

NEXUS

Essays in German Jewish Studies

Volume 2

Nexus: Essays in German Jewish Studies

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Nexus

Essays in German Jewish Studies

Volume 2

A Publication of Duke University Jewish Studies

Edited by
William Collins Donahue
(Duke University)

and

Martha B. Helfer
(Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey)



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For editorial correspondence, please contact either of the volume editors:

William C. Donahue
Department of Germanic Languages & Literature
Duke University
116K Old Chemistry / Box 90256
Durham, NC 27708-0256
wcd2@duke.edu

Martha B. Helfer
Department of Germanic, Russian, and East
European Languages and Literatures
Rutgers University
172 College Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
mhelfer@rci.rutgers.edu

*To the memory of
Joanne S. Helfer (1929–2010)
and of
William Phillip Collins (1929–2014),
who loved and encouraged us.
Their gifts remain our great treasure.*

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
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Introduction	1
<i>William Collins Donahue and Martha B. Helfer</i>	

Nexus Forum

Introduction to the <i>Nexus</i> Forum	
A Most Unwanted Man: Hans-Joachim Schoeps	5
<i>William Collins Donahue</i>	

Jew, Prussian, German: The Adventuresome Story of Hans-Joachim Schoeps	9
<i>Julius H. Schoeps</i>	

Hans-Joachim Schoeps: Contrarian Scholar	21
<i>Hans J. Hillerbrand</i>	

The Meyerowitz Family from Königsberg: Contemporaries of Hans-Joachim Schoeps	29
<i>Eric M. Meyers</i>	

From the Margins: A Response to Schoeps on Schoeps	33
<i>Laura Lieber</i>	

A Conservative Christian Welcome: A Response to Julius Schoeps	37
<i>Noah B. Strote</i>	

Facing His Nazi Past? A Response to Schoeps on Schoeps	41
<i>Paul Reitter</i>	

Setting the Record Straight Regarding <i>The Protocols of the Elders of Zion</i> : A Fool's Errand?	43
<i>Richard S. Levy</i>	

A Discussion of the “German” Dimension of Reform Judaism in Select Congregations in Three American Southern States, 1860–1880 <i>Anton Hieke</i>	63
Weimar on Broadway: Fritz Kortner and Dorothy Thompson’s Refugee Play <i>Another Sun</i> <i>Karina von Tippelskirch</i>	81
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem: The Jewish Exilic Mind in Else Lasker-Schüler’s <i>Ich und Ich</i> <i>Nick Block</i>	103
“Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören können von einander”: Martin Buber’s Message to Postwar Germany <i>Abigail Gillman</i>	121
<i>Hungerkünstler</i> : George Tabori Directs Kafka in Bremen (1977) <i>Martin Kagel</i>	153
Performing the Jew in Austria after Waldheim: Robert Menasse’s <i>Die Vertreibung aus der Hölle</i> <i>Andrea Reiter</i>	173

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The *Nexus* Editorial Advisory Board plays a crucial role in identifying and vetting first-rate scholarship in the far-flung fields of German Jewish Studies. With their diverse expertise and professional leadership, they lend *Nexus* a stature it would not otherwise possess. We thank all these colleagues for their ongoing dedication to the series.

The publication of this book is made possible by a generous grant from Duke Jewish Studies. Many thanks to the Steering Committee for choosing to support this undertaking.

When editors—or perhaps any readers—work closely with a single set of texts, they inevitably develop blind spots, both with respect to argumentation and presentation. We are no exceptions. Jim Walker, Editorial Director at Camden House, provided a fresh and discerning perspective that helped improve the volume in numerous ways. Though we have come to rely on his keen editorial eye, we hope not to have taken his efforts for granted.

We reserve our final word of thanks for the extraordinary engagement of Steffen Kaupp. With us at every stage—from the conference through to the completion of this volume—Steffen's contributions are simply too numerous to list. For his cheerful, expeditious, and thoughtful input we offer our sincere gratitude.

W. C. D. and M. B. H.
Durham, NC, and New Brunswick, NJ
August 2014

Introduction

William Collins Donahue and Martha B. Helfer

NEXUS, THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION of the biennial German Jewish Studies Workshop at Duke University, aims to showcase innovative scholarship in German Jewish Studies in North America and to foster the growth of new directions in the field. With this second volume we are especially excited to inaugurate the “*Nexus* Forum” section, designed to introduce unusual and controversial topics and to stimulate discussion in the research community. To this end, each volume will treat a single topic in depth, using a “statement and response” format. Our first *Nexus* Forum examines the complex case of Hans-Joachim Schoeps, German Jew and Nazi sympathizer, from multiple perspectives, and invites debate about the legacy of this controversial figure. In “A Most Unwanted Man,” William Donahue introduces Schoeps and comments further on our conception of the *Nexus* Forum for future volumes.

