H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Hillary Hope Herzog, Todd Herzog, Benjamin Lapp, eds. *Rebirth of a Culture: Jewish Identity and Jewish Writing in Germany and Austria Today.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2008. vi + 193 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-511-8.

Reviewed by Joseph W. Moser (Washington and Jefferson College)
Published on HABSBURG (October, 2010)
Commissioned by Jonathan Kwan

Austrian and German Jewish Literature in the New Millenium

This incredibly useful and interesting book brings together contributions from scholars and writers who have been working on the dynamic changes in Austrian and German Jewish writing over the last few decades. The origin of this project was a four-week summer seminar at the Einstein Forum in Potsdam,"Boundaries Crossing Boundaries: Jewish Identity and Jewish Writing in Germany after 1980," which was inspired by Sander L. Gilman and taught by Dagmar C. G. Lorenz. In her introduction to this book, Lorenz presents a comprehensive overview of this theme as well as a detailed description of each contribution, linking the essays to the broader topic at hand.

There are several important aspects that inform and guide German and Jewish writing today, and Lorenz points these out in her introduction as she emphasizes that "since 1945, Jewish writing in German has neither been possible nor imaginable without references to the Shoah" (p. 2). At the same time, she explains the difficulties that Jewish writers faced from publishers when trying to address the Holocaust in the postwar era, which discouraged writers or "turned [them] to different topics" (p. 4). What is remarkable about this book is that it manages to balance the different experiences that writers faced in West Germany and Austria–at a time when Austrian literature finally has managed to distinguish itself as autonomous from German literature–and this strong balance of covering these separate contexts also takes into account the situation in East Germany. The focus of the book is on the idea of a "Rebirth of Jewish Culture" in Germany and Austria, which has been in transition for the last thirty years with Jewish immigration into these two countries from Russia and other Eastern European countries as well as Israel (p. 6).

The book is divided into four parts: "German-Jewish Writing and Culture Today," "The Case of Austria," "Transatlantic Relationships," and "Jewish Writers in Germany and Austria." Covering a vast and complex territory of German-language Jewish writing, the book integrates the experiences of German and Austrian Jews in the book's first section. In "The Monster Returns: Golem Figures in the Writings of Benjamin Stein, Esther Dischereit, and Doron Rabinovici," Cathy S. Gelbin explores the Golem motif supranationally, and in "Hybridity, Intermarriage, and the (Negative) German-Jewish Symbiosis," Petra Fachinger examines two Austrian writers Peter Henisch and Anna Mitgutsch alongside Lena Kugler and Lothar Schöne. Rolland Dollinger, in "Anti-Semitism Because of Auschwitz: An Introduction to the Works of Henryk M. Broder," explores the phenomenon of new German anti-Semitism and Broder's work as a writer and journalist. In addition to an essay by Margy Gerber on Robert Menasse's novel *Die Vertreibung aus der Hölle* (2001) and Hillary Hope Herzog's piece on Ruth Beckermann's films and writings, this book features contributions by Benjamin Lapp, Iris Bruce, and Todd Herzog on transatlantic relationships between North American and German-Jewish literature. Richard Bodek contributes an essay on "A Political Tevye: Yiddish Literature and the Novels of Stefan Heym," and the book also features an interview with Barbara Honigmann conducted by Bettina Brandt.

The fourth part of the book offers English translations of short texts by Dischereit, Jeannette Lander, and Rabinovici. These texts help to illustrate the points made by the aforementioned contributions and introduce an English-reading audience to texts that otherwise are mostly available in German. "Mischmasch or Mélange" by Rabinovici is a fitting final contribution to this book, as the writer narrates in this two-page story the immigration of a school age Israeli boy to Vienna and his experiences meeting Austrians and learning German. The boy's experiences set in the 1960s illustrate the beginning of this transition to a "Rebirth of Culture." This book is an

important addition to the library of any scholar specializing in contemporary German and Austrian literature and would also lend itself well to a course on German-Jewish literature.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Joseph W. Moser. Review of Herzog, Hillary Hope; Herzog, Todd; Lapp, Benjamin, eds., *Rebirth of a Culture: Jewish Identity and Jewish Writing in Germany and Austria Today.* HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. October, 2010.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=30495

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.