1931

Jakob Wassermann's Jews

Dorothy Mueller

*The University of Montana*

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JAKOB WASSERMANN'S JEWS

by

Dorothy Mueller

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

State University of Montana

1931

Approved:

[Signatures]

Chairman of Examinin Committee

Chairman of Graduate Committee
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Jew, "precocious, intellectually passionate, incapable of moral compromise—almost scoundrel or almost saint—given to dreams and schemes of world betterment, chocked with inhibitions, anxieties, uncertainties..."\(^1\), with his unique historical experience, with his special significance in the development of human thought, with his inheritance of suffering, physical defeat and moral victory, is readily stuff for the modern epic.

Justification for looking upon the Jew as a well-defined historical and epic personality lies in the assumption that "the peculiar character and experiences of a particular people will be summed up in a unique vision of the multiform world."\(^2\) This vision will depend upon spiritual foundation and upon the spirit. The foundation was laid long ago: Judaism took on its definite character at the middle or the close of the 5th century B.C., when the idea of religious independence was substituted for that of political independence.\(^3\)

The ancient Jewish theocracy was permeated by an intense

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democracy of spirit, by a sense of election, by the spirit of inner unity. This spirit persisted in the Dispersion; the Jew "became a nation upon terms new in the history of mankind. . . . (they had) no country, no rulers, no instrument of war." The position has had its own peculiar dangers, especially manifest during the middle ages: "That terrible millenium of resistance not only more than decimated the Jewish people; it also enfeebled them. Dry Talmudical hair-splitting alternated with febrile Messianic hope. . . . No health came to the soul of the Jewish people until . . . arose the Chassidic teaching of mystical union with God."

Historic experience has brought the Jew to the conviction that appeal to force settles nothing and that moral and intellectual values are the great values in life; experience has kept him, too, from breaking away from the world of reality, as has the Christian world, for example, under the impetus of chivalry and asceticism. Jews have remained a nation by dint of a combination of unshakable practicality and devotion to an idea.

The so-called Jewish problem than, from the world-standpoint, lies in the paradox of the existence of an international

7. Ibid., p. 33.
8. Ludwig Lewisohn, "Levi versus Smith".
nation, although in some ways the solidarity of that nation is obviously no more actual than that of others. "The extremes of economic conservation and economic radicalism have coexisted within Jewry, the extremes of nationalism and internationalism. There is the division between East and West, between the assimilationist and anti-assimilationist, between orthodox and reformed, above all, between the passionate adherents of the lands and polities of their residence and political allegiance."\(^9\)

But for the Jew himself the problem has in addition a more personal side. Lewisohn calls it "this problem of the Jew’s relation both to the world and to himself."\(^10\) It is from this point of view that Jakob Wassermann, speaking from the basis of the historic and inner kinship and inner alliance of the Jew with much of German civilization, most often records the results of imaginative contemplation.

The fact that Wassermann is a Jew appears at first glance to be nothing short of an open invitation to give this writer’s Jewish characters special attention. It is only as the reward of intense and loving effort to understand these characters and the work to which they belong that a second, and real, invitation accrues. The nature of this

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admission to an author's mind is not easily explicable; the nature of the invitation must be inferred from the manner in which it is accepted. Second thought has hesitated before the consideration that the procedure of leveling a crude microscope at a Jewish writer's Jewish characters just because he is a Jew may very well result in false emphasis, distortion, foreshortening. However inseparably private self and literary self may work together in the remote fastnesses of artistic personality, it is not for the reader to attempt, at the same time, a study of any special component of a man's creative work and a summarizing fusion of his personal character and his creative imagination, unless, indeed, that special component proves to be a fusing power, a welding-flame.

The writer who is entitled to make "we" the subject of his sentence adds verb and modifiers with a subtle suggestion of authority. But the authority is apt to be more a matter of suggestion than of anything else; the suggestion may easily be from and to emotional prepossession. What he says will be, after all, a product not of scientific but of artistic imagination. His truths will be artistic truths, that is—and the definition is of course personal and tentative—the findings of one who is a sort of sociologist and psychologist not more than by the grace of God; they will be recorded in
plastic form. It is therefore less appropriate to ask concerning such an artist, "Being permitted to use the first plural, has he spoken truly?" than it is to ask, "Being permitted to speak in the first person plural, has he so spoken? Has he spoken in accord with his own approach to truth without prejudice to other approaches?" The specific problem here under consideration is that of the final significance of the Jewish characters in Wassermann's fiction.

The term "German Jew", according to Wassermann himself, is a never yet successful attempt to amalgamate "... zwei Begriffe, die auch dem Unbefangenen Ausblick auf Fälle von Misverständnissen, Tragik, Widersprüchen, Hader und Leiden eröffnen." To be born a German Jew is to inherit a problematical relationship to the human aspects of environment; and an inner conflict. The German Jew will hardly escape a sense of uncertainty and insecurity; false assumptions on the part of others may at any moment confuse him in the expression even of love of home, love of country, love of work, love of humanity.

The starting-point of Wassermann's development must, of course, be sought in the inborn strength of those very feelings in him and in his desire "Kunde zu geben." That he

12. Ibid., p. 23.
chose a direction that led him away from the Jews toward the Germans is the result of a universality and an idealism inherent in his genius. For in as much as he speaks, in his novels, not as an individual but as one of the articulate voices of the human world, it is to the whole world of a nation that he must speak if he is to be truly heard. "Ihm (such a writer as Wassermann) geht es um ein ganzes, um das volle, breite, tiefe, Erklingen einer Welt."\(^{13}\)

Nine years ago he published a small autobiographical volume\(^{14}\) in which he undertook to explain, to the world and to himself, the nature of this inner conflict. That it was a struggle for adjustment, that adjustment could only mean acceptance of a certain subtle injustice in the national mind, that an inner victory could only be wrung from the inner enemy by means of idea, philosophy, Weltanschauung, is obvious. "Es verlangt mich", he says, "Anschauung zu geben."\(^{15}\)

Even in his early youth Wassermann felt no deep and exclusive spiritual identity with the Jewish community; in the last analysis he was like many others a Jew in name only, a Jew chiefly by virtue of the attitude of his Christian environment, its hostility, its emphasis on a hypothetical foreign character of the Jews, its polite refusal to accept

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14. Ibid.
15. Ibid. p. 7
them as equals. In spite of an outward leveling of distinctions, he could never get rid of the feeling that he was, at best, a guest. Yet the deepest demand of his nature was: not to be a guest, to belong, to lose himself in the fullness of human life. These are the two poles of Wassermann's being, his Jewish birth, and his effort to be acknowledged as a German too.

He came in contact with the full strength and meaning of the German antisemitic feeling for the first time during his military service. His description is bitter, as it might well be; the immediate result for him was a sort of paralysis of the social side of his nature:


Jeder redlich und sich achtsame Jude muss, wenn ihn zuerst dieser Gifthauch anweht und er sich über dessen Beschaffenheit klar zu werden versucht, in nachhaltige Bestürzung geraten."16

The problem became broader and plainer as he grew into his mission— for so he considers it— as writer. "Ich rang um meine eigene Seele und um die Seele der deutschen Welt."17

17. Ibid., p. 74.
The German world would not immediately yield up its soul, not to a Jew. But, although Wassermann might have lost his own soul in such a struggle, humanly or artistically, he did lose neither himself nor his purpose. Out of the inner conflict came his first literary theme, the Ahasverus motif, which "... vom Passion der Juden klagt, dieser heimat- und rechtlosen Gemeinschaft, die nicht leben, nicht sterben kann-- der Umwelt verhasst und zugleich unentbehrlich!" From the outward conflict, the struggle to maintain his work against unjust criticism, against deliberate blindness and voluntary deafness, there emerged the mature writer, with suffering humanity as his theme. Ten years after Die Juden von Zirndorf, Wassermann published Caspar Hauser, with its secondary title "oder die Trägheit des Herzens." The conflict was not over; but to the observer the outcome must seem, in retrospect, a foregone conclusion; the author who has set himself to speak for the human heart against the world must ultimately stand above problem and question. Wassermann does write, in fact, in 1923:

"Inzwischen ist mir das alles zu gering, zu klein geworden. .................


To say that the question no longer arises in any personal sense for Jakob Wassermann is certainly not to say that he considers it answered for all Jews and for all Germans. It
is answered for him only by the consideration that the exception breaks the rule, and that he can feel himself to be, in a measure, an exception, a Jewish German instead of a German Jew. Wassermann does not defend the Jews on all scores; his position is perhaps as problematical from their standpoint as it is from the purely German one. Yet he must regard himself as "zugehörig" as long as the insult of the present German antisemitic feeling lasts, as long as accusations fail to distinguish between the guilty and the innocent.  

"Es ist die Tragik im Dasein des Juden," he says, "dass er zwei Gefühle in seiner Seele einigt: das Gefühl des Vor­rangs und das Gefühl der Brandmarkung. . . . und es ist der tiefste, schwierigste und wichtigste Teil des jüdischen Problems."  

Perhaps the most subtle and pervasive reason for the persistence of the German attitude is a certain similarity between German and Jew. That is: there have been in the histories of both peoples centuries of political dis­union and lack of a national focal point, centuries of for­eign oppression made endurable by the hope of victory and union. Both have endured misunderstanding, suspicion, hos­tility, and jealousy, from outside, and both have suffered

from the internal conflict of irreconcilable traits of character, practicality and dreaminess, the tendencies toward speculation in the highest and lowest senses of the word; from the influence of too many formulas and too little form; and finally, both cherish a dogmatic belief in themselves as chosen peoples.22

The Jews, like any other nation, are guilty of chauvinism;23 they are often servile when they should be proud, and push themselves when modesty would be more appropriate; they are rationalists and opportunists, inspired by a will to unveil the mysteries of life; and plunderers, determined to seize upon whatever they can; some of them are religious fanatics.24 But it is not just to blame a whole people as such for the sins of individuals or groups; and it not wholly the fault of the Jews that they have not been completely assimilated.25 The history of the middle ages and later offers proof of this. "Es blieb aber dieser herrlichen Jetztzeit vorbehalten, einer Genossenschaft, die ursprünglich von fremder Art sein mag, blutmässig oder religionsgeschichtlich, die äussere Zugehörigkeit zu Sprache, Landschaft und Volkstum trotz viele Male bewiesener Zugehörigkeit absprechen."26

22. Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude, p. 120.
The Jews may be the Jacobins of the period, but they are also the guardians of valuable tradition;\(^27\) they have true enthusiasm for art and true understanding for it, a longing for the creative that springs from a longing for the Creator;\(^28\) "... sind es doch gerade die edlen Juden heute, die Allerstillsten freilich, da und dort im Lande, in denen die christliche Idee und christliche Art in kristallner Reinheit ausgeprägt ist, ein Verwandlungsphänomen freilich, das in die Zukunft deutet."\(^29\)

The "European" Jew is cut off from the past, from tradition, patriotism and religion. He is an individualist; he desires to be so cut off; yet he feels the insecurity of his position, his life is a precariously sustained pose. He is the victim of his own detached personality, convulsive, restless, desirous. The modern Jew tries to destroy all fundamentals, all foundations, because he is himself without foundation. For him is "... Verrat eine Wollust, Würdelosigkeit ein Schmuck, Verneinung ein Ziel.... glauben sie bloss an das Fremde, das Andere, das Anderssein."\(^30\)

The Jew, on the other hand, whom Wassermann calls symbolically the "Oriental", the legitimate heir, is sure of

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27. Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude, p. 118.
himself, of humanity and the world. He cannot lose himself, because a noble consciousness of race binds him to the past, and an enormous responsibility to the future. He is not sectarian, not a particularist, not a fanatic, for he possesses within himself what the others seek outside. He takes his part in the forward moving life of peoples with freedom and devotion.

"Er ist frei, und jene sind Knechte. Er ist wahr, und jene lügen. Er kennt seine Quellen, er wohnt bei den Müttern, er ruht und schafft, jene sind die ewig wandernden Unwandelbaren.