The second section of *Nexus* 2 presents seven original essays that likewise pose important challenges to established scholarship and explore intriguing new research topics in German Jewish Studies. In “Setting the Record Straight,” Richard Levy offers an incisive discussion of the distortions that the debunkers, rather than the promoters, of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* have introduced into common knowledge about this noxious document. We’ve known for years that this infamous text is a forgery; but, as Levy eloquently shows here, we have for too long contented ourselves with shoddy scholarship regarding its provenance and deployment. We have allowed the ethical concern to expose the book to overshadow a rigorous scholarly examination. Now is the time to “set the record straight.”

With his compelling analysis of the transformation of Jewish congregations in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina from 1860 to 1880, Anton Hieke calls into question the prevailing view that American Reform Judaism in these southern states developed largely as a transplant of German Reform Judaism. Indeed, this investigation of inflections of the movement in the southern United States implicitly asks us to reconsider the extent to which we think of Reform Judaism as primarily “German.” In “Weimar on Broadway,” Karina von Tippelskirch presents an engaging close reading of another type of German transplant

to the United States, Fritz Kortner and Dorothy Thompson's failed refugee play *Another Sun*, and considers the implications of her conclusions for the study of exile literature in general. Richly enhanced with contemporaneous promotional materials for the play and well-grounded in fascinating archival material, von Tippelskirch's contribution bears out the dictum that we have as much to learn from "failures"—perhaps more—than from apparent successes. Her work is part of that new wave of scholarship (one thinks for example of Jonathan Hess's *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity* [2010]) that sheds critical light upon the larger social context of art without sacrificing analysis of individual works.

Nick Block discusses yet a different dimension of exile literature in his probing analysis of Else Lasker-Schüler's *Ich und Ich*, arguing that this lesser-known play bears witness to the disillusionment the author experienced in realizing her Zionist dream in Jerusalem. Many readers will know Lasker-Schüler principally as the poet who idealized what Block calls "the Holy Land." Once she got to Palestine, however—she was essentially "ausgebürgert" (stripped of citizenship) with no option for return—Lasker-Schüler was, Block argues, quite willing to "condemn it to hell." Rounding out this cluster of essays on exile writers, Abigail Gillman presents an astute and original interpretation of the postwar work of another famous Jerusalem émigré, the philosopher Martin Buber, as an ongoing connection to—and dialogue with—Germany. Placing him within this context of postwar Germany and the challenges and crises it faced provides a fresh context for this otherwise much-discussed philosopher, study of whom has perhaps too often been restricted to the "intellectual history" approach.

The final two essays explore more recent literature. Martin Kagel cogently analyzes the Hungarian-German-Jewish director George Tabori's controversial 1977 staging of *Die Hungerkünstler* as an extension of Kafka's parable into contemporary politics and aesthetics, considering the actors' decision to fast for forty days as a challenge to traditional forms of theater and acting and as a reference to the hunger strikes of imprisoned German terrorists. Kagel's essay—like others in this volume—attends to the manner in which drama spills out of the theater and becomes a critical part of political and social discourse. Andrea Reiter likewise offers a noteworthy reading of Robert Menasse's autobiographical novel *Die Vertreibung aus der Hölle* within its contemporary political context, focusing on the author's "coming out" as a Jew in post-Waldheim Austria. In this piece she argues that Menasse's tentatively asserted "Jewishness," though perhaps occasioned by Austria's very belated process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with its Nazi past), is productively mediated by way of a historical detour through the biography of another hidden Jew from an

earlier century, namely that of the protagonist's own *marrano* ancestor. It is this "dialogue" across centuries, in which one story of Jewish identity crisis illuminates the other, she argues, that constitutes the novel's distinctive contribution.

* * *

With this second volume of *Nexus* we hope to stimulate lively discussion and debate, and welcome your feedback and suggestions for future volumes (for contact information see the copyright page).

