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Kafka's Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition by David Suchoff (review)

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des Denkens [2005]), Jürgen Kaube (*Max Weber. Ein Leben zwischen den Epochen* [2014]), and Dirk Käsler (*Max Weber. Preuße, Denker, Muttersohn. Eine Biographie* [2014]).

One challenge for the approach Joshua Derman has so successfully employed is to identify criteria according to which the uses of a work can be assessed. Some appropriations are centrally important to inquiry, others are peripheral; some are significant, others are trivial; some remain true to the author's intentions, while others march in a contrary direction. Are there any limits to interpretative invention? Is every usage "unmittelbar zu Gott," to borrow Ranke's phrase? Similar to Marxism, the increasingly complicated and diversified Weberian field is rife with such questions. *Max Weber in Politics and Social Thought* is a thoughtful and engaging contribution to establishing the contours of the field and to thinking through this problem.

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Kafka's Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition. By David Suchoff. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. Pp. 267. Cloth \$62.80. ISBN: 978-0812243710.

David Suchoff offers new readings of Franz Kafka's oeuvre with an eye to his linguistic philosophy that developed while learning Yiddish and Hebrew between 1911 and his death in 1924. Suchoff tells the reader that he seeks to "revise the critical tradition that has presented [Kafka's] relation to Judaism as conflicted at best." His focus on Kafka's Jewish linguistic interests helps him argue that "Jewish languages helped Kafka envision . . . the formative 'family resemblances' between supposedly separate national and linguistic realms" (2). This manuscript brings to light many passages in Kafka's works that point to his engagement with things Jewish.

The structure yields an introduction followed by five distinct chapters. Chapter one is an overview of Kafka scholarship and the changing critical reception of Kafka from the Cold War on. Chapter two provides a look at Kafka's first interest in Yiddish and its impact on Kafka's linguistic philosophy as brought out in "Das Urteil." Demonstrating Suchoff's perspective as Professor of English, Beckett and Joyce make a cameo appearance in a brief, but fruitful comparison (67–71). Chapters three through five shift focus to Kafka's acquisition of Hebrew and its various markers in the texts *Der Verschollene*, *Der Process*, *Das Schloss*, "In der Strafkolonie," and the animal stories. Suchoff narrows his focus to these few stories to demonstrate how even the most well-known works exhibit Kafka's Jewish interests. *Die Verwandlung* is notably absent from analysis.

His approach to answering the perennial question on what is Jewish about these texts is much preferable to simple nods to Kafka's "in-between" status as evidenced

in his odd *Prager Deutsch*, for example. The book is well researched and is at its best in its keen awareness of exactly which Yiddish plays Kafka attended and which books would have been available to him. Based on this knowledge, the Yiddish influence of Yaakov Gordin's play *Elishe ben Avuya* is brought to bear on an interpretation of *Der Process* (156). The Hebrew influence of Yosef Haim Brenner and Kafka's Hebrew letter to his friend and instructor Puhah Ben-Tovim inform Suchoff's reading of *Das Schloss* (chapter 5). These specific examples of intertextuality are more convincing in *Kafka's Jewish Languages* than some passages from the encyclopedic work of the Talmud, with which Suchoff suggests Kafka would have been familiar. The author positions Kafka within the Hebrew-Yiddish language war raging at the time in Eastern Europe, as each vied to be the supreme Jewish language. He also brings in Kafka's contemporaries with contrasting views on Hebrew, like Franz Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem, and Walter Benjamin. This pan-European perspective proves lucrative for his interrogation.

Ultimately, this book should be seen in line with those readings that attempt to universalize Franz Kafka, even when examining the man during the most particularist, Zionist period of his life. Suchoff makes the case that despite Kafka's Zionist interests and publication of his short stories in the cultural/political Zionist organs *Selbstwehr* and *Der Jude*, including the story "Vor dem Gesetz," Kafka was uncomfortable with the movement he observed when he attended the Zionist Congress in Vienna. Kafka felt unable to subscribe to the project of building the modern Hebrew lexicon when it sought to put up blinders to "foreign" influence. Throughout this manuscript, the protagonist is a transnational Kafka, one whose German was inflected by Yiddish and Hebrew and who idealized the transnational, free-flowing nature of the Jewish languages he was learning.