Er ist, in solcher Vollkommenheit gesehen, vielleicht mehr eine Idee als eine Erscheinung. Doch sind es nicht die Ideen, durch welche die Erscheinungen hervorgebracht werden? Jede menschliche Wirklichkeit ist das Erzeugnis einer Idee, und die blosses Ahnung des Sternes, der über dem Sumpf des Rationalismus leuchtet, ist wirklicher als das behagliche Quaken des Frosches in seiner Mitte."31

The individual, to Wassermann, is a link in a chain, something very like a means to an end. The individual has significance only as he remains in line, founding himself on racial and social inheritance. Nature, in the course of generations, brings forth a complete individual of the strain, one capable of leadership. Types are perhaps the ideas toward which nature works, and when some of them are realized, the process begins again with these new individuals. There might thus be said to be atom-individuals, each capable of

31. "Der Jude als Orientale", in Lebensdienst, p. 177.
striving toward an ideal of complete manhood, and idea-in-
dividuals striving toward an ideal of complete mankind.
Such an individual is Ahasverus, the Wandering Jew. The
end of his journey is absorption into the conception human
being; but in the meantime he has many faces, even many ex-
pressions on many faces; and his wandering continues.

This study of the Jewish characters in Wassermann's
novels and stories is not, of course, a study of the "Jewish
question" as such. It is a literary theme that has been studied, a matter of epic and drama. Its final meanings are
above all poetic meanings; "race", "blood", are mystical
terms with Wassermann. Nevertheless, there is a profound
agreement between what he has had to say on the subject in
essay form, of which much has just been quoted, and what he
has said as a novelist. The difference is one of depth sound-
ings; on the one hand lucidity, conciseness, on the other a
sheer unfathomable intensity.

It has occasionally been thought necessary, in what fol-
lows, to include a short synopsis of story-action; but it
should be remembered, both that a synopsis conveys nothing of
what makes a story what it is, and that with Wassermann plot
is never an end in itself. If it seems sometimes less-than
life-like, it is through a process of intensifying and purify-
ing that leaves behind only what is in a sense legendary,
mythical; if it seems more-than-lifelike, it is because his purpose is not reproduction, but presentation. In this sense, his work appears to be one long parable, and that is perhaps its essential quality.

Although the Jewish characters here described have necessarily been taken out of their settings, sometimes completely, an attempt has been made not to destroy this quality of presentation. They, the Jewish characters—-and it should be noted, certainly, that there are after all comparatively few of them in the dramatis personae of Wassermann's epic—-have been loosely classified. The types are not finally distinct, they are not always mutually exclusive, that is, they are intended only as a way of framing a picture.32

32. Biographical note: Karl Jakob Wassermann was born March 10, 1873, at Fürth. His father was consistently unsuccessful, first as a small merchant, then as the owner of a small factory, and finally as an insurance writer. His mother died when he was nine years old; a stepmother was unsympathetic. Wassermann showed his talent at an early age, but received quite the opposite of encouragement from his family and friends. After leaving school he was sent to an uncle in Vienna as an apprentice in business. He was not a success; with an ambition to study, and counting on his uncle's support, he fled to a friend in München. The allowance from his uncle, however, was insufficient, and was later withdrawn; Wassermann was forced to return to his father. A "second chance" in Vienna ended in catastrophe; Wassermann was next sent to get his military service out of the way. The effect was not, as the family council had hoped, to cure him of the foolish ambition to write. He lost a clerical position because of his Jewish birth, and went on foot to join another friend in Zürich. Necessity again drove him home. After a period of the blackest discouragement, he
became secretary to Ernst von Wolzogen, who gave his enthusiastic support to the young author. With Thomas Mann, Wassermann took part in the founding of "Simplizismus", in 1895. In 1896, the publication of Die Juden von Zirndorf brought him early fame. Two years later he moved to Vienna, where, in 1900, he married Julie Speyer, the daughter of a wealthy manufacturer. His second wife, Marta Karlweis, is the daughter of a Viennese poet. Since 1919 Wassermann's residence has been Alt-Aussee in Austria.

Wassermann's books, with the date of first publication, follow:

Novels and short stories: Die Juden von Zirndorf; Die Schaffnerin, 1897; Die Geschichte der jungen Renate Fuchs, 1900; Der Molooh, 1902; Der Niggeskastete Mund, 1903; Alexander in Babylhn, 1905; Die Schwestern, 1906; Caspar HaUSER oder Die Tragheit des Herzens, 1908; Die Masken Erwin Reiner's, 1910; Der Goldene Spiegel, 1911; Der Mann von vierzig Jahren, 1913; Das Gänsemännchen, 1915; Christian Wahnschaffe, 1918; Der Wendekreis I (Der Unbekannte Gast, 1920); Der Wendekreis II, Oberlin's drei Stufen, Sturreganz, 1922; Der Wendekreis III, Ulrike Vorting, 1923; Der Wendekreis LV, Faber oder Die verlorenen Jahre, and Der Geist des Pilgers, 1924; Laudin und die Seinen, 1925; Der Aufruhr um den Junker Ernst, 1925; Das Amulett, 1927; Der Fall Maurizius, 1928.

Essays: Die Kunst der Erzählung, 1904; Faustina oder Über die Liebe, 1907; Der Literat oder Mythos und Persönlichkeit, 1909. The preceding three were collected under the title Imaginäre Brücken, 1921; Deutsche Charaktere und Begebenheiten, 1915; Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude, 1921; in 1928, a collected volume of essays, Lebendienst, includes Imaginäre Brücken, Gestalt und Humanitst, 1924, In Memoriam Ferrucio Busoni, 1925, and other essays and letters.

One-act plays: Die Ungleichlen Schalen, 1912.

Biography: Christoph Columbus/ Der Don Quichote des Ozeans/ Ein Portrait, 1929.
II. Sabbatai Zevi and Die Juden von Zirndorf.

The theme of Wassermann's first successful novel is specifically Jewish. He says of his purpose in writing it: "Als ich im Alter von dreundzwanzig Jahren 'Die Juden von Zirndorf' schrieb, griff ich einseitig zurück in Urbestände, Ahnenbestände, in Mythos und Legende eines Volkes, als dessen Sprössling ich mich zu betrachten hatte, und wollte anderseits auch das Gegenwärtige, das werdende Leben dieses Volkes in einem mystischen, sehr vereinfachten, sehr zusammenfassenden Sinn gestalten. Realen Boden für beides gab mir die Landeschaft die mich hervorgebracht, die fränkische Heimat." Yet even in this avowedly Jewish story, the curtain rises on the whole imaginative world of Wassermann's creation; the fundamental thematic and individual patterns are here in outline. He is the more entitled to picture the Jewish community in that he cannot do so without speaking for the suffering heart of humanity. Walter Goldstein comments: "Die Juden von Zirndorf sind die Ouvertüre zu allem Kommenden, geformt aus des Meisters Grundmelodien, die er erst in späteren Werken zur Entfaltung bringt"; Julie Wassermann-Speyer, with sympathetic insight: "Ein kleines Weltbild die Tragödie des Getto und seine Menschen als die Resonanz eines inbrünstigen Seelenzustandes; Wassermanns Stellung zum Judentum, zur Kultur, zum

33. Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude, p. 72.
34. Goldstein, op. cit., p. 61

Sabbatai Zewi, the prologue, is the story of the founding of Zirndorf. It goes back to that strange 17th century when men fought bloody wars for freedom of conscience, and believed in crude material miracles; when the spirit of freedom moved, restless and inarticulate, on a rising wind, and the peasant cowered under taxes and the Jews in their ghetto; when mystery, superstition, and faith were simple commonplaces. The first paragraph of the prologue strikes a note that is fundamental in Wassermann's attitude toward the position of the Jews, posits, that is, a half mystical, half natural bond between the land and its inhabitants:

"Gleichlich schwebt die Zeit hin über die Länder und über die Geschlechter, und wenn sie auch Städte zertritt und Wälder zerstampft und neue Städte und neue Wälder hinwirft mit gleichfältiger Gebärde, so ver-mach sie doch dem heimatlichen Boden niemals seine Lieblichkeit zu rauben oder seine Rauheit, kurz jene Gestalt und jenes Antlitz, womit die Heimat ihren Sohn erfüllt, in dem sie ihn gleichsam als ihr Eigentum in Anspruch nimmt und ihm auf dem Weg seines Lebens die Worte ins Herz sät: aus meinem Ton bist du gemacht."36

Near Fürth, there towers a mighty pile of stones, and it was said that the Swedes had built it up there as a monument to their victories, a stone for every plundered house. Among these stones was a block of granite from a Jewish tomb, with an inscription in strange foreign letters. The Christians left this stone undisturbed because of their superstitious dread of Jews and Jewish things; for the Jews, although they suffered under the knowledge that in such a place the soul of the dead man could never find rest, it had become a symbolic guarantee of present outward peace. With its strange language and its beautiful carving, it stood as a symbol too, of something noble and far distant in their history.

On the evening of a fair-day in October, seventeen years after the great peace, an old man stood long in contemplation before this Jewish inscription; then he turned toward the common, and made his way among the booths and the merrymakers. His eyes wandered restlessly. "Es waren Judenaugen, voll Hast und voll Unfrieden, voll von unbestimmten Flehen, von einer gedrückten Innigkeit, bald in Leidenschaft flackernd, bald in Schmerz alle Glut verlierend, die Augen des heberten Tieres, das angstvoll und kraftlos die Blicke dem Verfolger zuwendet oder in behender Sehnsucht hinaustarrt in das ferne Land der Freiheit." He spoke to a girl who was singing in a sort of play, and his communication frightened her. At the sight of the old man a hostile murmur went quickly

from mouth to mouth, and a name, Ahasverus. But Zacharias
Narr strode unmoved through the dark streets to the temple
of the Jews. "Keine friedliche Stimmung herrschte in diesem
Raum. Jeder schien seinen Gott für sich zu dienen,
und bisweilen entstand ein unbestimmter Lärm, in dem
sich eine schreieende oder keifende Stimme abholz. Ein
dumpfer höhlenartiger Riech erfüllte das Gotteshaus; es roch
nach altem Leder, nach alten Gewändern, nach Rauch und
nach fauligem Holz. Kinder standen umher und glockten
mit stumpfsinniger Andacht umher in Buchen mit gebrannten
Blättern. Der Raum glich einem unterirdischen Gemach für
Verschwörer, einer Versammlung für Asketen; nichts
von Lebensfreude und nichts von Gottesfreude war hier
tzu finden. Die Lichter qualmen, und wer aus freier
Luft herinkam, glaubte alsbald in eine schwül-qualmen-
de Schlucht zu versinken." 38

At the end of the service, Zacharias Narr spoke to the
worshippers, at first softly and casually, but when he had
cought their attention, with fiery, cunning words:

"Der Zorn des Herrn ist entbrannt wider sein Volk, und
er streckt seine Hand aus und schlägt es, so dass die
Berge erzittern und ihre Leichen wie Kehricht auf den
Strassen liegen. Haben sie uns nicht beschuldigt: ihr
giftet unsere Brunnen? Haben sie nicht unsere Brüder
hingeschlachtet zu Tausenden? Haben sie nicht geschiert:
ihr nehmt das Blut unserer Kinder zum Opfer beim Passah-
feaste? Ihr nehmt das Blut und braucht es für eure schwang-
eren Weiber? Haben sie uns nicht ausgewiesen aus ihren
Städten und unsere Götter geraubt? Müssen wir nicht
vogelfrei dahinwandern, und viele finden keine Hütte,
wie Kain, der seinen Bruder erschlug? Haben sie uns nicht
aufs Rad geflochten und den Henkern ins Land preisgege-
ben wie krankes Vieh? Nicht unsere Kinder verbrannt,
nicht unsere Weiber geschändet, und als die Fest kam,
nicht schlimmer unter uns gewütet, denn die Fest?" 39

But now, he continues, the hand of the Lord shall be

38. "Sabbatai Zevi", in Frankische Erzählungen, p. 17
lifted to punish the heathen and the oppressor; His promises

to His people shall be fulfilled, for a prophet has arisen in
Smyrna, Sabbatai Zewi. To him has been given knowledge of all
secrets and mysteries; he performs wonder upon wonder; joy­
fully the Jews of Asia Minor acclaim him. A feast has been
prepared for him at Salonika; in the presence of friends he
has celebrated his union with Thora, the daughter of heaven.
For he is the true Messiah, and the kingdom of heaven is
near.