Introduction to the *Nexus* Forum

A Most Unwanted Man: Hans-Joachim Schoeps

William Collins Donahue, Duke University

TWENTY YEARS AGO this cluster of articles, focusing on a German Jew who was, for a while at least, an unapologetic Nazi sympathizer, might have been impossible—at least in a venue such as this. But with the passage of time it has become possible, as Laura S. Lieber suggests in her diplomatic response, to view Schoeps as an important, if marginalized figure, never quite fully accepted within nor now excluded from Jewish tradition. Lieber genially proposes the figure of *Aher*—who is both the quintessential apostate as well as the object of enduring fascination for Jews and non-Jews alike—as analogous to Schoeps. With this, she advocates a capacious view both of Jewishness as well as of German Jewish Studies more generally. There could be no pithier editorial policy statement for *Nexus* than this.

When as a young man Schoeps founded the Nazi Jewish Vanguard (Der deutsche Vortrupp. Gefolgschaft deutscher Juden) he cannot have known how this would look in hindsight. For while Nazi racist ideology was already evident, the pogroms and Shoah were not yet in sight. He was not alone among conservatives who thought the Nazi movement could be made useful to their cause. And he of course did not know that members of his own family would be murdered in the Holocaust. But this is not to suggest that he was in any way or at any time an *accidental* gadfly. Schoeps, it would seem, made a career out of being “contrarian”—as his admiring student, Hans Hillerbrand, writes in the following pages. And in this, though surely not on this account alone, he succeeded brilliantly.

With this second volume of *Nexus* we are pleased to introduce the new *Forum* section, which is meant to capture diverse points of view on debated and controversial topics within German Jewish Studies. It is also meant to capitalize upon academic events that by their very nature are available to the relatively few, but have so much to offer to a wider readership. In this case, it was a special symposium held at Duke University on September 5, 2011 in honor of Hans H. Hillerbrand, who had, as he elaborates below, studied under the tutelage of Hans-Joachim Schoeps.

The Duke Jewish Studies program, in conjunction with Duke German Studies and Religious Studies, invited Julius Schoeps—Hillerbrand's longtime friend and colleague, and son of Hans-Joachim Schoeps—to speak on the occasion of Hillerbrand's impending retirement from Duke.

Our goal is to air and enrich the discussion surrounding the controversial scholarly and political legacy of Schoeps senior. As the two most substantial pieces are presented by unabashed supporters—in the first case by his son and in the second by his deeply appreciative former student—we make no claim to a comprehensive treatment. They are both privileged, if not unbiased, observers who clearly wish to shape the legacy of this much-disputed figure. Indeed, both Julius Schoeps and Hans Hillerbrand urge us to view the father/beloved teacher in a sympathetic light, or at the very least within a broader historical and scholarly context that allows us to see Schoeps's views, or at least some of them, as somewhat less eccentric.

One of these contexts has to do with his strong identity as a German, or more specifically, a Prussian Jew. In his response piece, Eric Meyers reminds us by way of his own family story of the deep pre-war commitment to Germanness held by many Jews like Schoeps. In the postwar period, at least once the immensity of the Holocaust had become clear, this strong sense of identification would become hard to fathom. If not impossible. The history of German Jews would in fact be re-written in order to reflect the belated, and for many quite painful, awareness that the alleged German-Jewish "symbiosis" simply never was. German Jewish "assimilation" was shown to have been a chimera. To grasp Schoeps's unmistakable "untimeliness" we need only recall that at precisely this juncture he was advocating the re-establishment of a Prussian monarchy and the revival of postwar German Jewish identity. Hardly a recipe for bringing him back into the fold.

There is another aspect to Meyers's contribution that, because mentioned only in passing, might easily go unnoticed: it is the congenial "marriage" of Prussian Lutheranism to Reform Judaism. (In the Meyers—or, at that time, still the Meyerowitz—family, it is the actual marriage between the Jew "Opa Benno Meyerowitz" and the French Huguenot "Oma Käthe Supplee.") This too is worth remembering when we think of the way in which Christianity and Judaism, or, to be more precise, certain strains within each tradition, become for Schoeps intertwined in a way that would prove pathbreaking for studies in Early Christianity.

Refreshingly, the response pieces offer dissenting as well as complementary perspectives. Noah Strote, for example, points out that Julius Schoeps, in emphasizing the manner in which his father was consistently "unseasonable" in his thinking, appears to overlook the important fact that conservative Christians, including Karl Barth himself, actually embraced some of Schoeps's key ideas. In the end, Schoeps proved to

be instrumental in postwar Christian-Jewish dialogue in Germany, Strote says, and “his brand of Jewish conservatism” remains “an important episode in the genealogy of today’s coalitions of Jews and Christians on a variety of issues.”