Of Suchoff's two main objectives noted at the beginning of this review, the latter point is persuasively argued. He demonstrates that Kafka envisioned German and Hebrew open to their historical contact with foreign nations. Thus Yiddish (*Jargon*) becomes the language here that most meets Kafka's ideals. As for Suchoff's initial claim, seemingly he means to place more emphasis on the Jewish sources underlying Kafka's writing, rather than suggest that Kafka had a comfortable relationship with *Judentum* (Judaism/Jewry). The "Brief an den Vater" certainly lays out Kafka's issues with Judaism, or at least the Judaism of his father, and Kafka's humorous statement is also not undone by Suchoff's book: "What do I have in common with Jews, I have hardly anything in common with myself."

The analysis of Jewish texts in the original German, Hebrew, and Yiddish is admirable. *Kafka's Jewish Languages* is weighted more toward Hebrew sources than Yiddish ones. After finishing the book, it is clear that Kafka's writings should be historicized within the time period when he was significantly invested in his Jewish identity, and the sources should be analyzed as Kafka would have read them—in the original.

Suchhoff aims high with his audience. Those familiar with Jewish sources and languages will have an easier time understanding some of his readings. The dense prose makes it foreseeable that a selection of the text could be used in a graduate course within German Studies, Jewish Studies, or Translation Studies. Students would do well to read a chapter from this work in conjunction with one of the corresponding stories from Kafka.

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Franz Kafkas Handschrift zum "Schloss." By Matthias Schuster. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012. Pp. 552. Cloth €74.00. ISBN 978-3825360719.

Die in der Bodleian Library in Oxford aufbewahrte *Schloss*-Handschrift dient Matthias Schuster als Primärtext für die bis dato wohl umfassendste Deutung von Kafkas drittem Roman, zumindest in erzähltheoretischer und sozialpsychologischer Hinsicht. Da die Untersuchung vom Umfang her etwas Herkulisches hat—der Bogen reicht von Schleiermachers Hermeneutik bis hin zu Canettis Massentheorie—seien hier nur ein paar Hauptpunkte kritisch beleuchtet.

Schusters Anliegen ist zunächst ein editorisches. Er argumentiert für den Gebrauch der Handschrift, weil es vom *Schloss* keine Ausgabe letzter Hand gibt und weil bisherige Ausgaben, namentlich die von Max Brod, aber auch die *Kritische Kafka-Ausgabe* des Fischer-Verlages, durch Emendationen das Original verfälschen. Ein Beispiel dafür ist das so genannte "Fürstenzimmer-Fragment," mit dem die Handschrift beginnt. Brod lässt es ganz weg, die Fischer-Ausgabe "versteckt" es im Apparatband, Schuster liest es als eine dramatische Exposition, die "wesentliche Themen" vorwegnimmt (125–126). Insgesamt plädiert Schuster für das editorische Prinzip der *Historisch-Kritischen Ausgabe* des Stroemfeld-Verlages, bei dem die Handschriften ohne jeglichen Eingriff faksimiliert und transkribiert erscheinen. So lobenswert diese unverfälschte Wiedergabe des Originals ist—es ist, als schaute man Kafka beim Schreiben zu—so prekär erweist sie sich in Schusters analytischer Praxis. Seine Kategorisierung von Kafkas Streichungen ist nachvollziehbar und seine Folgerung, dass es dabei vor allem um die Vermeidung von Eindeutigkeit (z.B. durch die Schaffung von "Leerstellen") geht, ist überzeugend. Konsterniert ist man jedoch, wenn Schuster wie selbstverständlich den Spieß umdreht und genau diese Streichungen be- bzw. ausnützt, um eine von Kafka absichtlich "verdunkelte" Stelle zu erhellen. Unermüdlich entwirrt Schuster auf diese Weise das psychosoziale Beziehungsgeflecht zwischen den Figuren. Solch flagrante Instrumentalisierung von Kafkas Korrekturen wirft ästhetische und ethische Fragen auf. Zum einen vermisst man bei Schuster eine dezidiert stilistische Analyse des Gestrichenen (man denke an Kafkas pedantisches Ringen um Prägnanz, Ton, Rhythmus und *le mot juste*), zum andern macht Schusters