This, the first direct message from the prophet, was
like a trumpet call in the ears of the Jews of Fürth. They
were so practiced in resignation and in the dull courage of
hopelessness, that a great hope was to them like the shock of
an unknown terror. They trembled; little by little a frenzy
came upon them. There came to them daily rumors of new con­
versions and of the setting out of other Jewish communities
to join Sabbatai Zewi; there occurred signs and wonders. The
Jew Wassertrüdinger at Fürth saw, on the Sabbath evening, a
huge spreading fire in the Northern sky. A crowd gathered
silently on the shores of the rivers; Christians and Jews
stood shoulder to shoulder, watching with the same fear, with
the same mystic awe. In the night a stormwind tore away the
cross from the Catholic church. When they went in the mor­
ning to pray, the Jews found Sabbatai's initials in golden
letters over the door of the synagogue. A voice announced
to one Maier Nathan that his daughter was to become the virgin mother of a bride for the prophet. In the houses of the Jews light burned all night; young girls danced half naked in the streets; boys sat in groups in the doorways singing psalms and hymns to the Messiah. Indoors, old men studied the Cabbala with attentive reverence. On Serapion Friday, after nightfall, the family of the beautiful Joseph appeared by the Swedenstein, and four young men carried away his carved granite tombstone. Many men, women, and children accompanied them. When they reached the Jewish graveyard, the girl Zirle, who had sung and danced at the fair, appeared to them like a ghost and proclaimed herself Sabbatai's chosen bride. Her dead father, she told them, had spoken to her in a vision. Zacharias Narr called upon the people to follow her; and Maier Nathan hung his head over his daughter's disgrace and the end of his own brief importance.

At the news that the Jews of Frankfort, Worms, and Mainz were making ready for the journey back to Zion, excitement reached a pitch that could only be compared to one long-continued ecstasy of worship. Those of Furth too began to make preparations. They bought huge wagons, horses, donkeys and oxen, and stripped their houses of everything portable; Samuel Ermreuther had his sons take the roof from the house, so that nothing of his should be left for the hated Gojim. At Itzig Canshenkens many young girls sewed on wagon covers and traveling garments, singing as they worked. Hour after hour
processions of strange poor Jews moved through the main street; in their enthusiasms they stopped only long enough to say a prayer.

The departure was to take place on Saturday, the Twenty-eighth of November. Long before dawn, the community had gathered for the last time in the synagogue. The holy scroll was carried out by the elders, and the men followed it in prayer. The lights were put out, the door was locked and the great key buried in a secret place. Behind many doors in many empty houses, there was a sound of weeping in farewell to the place of oppression and scorn.

After three hours of travel, the badly disordered caravan reached the forest a quarter of a mile away.


It had grown dark. Suddenly trumpet signals sounded from the four sides of the wood. All the wagons stopped, for everyone knew what was coming; there fell a very real silence of death. Then riders of the Nürnberg soldiery appeared in

40. "Sabbatai Zewi, in Fränkische Erzählungen, p. 66
a clearing; the city would not permit so much wealth to be taken out of its territory. A musket shot rang out, and the old Rabbi Elieser sank to the ground to mingle his blood with the rain. The Jews met the attack with whatever came to hand, kitchen utensils, an iron staff, a bridle rein, stones, these things against the weapons of practiced soldiers. With their ridiculous bludgeons the Jews ran against their enemies, and feared neither death nor wounds. They neither saw nor heard any reality, but shouted aloud in Hebrew. Yet it seemed as if the end must have come when suddenly there arose a cry of "Fire!" Zacharias Harr had set fire to the forest, and attackers and attacked fled from this new destroyer.

During the night Rahel, Maier Nathan's daughter, gave birth to a boy. She held the infant in her arms, and felt that her love for the Christian who had helped her to trick her people with a false annunciation, the love that had lain like a dead thing in her heart, was alive again.

In the morning, with proper ceremony, the Jews buried their dead, and set out again on their journey. The sun was shining; they made swifter progress than on the day before. Then those in the main caravan saw the vanguard, in a valley below them, halt. These had met a party of the Jews who had just been expelled from Vienna, and the strangers brought news of Sabbatai Zewi's conversion to Islam. To all these people, the prophet's betrayal was "mehr als der Tod, schreck-
licher als der Tod, etwas das die ganze Haltlosigkeit des Lebens in grellem Blitz zeigte. Die Juden sind ein starkes und störrisches Volk; doch sind sie nur gross, wenn ein wenig Gelingen bei ihnen wohnt und sie sind nicht lange gross, denn sie brechen leicht in dem Erstaunen über ihre eigene Grösse. Auch Sabbatai Zewi war ein Jude, vielleicht das klarste Bild des Juden, ein Stück Judenschicksal." 41

Many of the people went back to Fürth; a few families joined the Viennese in the founding of a new settlement there in the valley. They called the village Zionsdorf to commemorate a lost hope; Christian settlers changed the name to Zirndorf. Maier Nathan died mad when the child announced as the prophet's bride proved to be a boy; Zirle and Zacharias Narr disappeared forever; everything became legend. The prologue ends with a passage that bridges over the years into the present:

"Geschlecht auf Geschlecht erstand und verblühte, und eine neue Zeit kam. Und das Kommende war immer grosser, freier und vollendet als das Vergangene, und der Jude, anfänglich nur Knecht, wert genug, den Fußtritt des Übelgelaunten Herrn zu empfangen, tat seine Außen auf und erspähte die Schwachen und erriet die Geheimnisse dieses Herrn. Da griff er alsbald mit seinen Händen hinein in die Maschinerie der Völker und ihrer Gerichte und ihrer Kriege und oft verrichtete er ungeschen kaiserliche Dinge, wenn die Monarchen schliefen und die Minister schwach waren. Sabbatai wurde ein Moslem, manche sagen zum Schein. Der Jude wurde ein Kulturmensch und manche sagen zum Schein. Manche sagen, der Verderber und der Verführer sitze im ihm und er verständte die Bühne dieser Welt besser als ihre Erbauer. Dies ist sicher: ein Schauspieler oder ein warer Mensch; der

41. "Sabbatai Zewi", in Fährkische Erzählungen, p. 74
Schenheit fähig und doch hässlich; lüstern und asketisch; ein Scharlatan oder ein Würfelspieler, ein Fanatiker oder ein feiger Sklave, alles das ist der Jude. Hat ihn die Welt dazu gemacht, die Geschichte, der Schmerz oder der Erfolg? Gott allein weiss es. Vor den bleiken tut sich ein unermessliches Bild auf, denn das Wesen eines Volkes ist wie das Wesen einer einzelnen Person: sein Charakter ist sein Schicksal."42

The prologue is legendlike; it is permeated by the qualities of distance and mystery that belong to the symbols of poetry and religion; its figures, illuminated in outline, appear and disappear at those crucial and simple moments that gather meaning in story rather than in history. The hero, in the tragic sense, is, not an individual but a whole people—or rather the indomitable, humble under necessity, passionate and visionary spirit of that people. Or again, the individual figures stand out only as the bearers of torches, here and there, in a procession that moves through the dusk of past centuries toward a far off present. Yet they are human beings, and touched with imaginative fire.

Zacharias Narr is half visionary, half charlatan. He is a clever orator, an actor who knows how to seize the moment and make it serve, but he uses these gifts in pursuance of a fanatical and relentless purpose. He is a poet who imprisons and crushes his own inspiration. Verses written and destroyed in hostile secrecy and haste, express against his will an

42. "Sabbatai Zewi", in Frankische Erzählungen, p. 75
affirmation of material nature against immaterial good; he is capable of proclaiming a prophet and doubting the existence of God.

The girl Zirle plays her part in a sort of hypnotic trance. Her soul is both paralyzed by the shock of the persecutions she has witnessed in childhood, and inflamed by her mission, the mission imposed upon her by Zacharias Narr. She is consumed by a secret longing; suffering, patient and lovely; yet there is stubborn violence in her, too. She inspires sympathetic pain because of an effect of soul-nakedness; but there is "... etwas listiges in ihrem Schmerz, und etwas Begehrlches in ihren klagenden Augen." 43

Rahel's is a practical, sensual nature. She has cunning, and a physical sort of loyalty to her lover. Yet Rahel is the first of Wassermann's people to seek escape from the prison of racial inheritance. With her, disillusionment means not so much the loss of something actual, but a paralyzing loss of dreams; she feels herself cast out, condemned to endure alone shame, oppression, restlessness, homelessness. She lives in fear, in a dark inner world, until the birth of her child. With the child, there comes to her a calm, deep, natural satisfaction, ennobling because it is natural.

Mayer Nathan—a lamentable Shylock?—has two preoccupations, in the midst of the general hysteria, fear for his mo-

43. Sabbatai Zewi, p. 33
ney and fear for his daughter. But he is kind to her, even under the disappointment of having to take second place when Zirle appears, and believes in her as long as he can. Despair drives him mad. He is not equal to the destruction of hope; his essential kindliness makes him unable to find an outlet in anger.

The legend is simple: The Jews of Fürth, having set out to join the followers of the Prophet in a triumphal return to Jerusalem, learn that he has betrayed them all, and found instead a new village on German soil. Within this simplicity, however, there appear certain workings of racial character and racial fate. The centuries of persecution and oppression are there; the Jew has so long been shut into his ghetto that the eyes of his spirit have atrophied; he clings tenaciously to his jealous, fanatic, ritualistic God. At the same time he has the superstitious and credulous mind of the times. Permitted or forbidden, willing or stiffly resistant, he is at least partially submerged in his surroundings; the current is pulling him away from the East. Sabbatai's defection is no chance event, but profoundly characteristic, profoundly meant. It is not meant that the Jew should go back: because time, by whatever means, has made him "the Jew"; it is meant that he should found new settlements in the country where he abides.
Sabbatai Zevi is legend and prophecy; Die Juden von Zirndorf is life and prophecy. The foreground lies no longer in the shadow of the passage of time, but stands clearly and immediately visible, and in it the separate figures move with meaning as individuals and as types. It might be said that the theme is no longer simply "the Jew", but has justified itself artistically and become "some Jews". To furnish a basis for the attempt to understand these Jews, as marked individuals of a marked people within a nation, the story is briefly repeated:

The setting is the same village of Zirndorf in the summer of 1885, the central figure a boy of eighteen, Agathon Geyer. Agathon is Wassermann's Messianic character. Some power in him, developed under the impetus of his fiery sympathy, touches the lives of others directly, without intermediary speech or action. At the beginning of the story Agathon finds himself in literal and figurative conflict with the threatening person of the innkeeper, Särich Sperling, to whom his father owes money that he cannot pay. Särich Sperling is a personified antithesis to the Jewish character, the "Urbild des Germanen", a child of nature, "wild, stolz, unbezähmbar, keinem Vernunftgrund der Welt zulänglich". In a

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44. "Die Juden von Zirndorf", Fränkische Erzählungen, p.89
45. Ibid., p. 90
manner never explicitly stated, perhaps actually, perhaps only by willing it, Agathon causes the innkeeper's death. In the purity and strength of his soul guilt is transformed to innocence; he feels himself lifted up and set free. "Mir ist's", he says, "als ob mit Sürich Sperling die ganze christliche Religion gestorben wäre, oder vielleicht nur der böse Geist in diesem Volk . . . ." But Agathon soon progresses spiritually from a desire to champion his own people to a perception of the fundamental human sin, the unwillingness of the human heart to share itself, "die Trägheit des Herzens". He sees his cousin Jeanette Lowengard leave her home to become a dancer, make a valiant attempt, that is, to escape from the helplessness of her people and sex, and sees her throw herself away, in the end, in a love that has the dignity of a lost cause. He learns that he is the son of his mother's Christian lover, and that her life has been one long heroic act of abnegation. He sees the patriarchal figure of his grandfather sink under the burden of years and undeserved misfortune; the degradation of his favorite teacher Bojesen, who has dared to go against the prescribed ritual of his profession; sees his father dying under the sheer weight of life. "Ich bin kein Jude mehr und auch kein Christ . . . ." says Agathon. Power comes to him. He gathers around him the boys.

47. "*Die Juden von Zirndorf*, p. 210
from the Jewish orphan's home, and brings light into their dark lives; his touch saves his mother when she lies at the point of death.

An old man named Baldewin Estrich has spent his life and his fortune trying to make gold. It is not cupidity that inspires him, but a great desire, like Agathon's desire, to increase the sum of human happiness. At last, by an accident, the old man succeeds, and goes out into the slums of the town to distribute all the money he has left. He meets, not gratitude, but a perfect frenzy of greed. A riot starts; a mob of paupers and criminals tramples the old man under foot. Fleeing from the military police, the crowd takes refuge in a church. As the pursuers reach the portals, Agathon appears suddenly in their path, and by sheer force of personality holds them in check. Unnoticed, a terrific storm has come up; lightening strikes the cathedral tower, which bursts into flame. Agathon's voice rises above the confusion in a sort of confession of faith, "Lasst sie brennen, die Kirche!" He leads the panic-stricken refugees out to safety, and escapes to the forest. After he has slept the clock around there, he returns to the city, at night, tired and hungry and penniless, but full of exaltation and eagerness for life. He is taken in by his cousin Jeanette, who has just come back

back from Paris with the strange purpose of devoting her life to dancing for the king. Jeanette has been disillusioned; she gives herself to Agathon in the hope of freeing herself from the unspoken command of his example by making him share her disillusionment. But Agathon keeps his faith in the natural world as good.