In his brief but pointed response, Paul Reitter inquires into the potential discontinuity within Schoeps’s biography. The “contrarian” moniker that Hillerbrand recommends can camouflage the manner in which Schoeps’s postwar “Prussianism” was, as Reitter says, not merely an extension of his earlier conservative views, but rather a kind of refutation of his own early infatuation with Nazism. And Lieber, too, it should be noted, suggests a distinctly critical re-appropriation. The generous metaphor of inclusivity notwithstanding—Schoeps as a kind of *Aber* revenant—she does not content herself with the fascinating portraits presented here by a loyal son and a devoted former student. Once we have moved Schoeps from the margins back to the center of our considerations—as this Forum installment seeks to do—we must, as Lieber urges, allow Schoeps’s words, and they are many, to speak for themselves. In this spirit, we view the assemblage of essays as the start of a conversation that will, we hope, provoke a chain reaction among supporters, detractors, and the undecided alike.

* * *

As one of our contributors aptly remarks, Hans-Joachim Schoeps was a true polymath, which renders any kind of introductory overview of his work a daunting if not impossible task.¹ The portraits drawn here by Julius Schoeps and Hans Hillerbrand divide roughly into two sections: one on Schoeps’s early work on Paul and the relationship between early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, and the other on the scholar’s broader research agenda and advocacy in the postwar period within the Federal Republic of Germany while he held the chair for religious studies at the University of Erlangen. Bridging both these areas is of course the intriguing story of his “adventuresome” and “contrarian” life, including the key phase in Swedish exile during the war. Readers not well versed on Pauline theology and related matters need not despair (entirely): what Julius Schoeps does not fully explain tends to be illuminated, if only retrospectively, by Hillerbrand. Other gaps are filled in by the respondents. We therefore urge our readers to push on, to read the section as a whole, and then to join the conversation.

Was Schoeps really “a symbolic figure for German-Jewish existence in the twentieth century,” as his son avers?² Was he indeed a “proxy for all those German Jews [. . .] who remained convinced that conditions would not ultimately become intolerable?” With his effort to submerge a rather specific case into the broader demographic, one wonders if Julius

Schoeps is seeking a kind of ex post facto benediction upon his father. The younger Schoeps's pointed affiliation of Hans-Joachim Schoeps with Leo Baeck and Viktor Klemperer certainly strikes me as an attempt to upgrade the father by placing him alongside more widely accepted, if still controversial, company—"innocence by association," if you will. Hillerbrand, who does not tire to assert the "brilliance" of his teacher ("the most brilliant person I had encountered all these years") and who laments that his beloved teacher "never received the recognition he deserved," is certainly no less a partisan. We trust that these sometimes encomiastic portraits will both inform and provoke. We welcome additional responses of any kind; we encourage readers to avail themselves of the opportunity to continue the discussion on our website <http://germanjewishstudiesworkshop.german.duke.edu/nexus/discussion-forum>, and we welcome interventions and contributions at the next Duke German Jewish Studies Workshop, as well as manuscript submissions on this topic to the next volume of *Nexus*.

* * *

We will continue the Forum section in our next volume with an article cluster devoted to a reassessment of the "German Jewish" poet Heinrich Heine as well as Heine criticism/reception over the years. There the centerpiece essay will be a lecture by renowned Heine expert Jeffrey Sammons (Emeritus Professor of Germanic Languages and Literature, Yale University) entitled "Heinrich Heine in Modern German History, by an Eyewitness." We welcome you to what we hope will become a richly interactive feature of *Nexus*.

Notes

¹ For example, of the many gaps in the Schoeps senior story as it is told here, one stands out for placing this "contrarian" ahead of (or, at the very least, notably out of step with) his times: He was an open proponent of bisexuality and supported equal rights for homosexuals. This surely contributed to his failure to be accepted by many of his contemporaries.

² Readers may be interested to know that an earlier version of Julius Schoeps's talk referred to his father as a "*representative* figure for German-Jewish existence" (my emphasis).

