeal of the day — in fact, few intellectuals were. Few shared the skepticism and rejection of Gershom Scholem, Gustav Landauer, and Margarete Susman. At the beginning of August 1914 Susman wrote to Martin Buber that she “indeed [felt] that his certainty [was] right,” yet in a desperate tone also confessed that she could not share the feeling of the greatness of the circumstances at that moment and begged him to show her how one could tell the difference “between deed and suffering” (qtd. in Buber 363). The social reformer Landauer, for his part, was less diplomatic than Susman and did not hide his shock when he heard that Buber sought a compromise between the war and the Jewish spirit he wanted to revive:

Sorry about the Jewish blood, yes, sorry about every drop of blood that is shed in this war. Sorry about the people, sorry also to see how you got caught up in this war. What a pity it will be that you will notice too late the outcome of things that are still hidden. . . . You will again need to separate the highest representatives of the German spirit . . . from “the Germans of the Day” and from the adepts of the Reich. (qtd. in Buber 438)

Landauer’s radical rejection of the war was rooted in his political anarchism and pacifism. Margarete Susman’s desperation about the bellicose rhetoric and loss of intellectual impartiality was rooted in her inability to associate the highly ethical claims of aesthetic or spiritual culture with war and patriotism. What she seemed to realize, together with Gustav Landauer, was that the humanistic and regenerative power of art had turned out to be a failure in the face of political reality. None of her contemporary spiritual protagonists had managed or even tried to bring forth the fundamental ethical force that Susman cherished in the idealistically inspired culture of her day in the form of a moral point of view. Instead, profound belief in culture was forsaken for chauvinism.

Ironically, “the Habsburg-Hohenzollern-construction,” as Gustav Landauer called the German and Austrian empires, remained unchanged, and its Jewish citizens, who had been invited to be part of the state in August 1914, found themselves deceived by a growing anti-Semitism as the outcome of the war became uncertain. The army leadership organized the so-called *Judenählung* (Jewish census) in the autumn of 1916 to ascertain whether the Jewish Germans were proportionally represented at the front (Gräfe 214). For an anarchist like

Landauer, one who had no confidence in state structures, this did not come as a surprise. For someone like Martin Buber, who, however, had already started to lose his faith in the just cause of (the) war, it meant waking up with a start from the dream that a state can express the soul of the people.

In the case of Susman, it almost appears as if she had anticipated this act of exclusion: her article on Cultural Zionism had been published several weeks before the news of the shameful *Judenählung* was made public. In “Wege des Zionismus” Susman presents the Jewish cultural revival movement as the historical promise of the moral authority which idealist culture in its diverse forms had failed to realize in Germany. Cultural Zionism appears as the historical possibility of a spiritually guided community — at least, that is what she underscores in the work of Ahad Ha’am and Martin Buber and thus presents to her war-stricken reading audience. Cultural Zionism, in other words, provides solace by suggesting that the idea and force of beauty and spirit are not lost. What remains somewhat out of sight in Susman’s text is a clear specification of the aesthetic forms Jewish culture might take or how the Jewish nation should actually function. On the contrary, she draws a clear line between Theodor Herzl’s (concrete) Zionist project, which to her bears all the limitations of traditional political culture, and Ahad Ha’am’s and Martin Buber’s spiritually inspired concepts of a nation that transcends common political pragmatism. In leaving the eventual historical materialization of Cultural Zionism unmentioned, Susman wants to save the *dream* of a spiritual and thus fundamentally ethical civilization in the midst of a warring humanity.<sup>8</sup> Thus she underscores that “Ahad Ha’am explicitly demands that the word ‘nation’ should become an ethical concept,” and concludes her article as follows:

This Zionism . . . guarantees that every individual will be able to walk a real road on which the Final, the Eternal, and the Divine can be sought; for the people it is the real possibility to reconstruct a scattered homogeneous culture. But eventually this culture is an added value to humanity. (September 19, 1916, 2)

Martin Buber’s and Ahad Ha’am’s Cultural Zionism as a “living reality” [*lebendige Wirklichkeit*] that arises from the spirit is compared to an artist’s struggle to implement his or her highest ideas in material art so that it might inspire human-