He returns to Zirndorf, and discovers that a young Jewish girl, Monika Oliphant, has been betrayed and deserted by his half-brother, the writer Stefan Gudstikker. Confronting Gudstikker, Agathon finds himself helpless, for Gudstikker is "die Lüge" in person. To prove to Agathon how trivial is his own sin, Gudstikker takes him through all the low dives of the city, shows him unsuspected depths and dregs of life; and Agathon, despairing, goes to seek Bojesen, whom he respected. He finds disillusionment; Bojesen's love for Jeanette and the loss of his position have ruined him body and soul. But Bojesen gives Agathon a letter from Jeanette calling him to her aid.

Agathon travels to the capital, and finds that Jeanette has seen the king. She has seen him at the very moment of his madness and deposition. "Ich werde mein Lebelang diese Stunde nicht vergessen, Agathon", she says, "und wenn ich so alt würde, wie die Erde selbst. Als ich hinein trat in den Saal, der von Licht und Gold strahlte, wusste ich, dass meine
Seele diesem Mann unwiderruflich angehöre, und küsste im Gedanken die geheimnisvolle Hand des Schicksals, die mich zu ihm geführt. Ich wusste, dass ich für ihn sterben könnte und sterben würde und sterben müsste und dass Sterben nichts bedeute gegenüber dem Glück, seine Sklavin zu sein.  

Agathon has a vision. He sees the king, who has been driven mad by his inability to live out his kingship as he dreams it. To Agathon, the cause of the king seems to be the cause of the people against unjust force, of good against evil. Jeanette looks into his eyes, sees the vision there, and rushes away; and Agathon does not try to hold her back. After a long journey on foot to a village near the castle to which the king has been taken, he stirs up the peasants to make an attempt to rescue the royal prisoner. It is too late; the king's body has been found in the lake. Then Agathon, weary and hopeless, passes the open window of a room where two children are playing alone, and his faith in a future for humanity revives. There is hope for a new generation as long as childlikeness remains in the world.

Agathon goes back to Zirndorf, marries Monika, and settles down to earn their living by cultivating his father's land. He has learned patience.
Excepting Gedalja, Jeanette's old grandfather, who belongs to the past— one might almost say to the biblical past; excepting Enoch Pohl, the father of Agathon's mother, another Shylock, but this time a strong and bitter one, pious and merciless, inaccessible to any other emotion than that of the longing for gold, completely fearless (yet Agathon thinks of him: "... es war, als ob die beängstigende Stimmung von ihm ausflösse."50); excepting Agathon himself, who belongs to the future, and moves through the story as the embodiment of an idea, - a being intense and impersonal, uncompromising participant and onlooker who gives himself, the characters in "Die Juden von Zirndorf" live in the shadow of fear. They are, using the word in Wassermann's special sense, incomplete. That is to say that they are cut off from a complete and unified taking part in life, are incapable of fulfilling themselves. This is as true of the two Christians Gudstikker and Bojesen as it is of the Jews. Gudstikker, however, belongs to the category which Wassermann calls "Judenchrist"51, and Bojesen is in a sense poisoned by the seeping into the stream of his life of Jewish pain. It is not so much the gathering together of human weaknesses and fears and unsatisfied longings that achieves, in this novel, a legend of the Jewish

50. Die Juden von Zirndorf, p. 91
51. See below, chapter V. p. 58
heart, as it is the pointing of those weaknesses, fears and longings to their social causes.

Fear, not sudden and temporary, but like a foreknowledge of a quality of existence, shows itself at its simplest in the pathetic figure of old Lämelchen Erdmann:


An old and unconscious fear has laid its hand heavily, too, upon the boy Sema Helmut, Agathon's adoring shadow.

"Flüchtiges und Zeitloses, Dasein und Sterben sind schon hier verbunden, versinnbildlicht in der Knabenfigur."53 He suffers all the pain around him, and he is self-contained; only by his death does he betray the icy terror with which he shrinks from a confused and insecure world. Sema cannot live after Agathon goes away.

Gedalja says to Elkan Geyer: "Elkan, du dauerst mich aach. Hast dich abgeschunden's gange Leben, hast gesammelt en ubrigen

52. Die Juden von Zirndorf, p. 89
53. Siegmund Bing, Jakob Wassermann, Weg und Werk des Dichters, (Nurnberg, 1929), p.113
Heller fur die Kinder un jetzt is es weg. Du bist der beste Mensch, den ich kenne, aber Mark hase kaans in die Knochen. Da sitzte jetzt un starrst. Zu was? If Elkan is "von flackernde Lebensangst bedrunkt", it is not the fear of living but a definite state of fear imposed upon him by life itself. He fears Surich Sperling's power to make him a homeless pauper; a greater fear for Agathon's safety gives him the courage to challenge Surich Sperling. But he is destroyed by a deeper-lying dread. Sincere in his Jewish faith and in his hatred of Christianity, Elkan takes the status of the Jews with resignation, and out of that resignation he learns to fear his son Agathon. With an understanding that has the force of premonition, he dreads the far-reaching implications of Agathon's plan for life. His children's money gone, his father-in-law arrested for usury, Agathon lost---Elkan Geyer's fear is like Sema's, a synonym for death.

Jeanette Lowengard was driven to revolt by two things: the imminence of an "arranged" marriage, and the inadequacy of the man she had chosen for herself, Eduard Nieberding. Niberding is one of those Jews who, despairing in the face of Christian hostility, have lost themselves completely, cut themselves off from their foundations. His philosophy of life

54. Die Jeden von Zirndorf, p. 157
55. Bing, op.cit. p. 108
is a morbid one; his ideals are chaste love, enjoyment of pain, beauty without sensuous appeal. Bojesen's statement that there is no bond between German and Jew arouses Nieberding to passionate and despairing protest; but there is in reality no bond between him and others except his ancestral sense of guilt. Bojesen's analysis is an accusation:

"Es liegt in der Zeit . . . all dies Mystische und Schwächer, das über uns gekommen ist wie eine Krankheit, dass wir nicht mehr wissen was Kraft oder Rohheit oder Wahrhafte Scham oder Umnatur ist . . . Ihr Volk ist es, das uns dies Geschenk gemacht hat, ihr arbeitsames, intelligentes, stets an Extremen bauendes Volk. Sie lieben nicht das Weib, sondern sie lieben die Liebe, nicht die Selbstbetrachtung und Selbstvervollkommnung, sondern das Qualerische, Zerstörende, Erniedrigende, alles, was sie zum Martyrer macht . . . Flagellanten, unsere Flagellanten, und der Gott, vor dem sie sich geisseln, ist das wohlbekannte Ich, dies Phrase von der Individualität . . . Die Juden sind schuld . . . Nicht jene alte Juden, die noch fromm sind . . . die sogenannten moderne Juden, die vollgezogen sind mit dem ganzen Geist und der Uberkultur des Jahrhunderts . . . die mit ihrer menschlichen Düm­terkeit und geistigen Scharfe ein Pseudochristentum aufrichten mit Gefühlskasteigung . . . " 56

And Nieberding's answer is an appeal for mercy, "Haven't we paid enough? Suffered enough?"

Nieberding gives Jeanette up so that his own feeling shall be purely spiritual; to desire her would be to descend to a

56. Die Juden von Zirndorf, p. 170
lesser level of love; yet he wants her to marry another man so that she will seem more desirable, and his renunciation more significant. To Jeanette all this is nothing more than personal treachery. She is not afraid of life; she is rather haunted by the fear of missing it, driven to extremes by the fear of missing the tangible, sensuous, artistic meanings of things. If there is any secret shrinking in her it is from what she cannot ignore in herself of racial weariness.

Monika Oliphant is the sister, born two hundred years later, of Rahel, Maier Nathan's daughter—"Es scheint, als ob Charaktere oder Seelen über Jahrhunderte hinweg in einer neuen Kette von Erscheinungen und Ereignissen zu Neuem Dasein erwachen müssen. Es ist dann gleichgültig, ob dieser Wiedergekehrte Thomas Peter Hummel oder Stefan Gudstikker heisst." 57

Frau Jette, Agathon's mother, is like a person who struggles with an invisible and constricting power, and is not strong enough to free her imprisoned self for defense. Life lies upon her more like a crushing weight than an actual fear; she has the courage of those who are hopeless. Like Monika and Rahel, she has given her love, once, to some one "drüben, bei den Anderen" 58, but she has stayed with her people.

57. Die Juden von Zirndorf, p. 263
58. Der Fall Maurizius, p. 333
There are in *Die Juden von Zirndorf* two characters,—two aspects of the Jewish character,—that appear in such typical completeness nowhere else in Wassermann's novels, the patriarchal figure of Gedalja, and the pharisaical one of the poor guest for the night at Elkan's.

Gedalja is "eine wunderbare Mischung von Weisheit und Verzagtheit, hellsehntiger Geistesklarheit, verzweifelter Lebensbitternis und unbeugsamer Lebensmut".59 "Die Erfahrung eines alten Volkes, erfüllt von Schmerz und einer unnachahmlicher Ammut, echt wie ein Volkslied, geheimnisvoll wie ein Brunnen, spricht aus seinen Worten und verleiht seiner Gestalt eine fast alttestamentarische Grosse."60 Gedalja has an innate comprehension of true values in human relationship; to him sex is a thing natural and right, and love something more than sex, religion a reality, name and family and race a responsibility. He sees how vain is Jeanette's effort at self-assertion, and has sympathy and tolerance for Agathon's interest in Christianity. He is ninety years old; physical hardship can bend and break his body; but it is betrayal and injustice that taste most bitter in his mouth. When he is quite broken, the theme of his wandering talk has still a sort of logic, is

59. *Wassermann-Speyer*, op.cit., p. 41
60. *Bing*, op. cit. p. 50
a summing up of the results of having lived: "... ich kenn die Welt, ich kenn se in- und auswendig kenn ich se, oben un- ten kenn ich se, hinten und vorn kenn ich se." 61

The stranger guest—they give him food and shelter as a matter of course—is a stickler for religious observance; he attaches importance to every letter of the law. He is bitter and resentful, unpleasant, hostile because he feels inferior, and he likes to prophesy vengeance for the oppression of the Jews. He is, briefly, the antithesis to Gedalja, a man for whom the old faith has meant a stiffening into lifelessness. "Finster starrte er vor sich hin, als ob er in ein Grab schau­te. Und er schaute in ein Grab. Er selbst hatte es gegraben mit seinesgleichen, um darin alles zu verscharren, das frei und schön ist. Des ungeachtet betete er die Worte der Schrift: 'Gedenke unser, o Herr, zum Leben, der du Wohlgefallen hast am Leben'". 62

Like its prologue, Die Juden von Zirndorf is legend after all; it is the present of less than fifty years ago seen through the eyes of the future; indeed, this quality of more-than-pres­ent significance belongs to most of Wassermann's work. In Sab­batai Zewi the Jew was literally and physically set apart, con-

61. Die Juden von Zirndorf, p. 226
62. Die Juden von Zirndorf, p. 209
fined to the ghetto and forced to wear a badge; and his attempt to escape is literal and physical too; in Die Juden von Zirndorf the setting apart has become a spiritual act of force and the badge is figurative. Two qualities stand out: stoic resignation and hope of freedom. Bound with a chain forged from one or both of these substances, pure or alloyed, Wassermann's Jews struggle with the angel.
III. Ruth Hoffmann.

It has been said that the Jew, in the world of Wassermann's epic, wears many expressions on many faces; it is equally true that one sees there the same emotions on faces remote from each other in time and space. There is a Jew whose suffering has been physical, at least external, who has remained untroubled within himself. In his face there is fortitude and stubbornness, a strange tenacity of pride and hope (for it is still courageous to admit fear when there is no hope of escape); fortitude and resignation are in his face; he has maintained himself through the ages.

Alexander occupied the palace of the ancient kings of Babylon, and his soldiers rioted in the city. Twelve thousand men, slaves and prisoners and free laborers, Syrians, Bactrians, Egyptians and Hebrews, had been set at work clearing away the ruins of the temple of Marduk. Twice the Jews sent their elders to Alexander to beg for their sacred day of rest. They proved by the ancient writings that their God, the mightiest of all Gods, had himself rested on the sabbath from the labor of creating the world in six days. The statement was met by jeers from those around Alexander; only the Chaldeans, in the face of the general mirth, ventured the
admission that the Jewish god, although not all-powerful, was believed to exist as a tributary deity to the great Gods of Babylon.