Jew, Prussian, German: The Adventuresome Story of Hans-Joachim Schoeps

*Julius H. Schoeps, Moses Mendelssohn Center,
University of Potsdam*

THIS IS THE STORY OF MY FATHER: both a remarkable human being and a symbolic figure for German-Jewish existence in the twentieth century. It took place during momentous years, the Nazi takeover of government in Germany, World War II, the Holocaust, and the resurgence of postwar Germany. Born in 1909, Hans-Joachim Schoeps came to maturity at the fateful time the Nazi Party got ready to assume power in Germany in the context of a largely dysfunctional Weimar Republic. On January 30, 1933, when Hitler became chancellor, Schoeps celebrated his twenty-fourth birthday, having the previous year received his PhD under Joachim Wach, later at the University of Chicago. He was twenty-nine when under adventurous circumstances he fled Germany. On the evening of December 24, 1938, Hans-Joachim Schoeps flew from Tempelhof airport in Berlin to freedom in Sweden. His escape was made possible by the head of the Asian Department in the German Foreign Ministry. Through him, Schoeps received the exit visa that allowed him to leave the country as a courier for the Foreign Ministry. Schoeps spent seven years in exile. Both his physician father, who had been decorated in World War I for bravery, and his mother perished in Theresienstadt.

Schoeps's ancestors had lived in Germany for centuries; his lineage included both Moses and Felix Mendelssohn. If there ever was an "authentic" German family, here it was. Except that it was not what was called "Aryan." Though Hans-Joachim Schoeps intended a university career, the new Nazi law "to restore a professional civil service," passed within weeks of Hitler's succession to power, made that impossible.

From the mid-1920s onward, already as a teenager, Schoeps was a prolific and engaged participant in the *Jugendbewegung*, the youth movement. In fact, he organized a movement, the *Vortrupp*.¹ He was aware of the growing importance of the Nazi movement. Fatefully, he felt kinship with its anti-Weimar orientation, taking it to be a conservative movement that affirmed the values of tradition and religion, a means, perhaps, that might enable the return of the monarchy in Germany. Nazi anti-Semitism

seemed a peripheral issue, making an alliance between conservative Jews and conservatives of all ilks seem possible. His father was a distinguished physician in Berlin who had proven his loyalty to Germany on the battlefield during WWI; his mother was of the prominent Mendelssohn family.

Not surprisingly given his family ancestry, Schoeps began his scholarly career as a scholar of the Jewish tradition. Like many other brilliant youths, he was attracted by the challenges the older generation had seemingly not met—convinced that he was able to succeed where they had failed. In his case, it was the dual challenge of Jewish identity in a Christian society and Jewish identity in the modern world. Importantly, his university studies at Berlin, Leipzig, and Bonn exposed him to the thought of such leading Protestant theologians as Adolf von Harnack and Karl Barth. Unable to accept the premises of the Enlightenment, he found in Barth's neo-orthodox Christian theology a means to affirm *Jewish* existence in the modern world. There was an existential element in his engagement, not merely an abstract scholarly interest. Protestant neo-orthodoxy seemed to provide the principles for Jewish identity in modernity. Hans-Joachim Schoeps could not have been aware of it, but this embrace of Barth—these first steps into the broader arena of scholarly discourse—put him at odds with the prevailing consensus on Jewish identity.

His first book was titled *Jüdischer Glaube in dieser Zeit* (Jewish Faith in our Time, 1935).² It was frankly audacious: here was a twenty-three-year-old doctoral student who proposed to offer in not quite 100 pages the basis for a systematic theology of modern Judaism. This book had actually been the draft of his doctoral dissertation, but his PhD advisor, or *Doktorvater*, Joachim Wach told him, arms raised in dismay, that the draft was at best the “confessions of a beautiful soul,”³ but hardly a work of scholarship. There was too much of the author's personal wrestling with the challenge of modernity. Wisely, Schoeps reworked the draft and turned it into a scholarly dissertation, which he titled “Glaube in dieser Zeit: Prolegomena zur Grundlegung einer systematischen Theologie des Judentums” (Studies of the Development of Systematic Religious Reflection in Nineteenth-Century Judaism, 1932). Despite the formidable problems of Nazi censorship and restriction, the dissertation was published in 1934. However, the increasingly oppressive Nazi regime left few avenues for scholarly writing. Less than two months after the so-called “Reichskristallnacht” (Night of Broken Glass) pogrom, Schoeps fled to Sweden.

Schoeps used the years there for intense scholarly work. He once admitted to a colleague that a feeling of “boredom,” or rather of “being unfulfilled,” marked his work in Swedish exile. Not knowing what else to do, he spent his days in libraries and archives reading books, combing through bundles of files in basements, and studying the people and problems involved in the German and Swedish history of science, particularly in the Baroque period, which especially interested him at the time.