<sup>8</sup> Buber himself worried about the growing sense of nationalism among Zionist groups by the end of the War. He clung to the idea of a spiritual (*geistig*) community in Palestine that would somehow make a fundamental difference in the European experience of nation states. To Hugo Bergmann he wrote: “We must not be misled that most of the leading (and led) Zionists are nowadays ruthless nationalists, imperialists, and yes, even unconscious mercantilists and worshippers of success. They speak about rebirth and they mean enterprise. If we do not succeed in establishing a strong countermovement, the soul of the movement will be lost, perhaps forever” (526).



ity. The analogy between art and the project of Cultural Zionism is significant. It underscores that Susman's reading of the work of Martin Buber and Ahad Ha'am is not a mere comment on a body of thought but rather an expression of a lasting hope that a state empowered bottom-up by a humane spirit that is inspired by art, thought, and culture might become a historical reality. The mediator's hope that culture may be a fertile ground of a deeply ethical society may appear dramatically unrealistic at first sight. But Susman's rare combination of high cultural idealism and political awareness seems to avoid an inner conflict that is present in Theodor Herzl's concrete historical concept of state. Herzl's request that Jews should have "sovereignty over a piece of the earth's surface" was justified by the long historical experience that no European state power had proved to be able to control its subjects' malicious intentions toward Jewish minorities (Likin 142), who were thus forever vulnerable to particular and extreme forms of violence. Copying this state model implies the continuation of the same problem as far as the protection of the "other" within mainstream society is concerned.

Susman concludes her essay in a surprisingly down-to-earth way: "History will allow for true criticism of the Zionist movement. What will grow from this ideal into living reality will be the true criticism of the Zionist movement" (September 19, 1916, 2). But she could hardly have done otherwise. While writing her article on Cultural Zionism, she had ample experience of the consequences of nationalism and had seen people dancing around the golden calf who had forsaken their high ideals of beauty and humanity. The fundamentally different concept of community that Susman found expressed in the work of different thinkers such as Martin Buber and Ahad Ha'am revealed that not all hope for historical change had to be abandoned. Thirty years later, in 1946, she resumed the same subject in her book *Hiob und das Schicksal des jüdischen Volkes*, a theologically inspired attempt to understand the destruction of European Jewry. But even in the face of what she understands as the justified Jewish claim for an acknowledged state as the rescue of the Jewish people, she remains the mediator between ideal and history. It must not only be the state Palestine that is to be established (the book was written one year before the official recognition of the state Israel), it must be Zion too if it is to be a contribution to humanity:

Zion is not an aim, but a road, not an answer but a question, an open question about the future put to the people. Even in an entirely secularized world the work of Zion can only find its fulfillment in the light of salvation: only in change [Umbildung], in a new becoming of society [Neuerdung der Gemeinschaft], a new living representation of humanity. (118)

Thus for Susman Zion remains a cultural ideal that can finally be realized in this new state.

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## The Biology of Social Class: Habit Formation and Social Stratification in Nineteenth-Century British *Bildungsromane* and Scientific Discourse

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Nineteenth-century British *Bildungsromane*, while not as directly concerned with the process of state formation as Goethe's prototypical *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821),<sup>1</sup> propose their specific visions of the relationship between individual and society. Accounts of the genre's rise in Britain diverge: while some critics postulate an independent origin with Eliza Haywood's 1751 *History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (see Ellis), others locate the starting point in Thomas Carlyle's translations (1824 and 1827) of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and *Wanderjahre* and in Carlyle's own *Sartor Resartus* (1834). Since then, there have been various subgeneric manifestations: the traditional male-focused story of individual development from childhood to maturity; the "male," the "female," the "double," or the "multiple" *Bildungsroman* as in, for instance, Charles Dickens or George Eliot; and the "negative" novel of formation or *Anti-Bildungsroman* as in Oscar Wilde or Thomas Hardy. All through the nineteenth-century British history of the genre, the context for the protagonist's process of maturation

<sup>1</sup> See Degering as an example of this political reading.