The pleading of the Jews was in vain. They came for the third time. When they had spoken, Alexander said somberly, "If you believe so firmly in this God and his laws, why do you not turn to him instead of to me?" Then the eldest of the Jews, while the spectators stood pale with horror, spat upon the footstool before the throne, rent his garments, and cursed Alexander and Alexander's race. He was thrown to the lions, and his companions were imprisoned in iron cages, where they crouched night and day in prayer, with their faces turned toward Jerusalem. On the next Sabbath, all the Hebrews refused to take up their work.

The overseers struck them with their heavy whips, loosed the wild Bactrian dags against them, and called in the Lydian mercenaries to attack them with lowered spears. The Hebrews allowed themselves to be whipped and bitten and stabbed, and no cry came from their huddled ranks. Alexander came. When he saw among the soldiers his half-brother Arrhidaos, the shadow man--Alexander's shadow and caricature--who was there to steel himself for great deeds by the sight of blood, Alexander
turned deadly pale and gave a hasty order to end the massacre and grant the Hebrews their holiday.  

Again, this time in a Galician village during the war: Seven persons had been summarily condemned to be shot as spies, three Jews, a seventeen year old Polish girl, a boy of twelve and an old man of seventy-six, and the gigantic ringleader, who was in all likelihood the only one at all guilty. All but Katinka and giant begged for mercy on their knees, and of them the Jews groveled most humbly. But when the captain, wary of the noise, abruptly ordered the prisoners to be taken away, it was a Jew with a red beard and face as white as cheese, the one whose despair had made him most abject, who stretched out his arms and uttered an appalling old testament curse.  

Acceptance of the inevitable, a resignation that is not without its reserve of pride and of contempt for the inflictor of injustice, is the keynote in the attitude of the Jews involved in the "Elasser affair". Elasser is a Jewish peddler, fairly goodnatured, humble in manner, careful of his money. When the brutal butcher callously refused to pay him,

63. "Alexander in Babylon", in Historische Erzählungen, (Berlin, 1924) pp.141 - 144  
64. "Jost", in Der Unbekannte Gast, (Berlin, 1923), p. 298  
65. Goldstein, op. cit. p. 249
Ellasser, although he is terrified by bodily mistreatment, threatens the man with the law. He has, in the beginning a rather pathetic belief in legal justice; when he asks young Arnold Ansorge to be a witness against the butcher, there is in his manner, in spite of its servile friendliness, an assumption that Arnold cannot refuse. But the belief and the assumption prove untenable. Ellasser's daughter Jutta, a child not quite fourteen, ("mit ihren etwas schwärmischen Augen schien sie wie ermüdet von den Lasten der Generationen"), disappears from her home. After a day and a night of frantic search, her father discovers that she has been taken to a nearby convent, literally stolen. Quite in vain, Ellasser invokes the law. He follows Jutta from convent to convent, always too late, never allowed to see her; he appeals to the police, to the minister of justice, and at last to the emperor himself. He is humble, he begs for justice in person and in writing, he accepts promises of help, and waits patiently. When the affair is brought up in the parliament, the speaker is greeted by hisses and cries against the Jews and silenced by laughter; nothing is done; probably nothing will ever be done about it. Arnold Ansorge (the forerunner of Etzel Andergast in Der Fall

Maurizius), filled by a desire to see justice done, champions Elasser's cause. He sees the whole family praying by candlelight, and is moved to indignation by their inactivity and resignation. His outburst is answered by a venerable old man: "Es ist in der Schrift geschrieben . . . man soll das Unrecht sich ergeben lassen ganz . . . Die Welt ist nicht jüdisch, Herr. Das Recht ist für sie und nicht für uns." 67 And Elasser, having given up all hope of saving his child and returned to his home and his business, comforts Arnold: "Nu, es lasst sich leben. Man muss sich eben dazu halten. Mit der Peitsche muss man's treiben." 68

All these are Jews who have no thought of being anything but quite simply Jews. Therein lies their strength and their weakness; the weakness itself is only the negation of strength, and therefore a diminishing quantity as strength approaches its fulfillment.

But imagine that throughout the generations nature has been at work selecting, purifying, intensifying; that little by little acceptance of injustice and pain for the race has been ennobled and widened into an understanding of the pain of all races; that the strength that comes from a consciousness

67. Der Moloeh, p. 59
68. Ibid., p. 272
of race has overflowed into a consciousness of humanity, imagine, that is, an individual so rare that these are his capacities—the result, poetically conceived, is Ruth Hoffmann, the little figure in a shabby flannel dress and soiled, worn shoes, with thick hair that curls at the ends, and large grey eyes in a clear pale face flooded with an alien spiritual life

"What seemed mysterious to all others revealed itself as simple and necessary to her. It was never the rare and the beautiful that astonished her in life, it was always the common and the mean". "In her there was a pure element that was frank and enthusiastic, that loved and vibrated with the souls of others. Her instincts had freedom and sureness, and her whole inner life radiated an irresistible intensity. The very stones gave up their souls to her. She was the seeing friend of inanimate things. She forgot neither words nor images, and her impatience to communicate what she felt and the courage she had to acknowledge and follow her own heart surrounded her with an atmosphere as definite as the strong, sanative fragrance of plants in spring. Life and its law seemed simple to her. The stars ruled one's fate; that fate expressed itself through the passions of our blood; the mind

69. The World's Illusion, II, p. 84
70. Ibid., II, p. 143
formed, illuminated, cleansed the process." The establishment of human relations and the gift of confidence." There is no hatred in Ruth's heart, of anything at all.

Ruth is not more than sixteen years old, but she has many responsibilities. When she was seven she nursed her mother through a last illness. She has kept house ever since for her father and her younger brother; she studies to prepare herself for a degree, gives private lessons to help in her father's struggle against poverty, reads to a blind girl, makes many visits to the poor people in the neighborhood and many others to the rich to get help for the poor—all without any sense of effort, with a calm, clear joy. Her father is a man like Elkan Geyer, like Wassermann's own father. He is a merchant who has failed, left home to begin again, lost his savings to a swindler. He has seen his wife and his youngest child die as the result of hardship. He meets failure with indomitable toil, with an industry that is tireless, patient, and magnificent. At last, however, the feeling of guilt toward his children in his failure drives him away from them. Afraid of becoming another burden on Ruth's shoulders, David Hoffmann

71. The World's Illusion, II, p. 143
72. Ibid., II, p. 147
goes off to America to try beginning again once more, without hope, and yet hopeful—

Ruth is left alone with her brother, strong in her innocence and purity of heart, and the tragedy of that innocence and strength works itself out. Caspar Hauser the foundling was killed by the world's stubborn or indifferent refusal to understand the childlikeness of his heart or believe in it; Ruth is destroyed by brute force; or rather, she is destroyed by a representative of brutalized humanity, one who lives in filth and darkness at the bottom of a pit, and can hardly be blamed for wanting to put out a light that makes his filth show more loathsome and his darkness darker.

The man Niels Heinrich Engelschall, dissipated, ruthless, intelligent, has seen Ruth and desired her. By means of a letter that seems to come from someone in need of help, he gets Ruth to go away with his messenger and the horrible naked butcher's dog; Ruth's mutilated body is found many days later. In a dark cellar, alone with Niels Heinrich, she has fought in vain for her life and innocence against his will to destroy. Yet he grants her a few minutes alone, and she tries to save herself---and him from sin! ---by opening the veins of her wrists. The reader sees the scene of Ruth's death through Niels Heinrich's eyes, as he confesses to Christian Wahnschaffe. There is a compulsion upon Niels Heinrich
to seize little Ruth and kill her, the compulsion of guilt toward innocence, of good toward evil, of force toward spirit. Force must seek to destroy spirit; it would not otherwise be force.

Niels Heinrich has destroyed "a being so precious, so irreplaceable, that centuries, perhaps many centuries, will pass till one can arise comparable to it or like it." Many centuries of conflict between the spirit and the body were necessary to bring forth such a being. Ruth descends from Gedalja; she is Agathon's little sister; she is the descendant of the Jew that cursed Alexander and of those who prayed with their faces toward Jerusalem. Elkan Geyer's despair, Elasser's bitter resignation, David Hoffmann's deceptive hope, are necessary steps, perhaps, in the process of changing hatred to love.

IV. Friedrich Benda.

"Um jene Zeit starb der Oberoffizial Becker ... und als neue Mietpartei zog Doktor Benda mit seiner Mutter ins Haus.

Carovius erzählte das Ereignis am Stammtisch, und man konnte ihm dort Verschiedenes über das Leben Bendas berichten. Es wurde gesagt, dass die Familie früher reich gewesen, dieses Reichtums im Jahr des grossen Krachs verlustig gegangen und nun auf eine mässige Wohlhabenheit beschränkt war. Bendas Vater habe sich damals erschossen, wurde gesagt, und seine Mutter habe ihn nach den Hochschulen begleitet, an denen er studiert. Der Fiskalrat Korn wollte gehört haben, dass er trotz seiner Jugend schon bedeutende wissenschaftliche Arbeiten auf biologischem Gebiet geliefert, dass ihn dies aber nicht ans Ziel geführt habe.


Eben, das sei ja der neue jüdische Kniff, antwortete der Assessor und tat einen gewaltigen Schluck aus seinem Masskrug; in alten Zeiten hatten sie den gelben Fleck getragen, hatten Geiernasen gehabt und Haare wie die Buschmänner; heute sei kein Christenmensch sicher, dass er nicht dem einen oder dem anderen gelegentlich mal aufsitzte. Dem wurde zugestimmt."74

The attitude so glibly and so casually expressed by Herr Carovius and the Herr Assessor is the attitude, however it may

74. Das Gänsemännchen. p. 71-72
be expressed, that serves to confuse some of the main issues of life for those Jews who, like Friedrich Benda, have sent roots into the soil of an adopted country, founded themselves upon its national life, and let their ambitions breathe in the atmosphere of its culture. Theirs is not the direct road described in the preceding chapter, the road from the old testament to the new; nor is it, on the other hand, a path that wanders away from its starting point into a wilderness of lost souls. Benda is neither "der Jude als Europäer" nor quite "der Jude als Orientale". He is one who has asked himself the question: Why can I not be a Jew and a German, too? Benda suffers, and is too proud to keep on knocking at a gate that is closed in his face, a gate "das er zuletzt selbst zugesperrt und verbarrickadiert hatte." He is too proud, besides, to escape from his problem by committing himself to membership in formal associations of others like himself. To him such unions are unfruitful, their activities no more than empty phrases, noisy slogans to drown out the silence of emptiness. In voluntary loneliness, he clings stubbornly to the explanation that his own case is an exception.

75. Das Gänsemännchen, p. 80
Benda's tragedy is the result of emotional uncertainty. He feels that he is being denied his rights as a scientist and as a human being, but he feels, too, that this is because, "verpflichtet der Not und dem Glück des Volkes, Herz an Herz geschlossen an ihre Besten und geistig geformt durch ihre Sprache, ihre Ideen und Ideale" though he knows himself to be, he cannot count as a German. But he admits that he is a Jew, and that as things stand it is only as a member in full standing of a group that a man may come to the full exercise of his rights as a human being.

In an essay written the same year that "Das Gänsemännchen" was published, Wassermann analyzes the feeling of nationality. Its foundations are history, and by history he means something organic and living in the national consciousness, not events only but the results of events as well; tradition, that is convention, the unwritten laws that regulate the details of human intercourse and must be kept from petrifying by the functioning of human love; landscape; and language. "Was wir Volk nennen, ist nichts Greifbares, ist nicht der und der und die und die und nicht die Summe von ihnen, nicht addierte Tausende oder ungezählte Millionen; es ist ein Wesen, ein

76. Ibid., pp. 79-80
77. "Fragment über das Nationalgefühl", in Lebensdienst (Leipzig, 1923), pp.136-198
geistiges Wesen viele Jahrhunderte alt und doch wieder ganz jung; vorhanden und auch wieder nicht vorhanden, so, wie die Seele da ist und auch nicht da ist, immer fern und immer nah, meiner Berührung nicht erreichbar, und doch auf allen Weiten mich umgebend, real und imaginär zugleich."78 Can a German or a Jew, or a person of any other nationality, possess two Histories, two Traditions, two Landscapes, two Languages? There is more than one answer. One may say, for example: If I am a human being first, and a member of whatever nation I may have happened to be born into in the second place, the number of any of these things I may possess is limited only by the quality of my imagination. At the other extreme, one may answer determinedly: No; it is impossible. But to return to Benda in particular. Benda says in effect: You and I, even if we are German and Jew, have the same language, the same landscape, and I have made your tradition my own. The history? Well—Benda does not quite know what to do with the history; he cannot himself ignore it, yet he would like to have it, somehow, ignored, cancelled.

Benda is reserved, serious, calm, considerate of others;

78. Ibid., p. 800
never does he allow personal antipathy to affect his conduct. He has a seeing eye, and an ear that hears, for whatever may be inarticulate and blurred in another man's heart. Even after he has failed in a final attempt to pursue his chosen career in Germany, he holds no one responsible, is angry with no one; he only mourns over the fact that men are what they are. It has become his fate to shrink in pain from the touch of the world.

Defeated, Benda leaves Germany for England, goes from there with a scientific expedition to the Congo, and is lost in the interior of Africa. After many months he is rescued and brought to Europe to be honored as a hero and pioneer. His physical health is ruined, but he has gained a new spiritual health. The expression of his face is changed; he has the calm, farseeing glance of the hunter and the farmer, of one accustomed to measure life on the gigantic scale of the natural world. Distance, literal and figurative, has given him a clearer perspective. "Ich habe Deutschland als Gestalt beg riffen", he says, "als Gebild lieben gelernt. Die wirk liche grosse Natur ist mir Erfahrung geworden . . .

Alle menschliche Organisation hat sich mir dagegen mehr und mehr zur Idee entwickelt . . . Ich hab die Schalen mit den Gewichten zweier Welten schwanken sehen . . . .
Yet it is impossible not to feel that Benda's treaty of peace with the world and with himself is more an intellectual formulation than a final and satisfactory synthesis of thought and feeling. An indication of this: His friend Daniel Nothaft, the composer, has seen his life's work, the music for which he has sacrificed almost everything that was given to him of human love, destroyed in an incendiary fire. Daniel, accepting the consummation as just, prepares to work out for himself a new salvation. At first Benda cannot grasp the fact that Daniel is still able to work, that he can contemplate beginning again from the very beginning. When at last he does understand, he is humbled, "er fühlte sich so gering; er fühlte sich so sonderbar gering." 80

With no more than a slight shift of emphasis, Benda's highminded and sensitive type appears in caricature. His

79. Das Gänsemännchen. pp. 556-557
80. Ibid., p. 602
loyalty to the civilization of his German fatherland becomes slavish imitation, his admiration and his desire to serve, covetousness.

There is, for example, Isidor Rosenau, dressed according to his own rather highly-colored picture of the latest fashion, posing as a dignified man of the world, fond of playing the atheist, shallow and hardhearted. His ambition is to be an imitation Christian, and the effort he makes costs him nothing in the way of inner conflict.

There is Sinzenheim, retired merchant, who puts into practice his own odd solution. For six months he lies hidden from sight in abject poverty; he emerges, dressed like a nobleman, and with the money he has saved cuts a figure in high society for the rest of the year. Finding himself handicapped by the circumstance of his Jewish birth, he allows an ancient and bigotted countess to convert him to Catholicism. 82

There is Pottgiesser, broker, newspaper owner, friend of the people, friend of the government, converted Christian, and above all millionaire. Concerning the Elasser affair Pottgiesser is indifferent and contemptuous: "Die Juden sollen

82. Der Goldene Spiegel (Berlin, 1919), p. 105
ihre Geschäfte selber austragen."³³

There is especially Wurzelmann the misical critic, "das Knechtlein", standing with Benda beside Daniel Nothaft. But where Benda sympathizes and sustains, Wurzelmann admires and betrays. He is servile and intrusive, "erfüllt von der Bewunderung des in Armut geborenen Juden für den Genius der anderen Rasse"; "Der Neid ist meine einzige Tugend," he says frankly of himself, "ich bin ein Genie des Neides."³⁴

Is it the tragedy in the heart of the Jew that nature and man have united to drive him to a choice between extremes, envy and selfless love, a passion for acquisition and a passion for service?

³³. Der Moloch, p. 158
³⁴. Das Gänsemännchen, pp. 106, 197, 133.
Gedalja and Ruth, Elkan Geyer and Klasser, whether in hopefulness or in despair, seek their life's fulfillment in unquestioning acceptance of their Jewishness; Benda and Wurzelmann yearn toward the others, the Germans. But there are others, difficult to describe because they are individuals standing alone, or fleeing from fate, or rushing voluntarily to destruction, or sinking under a deadly weariness. They are the fellows of Eduard Nieberding, without support, without foundation. "Mir ekelt blos," says Stieve the journalist, "und auch das nicht immer . . . ." 85

But it is above all the women who, if ever impulse or conviction or the spirit of restlessness and protest leads them to step outside the traditions of their own people, are condemned to disaster. These young girls, "voll jener grundlosen Schwermut, die nur dem Juden eigen ist", 86 are doubly handicapped, doubly helpless, as Jews and as women.

Nieberding's sister Cornely has been shut away from anything like reality; all her normal emotional impulses have been paralyzed by acceptance of his philosophy of abnegation.

85. Die Geschichte der jungen Renate Fuchs (Berlin, 1925) p. 158
86. Die Juden von Zirndorf, p. 128
The result is a secret abnormal love for her half-brother.
She struggles against an ever-present sense of guilt, tortures
her own body in the effort to achieve the frigid self-control
which she has been taught to consider the only real freedom.
She has never known life, and comes to the conclusion that
death is the only solution. But when, meaning to act on the
decision, she goes out alone into the streets, in a state of
mind that makes her really alone and independent for the first
time in her life, she begins to understand that her isolation
has not been wholly voluntary. She understands simultaneously
the value of life, and the futility, for her, of trying to
grasp at it, "Es schien ihr als ruhte die Lügenlast von Jahr-
hunderten auf ihr und drücke sie nieder, ersticke jede Frei-
heit, jeden Willen zur Freiheit." Yet, with a fatalistic
sort of courage, she decides to go on living.

Gisa Schumann's short life is like that of a breathless,
hunted animal. She is young and beautiful, restless, tender
and passionate; her face is full of pulsing life and of pro-
found sadness. "Sie war gewillt zu leiden, betrachtete sich
als verurteilt zu leiden." Gisa falls in love with a Chris-

87. Juden von Zirndorf, pp. 267-268
88. Geschichte der jungen Renate Fuchs, p. 201
tian nobleman, and in her love there is something of the sudden and destructive force of an event in nature. In desperation she promises to marry another man; madness, or something very like it, comes to her on her wedding day. She is, says Gudstikker, "als Jüdin zur Liebe verurteilt."

Sylvester von Erst, from his hotel room, sees a young Jewish girl in the window opposite. The window is her only world, for her father allows her almost no human society.

"Sie ist mehr als jung," Sylvester writes to his wife, "dabei ist sie melancholisch wie alle Aufwachenden. Mit ihren schwarzen Judenaugen klagt sie mir das Leiden von vielen Geschlechtern, und ihre Gebärdens sind unbefohlen wie bei Gefangenen. . ." Her face has an expression of dreamy enthusiasm; her eyes the fire of a nun's. Sylvester persuades her to come to his room, and her father, finding her there, drags her away by the hair. She spends the rest of her life taking watches apart, like a child destroying its toys.

All these are fleeting glimpses; Johanna Schön tags's ugly, charming, clever, sensitive, tortured foundling's soul, with its yellow badge, lies naked before us. Cruelly, and beautifully, Amadeus Voss says to her:

"The first time I saw you I thought at once of Jephtha's

89. Ibid. p. 219
90. Der Mann von vierzig Jahren, in Die Lebensalter (Berlin, 1910) p. 309
91. Ibid., 402-403
daughter. She was, you remember, sacrificed by her father, because she happened to be the first to welcome him on his return home; for he had made a vow, and his daughter came to meet him with cymbals and with dancing. It is a profound notion—that notion of sacrificing the first one who comes to bid you welcome. And she must have been sweet and dainty—the daughter of Jephtha. She is today—experienced in dreams; rash where it is a matter of mere dreams; spoiled, incapable of any deed, submerging all enthusiasm and initiative in an exquisite yearning. The long wealth gathered by her ancestors has made her faint-hearted. She loves music and all that flatters the senses—delicate textures and beautiful words. She loves also the things that arouse and sting, but they must neither burden nor bind her. She loves the shiver of fear and small intoxications; she loves to be tempted, to challenge fate, to put her little hand into the tiger’s cage. But everything within her is delicate and in transition toward something—blossoming or decay. She is sensitive, without resistance, weary, and so full of subtle knowledge and various groping that each desire in her negates another. Inbreeding has curdled her blood, and even when she laughs her face is touched with pain. And one day her father, Jephtha, Judge in Israel, returns home and sacrifices her.92

Johanna is torn between weakness of will and fineness of temper; she is inwardly consumed by a passion of curiosity, intellectual and emotional, tortured because she is afraid wholly to satisfy it. Her whole heart is given over to her ideal of spiritual distinction; yet her overt acts are defacements of the ideal in herself. She is thoroughly, fatally selfconscious. She obeys the simplest and most spontaneous impulse in her life when she gives herself to Christian Wahlenschaffe; she obeys her terrible, subtle, self-destructive

92. The World’s Illusion, p. 175
curiosity when she surrenders to Christian's other self—as Arhidaos is Alexander's—Amadeus Voss. "At last she had the valid proof of her feebleness of soul. She needed no longer to fear an inner voice that would defend her, nor any hope that might counsel her to guard herself... she was shamed. She would have liked to lie down very gently and wait for death."93 "She was so very tired, and disgust of life filled her to the brim..."94

Johanna knows that her punishment and her destruction are complete when she realizes that she has come to love Amadeus Voss, with an ugly sort of love that is based on the desperate need for some sort of human being to use as a protection against loneliness. It can hardly be accident that brings together these two, for Voss is the most thorough example of what Wassermann calls "Der Judenchrist". Their spirits are kindred spirits, their fates kindred fates. Wassermann defines the type as "der Deutsche von zweifelloser Reinheit der Abstammung, der aber vermöge einer merkwürdigen Chemie des Schicksals oder der Elemente unverkennbare jüdische Eigenschaften besitzt, jüdische Glut, jüdische Verschlagenheit, jüdische Labilität, jüdische Augenblickhaftigkeit."95

93. Ibid. p. 208
94. Ibid. p. 327
95. Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude, p. 91
Oddly enough, the Judenchrist appears always as the shadow, the other self, of some contrasting figure: Arrhidæos of Alexander; the teacher and journalist Maxim Specht of Arnold Ansorge; Gudstikker, in a more remote and complex fashion, of Agathon; Amadeus Voss of Christian Wahnschaffe. Waremme is both, shadow and substance of himself, Judenchrist and Jew, self-determining even when he moves toward annihilation. Yet the shadow-men reach across the metaphorical chasm and change the lives of their stronger brothers; Arrhidæos helps to teach Alexander the meaning of death; Gudstikker teaches Agathon the power of lies and of evil; Amadeus shows Christian something of the world's suffering and its guilt, and Amadeus' futile passion for the good becomes noble action when it has passed into Christian's heart.

Agathon sums up Gudstikker's life: "Er war ein Wahrheits­sager der stets log. Er tat wie ein Prophet, und doch ging er nur auf Abenteuer los." Gudstikker has his one moment of self-realization when he finds the farewell message that Renate wrote in the sand, "Ich habe dich durchschaut." But Amadeus Voss' life is one long torture of understanding himself.

96. Der Fall Maurizius, passim. For the list of characters belonging to this type, see Bing, op. cit. p. 108
97. Geschichte der jungen Renate Fuchs, p. 374
98. Ibid., p. 249
He knows himself; he takes a somber ascetic pleasure in vivisecting his own heart:

"No peace is left in me. From an invisible wound in the world's body the blood keeps flowing. I cry out for a vessel to receive it, but no one brings me such a vessel. Or are the sickness and the wound within myself? Is there such a thing as the yearning of the shadow for its body? Is it conceivable that the unimaginable has come to pass and yet that he who yearned and sobbed and struggled and prayed for it to come to pass cannot recognize it now? There is some strange fatality in it all."

Christian Wahnschaffe is Amadeus' unimaginable being, so real that he becomes an active force for good, but Amadeus cannot, or will not, accept his miracle, and cries out in protest and pain:

"But love surrounded him and hate surrounded me. Whenever he appeared love burst into bloom; whatever I touched turned upon me in hatred. Light and beauty and open hearts were about him; blackness and humiliation and blocked paths were my portion. All my good spirits guarded him; I was fighting Satan and out of my darkness crying to God, who cast me off. Ay, cast me off and rejected me, and set a mark of shame upon me, and pursued me ever more cruelly as my self-humiliation deepened and my penitence grew tenser and my roots emerged more energetically from the earth. Then it came to pass that he recognized a brother in me. We passed an unforgettable night, and unforgettable words were exchanged between us. But love remained about him and about me hate. He took my flame from me, and carried it to men; and love was about him, and about me was hate. He made a beggar of me, and gave me hundreds of thousands; and love was about him, and about me was

hate."100

"It is they who take the last step who are the chosen—Those like myself stop at the step before the last, and that is our pergatory. Perhaps Judas Iscariot could have done what the Master did, but the Master preceded him, and that doomed him to crime. He was alone. That is the solution of his mystery: he was alone."101

100. The World's Illusion. p. 183
101. Ibid., p. 182
VI. Agathon and Waremme

"Nicht im Wirklichen und Greifbaren spielt sich das entscheidende Leben des Menschen ab. Das Tiefste, woran der Sterbliche seine Seele bindet ist Rauch, ist Traum. So werden Glück und Unglück zu blossen Namen."102

Die Juden von Zirndorf was published in 1897, in 1928 Der Fall Maurizius. Twenty-one years apart---between them Wassermann's created world, a panorama of epic length and breadth---stand two unforgettable Jewish figures, Agathon Geyer and Gregor Waremme. It is impossible to compare the two without a feeling of sadness, for Agathon is "the Good", and Waremme---Waremme is Lucifer. Yet the hand of their creator has worked at them both with the same touch of warm personal love; whatever else he may be, and his character is kaleidoscopic, Waremme is proof of Wassermann's flawless artistic integrity, the integrity that compels its possessor to balance the ideal personified with the person made idea. Is Agathon lifting the curtain---enter, among a crowd, Ahasverus---and Waremme letting it fall? Agathon is dead; and Waremme is preparing to vanish "gen Osten."103 Both started with their faces turned toward a westward future; did they meet? Is Waremme a changeling Agathon?

103. Der Fall Maurizius, p. 529.
Agathon is young, strong, beautiful, ruthless, tender. He is a prophet who refuses to prophesy; he is full of the will to do, to be. In the fact of the suffering and degradation he sees about him, the question: Jew or Gentile? becomes insignificant to him. He sees the Jewish religion as a dead thing, Christianity as a ghost. The old, whatever has provided the material for chains and walls, must be destroyed before humanity can find itself again:


Sein bleiches Geschicht spiegelte sich strahlend in den Bewegungen der Seele. Jeanette sah ihn an und vergass seine Jugend, wie alle die mit ihm sprechen. Ein reiner Strom umfloss sie, der Strom reiner Gefühle. 'Und was willst du tun für diese Idee?' fragte sie mühsem lächelnd. 'Sterben natürlich, wie alle diese Schwärmer.' 'Sterben? Nein, leben!' 104

But Agathon dies because his heart has been worn out by giving itself. His coming together with Renate Fuchs, just before his death, is fulfillment of his youthful hope for a new generation, life that is joyfully and innocently in accord with nature. His last words to Renate are like a creed born of the synthesis of hope and abandonment of hope: "... wenn es ein Knabe wird ... erzieh ihn rein. Erzieh ihn fern von Menschen ..."105

To a friend, Agathon sums up of his life and its meaning:


105. Renate Fuchs, p. 380.

It is characteristic—and tempting for the building up of analogies between two groups that have sometimes needed champions, Jews and women—that both Agathon and his great kinsman in spirit, Christian Wahnsehaffte, appear most immediately, most tangibly, as the saviours of women: Monika and Renate Fuchs and Karen Engelschall. Christian Süssenguth, too, another "erlöserhafte Figur, aus jüdischem Stamm gleich Agathon, doch minderen Grades, literarisch angekränkt," speaks for his author: "ein Mann kann fallen, eine Frau kann niemals fallen." Süssenguth expresses also something like Christian's idea that all men are guilty of each other's

106. Renate Fuchs, pp. 346-349.
108. Renate Fuchs, p. 19
sins; he too sees a duty in saying the understanding word
that redeems the sin.

There is one other Agathon-like figure in Wassermann. Comparable to Sema Helmut, whose understanding of Agathon is perhaps the deepest and most instinctive, a boyish figure stands beside Christian Wahnschaffe, Ruth Hoffmann's crippled brother Michael. "He was about fourteen, but his tense features and passionate eyes had a maturity beyond his years." In the beginning Michael suffers cruelly from his Jewishness, and returns hatred for hatred. He is afraid of everything, even of the light. By a horrible chance he is present in the house when Ruth is murdered, and hears her scream. Christian's influence brings him out of the resulting state of utter spiritual darkness; he worships Christian as an ideal. "His consciousness of being a Jew and having been cast out had been transformed from pain and shame into wealth and pride through the assurance of a certain service and a peculiar power." He faces a jeering crowd to defend Christian's character; it is to Michael that Christian addresses his farewell letter—"Michael, rapt from the things about him, looked upward with visionary, gleaming eyes."

109. World's Illusion, p. 90
111. Ibid., II, p. 400.
Christian Wahnschaffe's confession of faith should justly be put beside Agathon's. How little it matters that one is a German and the other a Jew:

"I wish to perform no works, to accomplish nothing good or useful or great. I want to sink, to steep, to hide, to bury myself in the life of man. I care nothing for myself, I would know nothing of myself. But I would know everything about human beings, for they you see, they are the mystery and terror, and all that torments and affrights and causes suffering—–To go to one, always to a single one, then to the next, and to the third, and to know and learn and reveal and take his suffering from him, as one takes out the vitals of a fowl... But it is impossible to talk about it; it is too terrible. The great thing is to guard against weariness of the heart. The heart must not grow weary—–that is the supreme matter."

Agathon is a unique, a glowing personality; his power to love has the phenomenal quality of genius. Christian Wahnschaffe, twenty years later, is intellectually an average man, the mainspring of his conduct is not prophetic inspiration but a simple, matter-of-fact humanity. Waremme is again pure genius.

To set Waremme beside Agathon and Christian is, it must be confessed, to deal very venturesomely in antitheses, to identify similarity and contrast. But it is also, at least under Wassermann's own hand, to condition an electrical current from pole to pole. Waremme is the most fascinating, the most broadly and variegated human of all Wassermann's

characters, the sort of character that inspires commentators to hyperbole. He is called "der düstere Dämon," "Hochstapler und Genie zugleich," "Hypertrophie des Negativen," the supreme example of "die unsägliche Gefährdung des Intellektuellen in unserer europäischen Zivilization, die zehnfa che Gefährdung des intellektuellen Juden der dem Ghetto nicht mehr, einem anderen eigenen, fest umrissenen Kulturkreise noch nicht angehört," "in Waremme rast est wie gegen die Wande zweier Weltteile." "er hat die alte Welt mit der neuen betrogen und sich selber dazu. .."; his fatality is "der Kainshass widerwilliger Blutbrüderschaft, das Ressentiment unerwiderten Verlangens." Etzel Andergast, aged sixteen, son of the prosecutor general, sets out to right the wrong of a miscarriage of justice in which his father was involved twenty years before. The case is this: Leonhardt Maruzius, a young professor, was condemned to life imprisonment for the murder of his wife. Elli Maurizius' death was the result of the tragic interrelationships of three people, Leonhart and the beautiful Anna Jahn, his sister-in-law; Leonhart and Waremme; and, strangest

115. Ibid., p. 286.
116. Ibid., p. 289.
117. Ibid., p. 293.
118. Bing, op. cit., p. 75.
119. Ibid., p. 244.
120. Ibid., p. 245.
of all, almost the relationship of the sorcerer and his victim, Waremme and Anna Jahn. The question of young Maurizius' guilt hinges on Waremme's testimony; it was Waremme's oath that determined the verdict. Maurizius' old father has never stopped trying to have the case reopened to establish his son's innocence, and from him Etzel learns where Waremme is to be found. Etzel runs away from home. Under an assumed name he tricks, cajoles, by sheer force of personality and will makes Waremme confess that the oath was false. In the meantime, Herr von Andergast, shaken out of his cold complacency by the boy's action, has visited Leonhart at the penitentiary, and has learned from him that it was Anna Jahn who shot her sister. Afraid of the results of reopening the case, Andergast obtains a pardon for Maurizius. But Maurizius can find no use for a life cut off from normal human associations by the stain on his name, and commits suicide. Etzel, returning with the proof of Maurizius' innocence, feels that his father has once more betrayed justice.

To old Peter Paul Maurizius, Waremme is quite simply the traitor, the enemy, an indescribable "Wundertier" of a philosopher, man of the world with a shady reputation, politician, hypocrite. He can repeat unpleasant stories about Waremme's mode of life, his debts, the suicide of his fiancee, "und wenn auch zuletzt nichts gegen ihm vorgelegen hatte, als
dass er der Freund von dem Mörder Maurizius gewesen, das genügte, damit war er erledigt, das genügte. . . ."  

To Elli Maurizius, Wareme is the evil influence in her husband's life, an adventurer, a charlatan, an unaccountable prophet of the Germanic mission in Europe, "Entweder ist es wirklich die Idee, die ihn zum Fanatiker macht (falls er einer ist), oder Fanatismus (falls er ihn hat) ist ein Bestandteil seines Wesens, und treibt die Idee aus sich heraus, weil die Zeit dafür reif ist."  

Elli fears Wareme, and hates him, until, on the occasion of a painful scene with her husband and her sister, Wareme takes her home and plays the consoler. Then Elli, too, falls under the spell of his personality. "Sie hat das Gefühl, ein großer Arzt oder ein herzenskundiger Priester habe sich ihrer angemommen. Ihre Antipathie ist verweht, sie kann selbst nichts sagen, aber sie gibt sich, still weinend, dem Zauber seiner Nähe hin. Er ist so sanft, so gütig, so weise, sein Auge umfasst ihr ganzes Elend, wie kann das sein, denkt sie, so ein Mann existiert und man glaubt ihn hassen zu sollen."  

Oberstaatsanwalt Andergast, going over the records of the case, and resurrecting its figures in his cool and accu-

121. Der Fall Maurizius, p. 107.
122. Ibid., p. 175.
123. Ibid., p. 186.
rate memory, sees Waremm plainly: "Die kühne Stirn, der
schräg in Raum fixierte Blick, der ausladende Raubtier Kiefer,
alles von Brutalität formlich durchschmolzen, der gross di-
mensionierte Kopf mit den kurzen Börstenhaaren, die etwas
feiste Gestalt. . . "124 Wareemm was "so sachlich, so kühl,
so nüchtern wie Wasser." The prosecutor remembers an impulse
of thankfulness that it was not Waremm on the prisoner's
bench; no court in the world would have been equal to such a
man. It might have led to interesting results if, during
the trial, there had been a thorough investigation of the
character of Gregor Waremm; after all, the man did appear
and disappear with quite too theatrical a suddenness.125

Leonhart Maurizius describes his own bondage to the
brilliant, demoniac Waremm; Waremm had taken complete pos-
session of him, body and soul. Waremm exercised upon every-
one the fascinating power of a gigantic intellect, of a per-
sonality steeped in passionate interest for every detail of
the universe of mind and sense. "Unfasslich war der Mensch,"
says Maurizius, "Ich bin gleichzeitig überzeugt, dass er der
Teufel war. Ja, schlechthin der Teufel."126

Etzel finds a Georg Warschauer living in a cheap board-
ing-house, giving private language lessons for a living, in

124. Der Fall Maurizius, p. 203.
125. Ibid., p. 204.
126. Ibid., p. 409.
a loneliness so abysmal that the solitude of the convict Maurizius is a social life by comparison. Warschauer's room is a devastation of disorder and dirt; his person he keeps meticulously clean; every half hour he washes his fat white hands. His bookshelves are filled with volumes of Jewish history and religion. He has a passion for all sorts of gatherings of people, and calls it "Anonymitätsrausch, Entpersönlichungglück." 127

He is jovial, hypocritical, pharisaical; he has moments of a horrid tenderness for Etzel: "Es ist Etzel zumute als ob ein Golem aus Lehm erwache und schnaufend um sich greife, weil sich ein Appetit nach Menschenfleisch in ihm meldet." Etzel, too, feels the drawing-power of Waremme's penetrating intellect, of his truly universal understanding of the human mind, his colossal knowledge, his vast experience. And at last Waremme tells his own story:

He was the son of poor Jewish parents. As a boy he suffered unbearably from shame at the moral cowardice of his own people; and, on the other hand, from the feeling of being shut out, of not belonging. "Denn ich knnnte nur sein," Waremme explains with an undertone of irony directed at himself for having desired so greatly, "demals wenigstens, ich konnte

127. Der Fall Maurizius, p. 257.
128. Ibid., p. 256.
nur sein, wenn ich die Welt hatte, die vollständige Fülle der Welt. . .
Darum fällt der Einwand, den Sie wahrscheinlich im stillen bereits gemacht haben, dass von allen diesen Gründen jeder einzelne genügt hätte, mich mit denen meines Stammes solidarisch zu erklären, . . . in sich zusammen. Wie gesagt, ich liebte sie nicht. Da ich sie nicht liebte, entwand ich mich der Zugehörigkeit. Sie konnten für das, was ich entbehre, keinen Ersatz beiten. Ich war kein Renegat, wenn ich sie verliess, ich gehorchte meiner Notwendigkeit. . . . Ich liebte sie nicht, das ist nur die Hälfte der Wahrheit. Die ganze Wahrheit ist, dass meine Liebe drüben war bei den andern. Kein seltsamer Fall: der Zurückgestossene verliert seine Seele an die, die ihn zurückstossen. Ein sehr jüdischer Fall. Was ihm verwehrt ist, das ist die Verheissung des Juden, was er nicht hat, sein teuerster Besitz. Immer wieder das verlorene Paradies. Auch ein jüdischer Fall. Sündenfall . . . . . .

Ich liebte ihre Sprache, meine! so gut wie meine Augen mein sind . . . tiefer als sie selber es lieben und verstand es besser als sie . . . . "129

After his mother died, Georg Warschauer invented a legend: that his mother was the daughter of a Christian, that he was himself illegitimate, wholly of Christian blood. Later he was adopted by a Catholic author named Waremme, who considered him a genius, and was baptized into the church. He became a brilliant student at the universities, a great scholar; his goal was creative politics. But Waremme could not escape the fate in his own breast: "Ich war ein Schauspieler, ich musste spielen. . . Jede ungewöhnliche Geistes- und Char-

129. Der Fall Maurizius, pp. 332-333.
akterleistung beruht auf einer sublimierten Verwandlungskunst . . . dass ich bei alledem noch dafür zu sorgen hatte, meine frühen Spuren zu verwischen, meinen Ursprung zu verschleiern, das ich sozusagen immer einen dunklen metaphysischen Rest von schlechtem Gewissen in mir zu beseitigen hatte, der meine reine menschliche Unbefangenheit mir selbst zuletzt als das Produkt einer Anstrengung, wenn nicht einer Qual verdächtige; summieren Sie das alles und leugnen Sie dann, dass es nichts geringeres war als ein Tanz auf einer Turmepitze . . . "130

(Compare Waremme's "dunklen metaphysischen Rest von schlechtem Gewissen" with a few words about Agathon: "Er empfand eine ehrene Zusammengehörigkeit mit seinem Volk, und doch hasste er dies Volk . . ."131

Waremmes real tragic guilt is fundamentally that of wasting himself in conflict with what is less than himself. He hates Leonhart Maurizius because Leonhardt's success, shallow and deceptively brilliant though it is, effortless and undeserved, is the negation of his own. The very hypothesis which establishes Leonhardt, the German, as a being for whom proof, conclusion, fulfillment, are a mere working out of principles already given, destroys Waremmes foundations. Thus Leonhardt's destruction becomes a vital necessity to Waremmes. In the second place, Waremmes, although he

130. Der Fall Maurizius, p. 341.
can violate Anna Jahn's body and destroy her soul, cannot compel her love, for in her he is combatting all the trivial conventionality, all the moral slavishness for which both Jews and Christians are responsible. Lastly, Waremme's ambition was an outward, surface conquest of the world, and ambition which constitutes in itself an inner betrayal of genius.

Having failed in Europe, Waremme goes to America. "Der Jude ist da, um abzurechnen. Dazu hat ihn Gott bestimmt. Warschauer kontra Waremme, verstehen Sie. Das Hûben und Drûben; zwei Parteien. Europe und die Vergangenheit, Amerika und die Zukunft; es wurde immer mehr zum Leitmotif."152 In America he finds a civilization completely material, a negation of the spiritual values of Europe, and a childlike groping toward a new value, a new simplicity in human relationships. He associates with Jewish immigrants, studies the old Jewish writings, and "unabwehrbar vollzog sich die Wiedergeburt Georg Warschauers. . . ."153 Too late; George Warschauer is too old; he comes back to Europe for no more than physical security. He has a daughter somewhere in Polish Upper Silesia whom he has not seen for twenty years; he may go to her, he may go on, farther toward the East. Justice?

152. Maurizius, p. 365.
153. Ibid., p. 375.
Justice is a delusion, a cruelly blinding idea. Humanity will have to get itself a new set of measuring instruments, a new scale of weights, before it can dream of justice---


Almost, Waremme the shadow has completed the cycle and

134. Der Fall Maurizi-us, pp. 527-528.
The final difference is the difference of a word: Agathon believes that a dream of humanity freed from guilt and injustice and pain can sometime be realized; Waremme wonders if it can only be dreamed. Perhaps the fact that the same imagination could look into the human heart and see, and create Waremme, that the same writer could also dream Agathon, is Wassermann's final involuntary answer to the "Jewish question." His ideal for the Jew is not separate from, not other than, his ideal for humanity. There is a mystical unity in his work: the Jews, the seekers for justice, the stubborn hearts and those that are like sensitive lenses, are not separate entities, but phases, aspects, of the same human heart in its struggle against itself.

Yet the present writer has often been tempted to an impression that Wassermann's characters are all Jews, not crudely, not obviously so, but only faintly colored by some subtle involuntary chemistry of the creative imagination. Perhaps they are. Is there any one of us who has not sometimes wandered homeless and outcast? who has not stood before a barrier, and yearned, with a final blending of hatred and love in a longing that stretched his soul to the breaking-point, to be on the other side, with the others? who has not some secret ineluctable loyalty to a lost city of Zion and a temple laid waste? The figure of Ahasverus (it must have
been said many times) is just one symbol for the human heart, which has lost the secret of direct and unequivocal communication between man and man, and wanders from age to age, seeking, seeking—

Love is needed, Jakob Wassermann says again and again, for what seems evil is the result of misunderstanding. Love is needed, not love that desires to possess, or convert, or reform, but love that is satisfied to see and hear and touch and communicate.
VII. Summary and Conclusion

Wassermann's Jews—insofar as "race" is for them a determining factor in character and experience—belong to the subjective side of the so-called Jewish question. They are confronted, as Jews, by a special necessity for adjustment. An individual, or whatever nationality he may be, must achieve some working relationship to himself and to his environment. Parenthetically speaking, this necessity provides the raw material for all science, philosophy, and art. The special case of the Jew is this: that instead of finding himself accepted as a unit by similar units in an environment to which his relationship is in a sense already given, he is called upon to meet a demand that is made of him, not as an individual, but as a member of an outside group. He must meet the demand as an individual because his group has no recognized means of meeting it as a group. Society demands something of the Jew; but neither he nor society can say exactly what that something is. Almost it appears to be a demand for some one who is to function as permanently undemandable, excluded.

Only one of Wassermann's stories, his first novel, has Jewish history and Jewish character for its special theme. The prologue, Sabbatai Zewi, provides historical and psycho-
logical background; it strikes two resonant chords: the desire of the Jew for freedom and peace, and his filial relationship to his adopted country. Certain types—or rather, certain men and women as the bearers of typical traits of character—are impressionistically sketched: the fanatic and charlatan; the miser; the patriarch; the individualist; the realist; the lover of Germany. In the novel proper, Die Juden von Zirndorf, the desire for safety and freedom is no longer literal but has become largely figurative; its implications have multiplied. The symptomatic nature of the Jew's anomalous position is emphasized; it is symptomatic, that is, of a maladjustment that permeates all of human society, the actual solitude of the individual, whether he attempts to rise above the need for human companionship or has an illusion of it. The characters of the prologue have been individualized; they have also been widened and deepened. They can be made to fall largely into general divisions; Jews who accept their Jewishness and their social status, and Jews who seek escape from both by an individualistic, introspective view of life. In neither case has a solution been reached, for the first group is merely maintaining the status quo, and the second has gone off at an angle from the direct line of progress—group to larger group to larger group. But while in Sabbatai Zewi a Messianic hope is literally
destroyed, in Die Juden von Zirndorf it is figuratively realized. The second messianic figure is Agathon Geyer. Agathon's desire is to free those who suffer, both from the extra-human solitude into which injustice and indifference have thrust them, and from their delusions of companionship.

In Wassermann's subsequent work there are comparatively few Jewish characters who can be said to belong to the main story action. Of chief importance from that standpoint are: Ruth Hofmann (in Christian Wahnschaffe); Gregor Waremme - Georg Warschauer (Der Fall Marzilus). Of somewhat less importance are: Friedrich Benda (Das Gansemännchen); Johanna Schontag (Christian Wahnschaffe); Samuel Elasser (Der Moloch). These, and other minor and purely incidental characters—(counting those most slightly developed, there are forty-two Jewish characters in Wassermann's twenty-four works of fiction)—with the Jews of Sabbatai Zewi and Die Juden von Zirndorf, can be very roughly classified: those who remain, literally or figuratively or both, within the limits of their racial inheritance; those whose desire is to become Germans or "German Jews"; those who seek escape by trying to divest themselves of all sense of solidarity.

In the first group Elasser, Elkan Geyer, Gedalia, are representative characters; Ruth Hoffmann is a sublimation, a representative purified of conditioning characteristics. In
the second group, the scientist Friedrich Benda attempts typically to work in and through his German environment. In the third group, Johanna Schontag illustrates the degeneration of the individual who bases all protest on his own needs.

Both Agathon and Waremme stand outside the foregoing attempt at classification. Waremme belongs successively to all three groups. He is first a thoroughgoing assimilationist, next an extreme individualist, and lastly seeks his foundations in national tradition. At the same time he is unique in that he never at any stage either makes inner concessions to the environment or admits a finality in method of adjustment. Agathon belongs to all three simultaneously; he is an idealization of the distinguishing characteristics of each, and so obviously transcends the possibility of cut and dried classification.

In effect, the three kinds of Jewish figures can be understood as parallel in significance to three phases of Jewish spiritual history, and to three more or less incomplete answers to the question that confronts the Jew in his personal life, that of finding some unifying principle on which to base his existence as an active member of society. Agathon has found the fourth answer. He comes to understand that the problem is not only Jewish but universally human, that it cannot be answered finally for the Jew until it is answered
finally for the Jew until it is answered for all men. Ruth Hoffmann is destroyed by a form of brute force which is in its turn the result of injustice; Benda reaches a plane of detached and patient waiting for justice; Johanna Schontag, carried out of herself by Christian Wahnschaffe's principle of devotion, recognizes her own inadequacy. In the character of Agathon, Wassermann has expressed unconditionally the Judaeo-Christian ideal of universal justice and love, and has freed it from asceticism and other-worldliness on the one hand, and from the sense of election on the other.

Whenever, then, Wassermann has written about Jews, the picture—the figure, the fable—has its specifically Jewish content, which is emotional, and its universally philosophic application. In the last analysis, however, such an interpretation can but do violence to the intrinsic significance of a work of art. Wassermann's Jews are not exclusively Jews—not laboratory experiments; they are first of all human beings. Almost every Jew has his Christian—his German—counterpart. Christian Wahnschaffe, for example, is a completer Agathon; Amadeus Voss a more complex Nieberding; Ulrike Voytich the final working out of Enoch Pohl's love of gold; Caspar Hauser completes Sema Helmut. Only one Jew, Waremme, is the chief representative of his type of human being, and if Waremme stands as an accusation against indi-
individual rebellion and against repudiation of national "Zugehörigkeit", he too comes to dream Agathon's dream. If it is to be objected that Wassermann's men and women are all Jews, then answer must be made that he has used his deep understanding of his own people as one uses an electric torch, a microscope, a telescope, and that he has used it with a prophet's burning desire to make the world better. With that, has been said the most that can be said certainly of the significance of the Jew in his work.

Wassermann's great themes are: the tyranny of things, justice, the sloth of the heart, love. The case of the Jew is simply a case of injustice, a case of the need---on both sides---for more sympathy, greater will to understand, greater love.
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