

Laboratory for World Destruction Germans and Jews in Central Europe

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Introduction

Jews and Antisemitism in Central European Culture

Albert Einstein once remarked that when the German Jews first began to flock into the universities of Central Europe at the end of the 19th century, it was as if they had spent an entire millennium preparing for the entrance examinations. During the sixty years between the founding of Bismarck's German Empire and Hitler's rise to power, German-speaking Jews would leave an indelible mark not only on Central Europe but on 20th-century culture as a whole. How would modernity look today without Einstein, Freud, or Marx; Mahler, Schoenberg, Wittgenstein, or Kafka; or a whole galaxy of other outstanding Jewish scientists, poets, playwrights, composers, critics, historians, sociologists, psychoanalysts, jurists, and philosophers?¹ Yet the most vibrant period in Central European cultural history—one which peaked first in fin-de-siècle Vienna and then in Weimar Germany (and which owed so much to the contributions of brilliant Jewish minds) ultimately collapsed into the horror and mass murder of the Nazi Holocaust. How was this possible? Was there not some connection between the dazzling achievement and the ferocity of the backlash? Did the Jews not take a tremendous risk in entering the mainstream of Central European life with the dizzying speed that they did? Was the German-Jewish “symbiosis” in Berlin, Vienna, Prague, and elsewhere, not a “tragic, one-sided love affair” (Gershom Scholem), based on delusion and ultimately doomed to failure? Was not the lure of ambition and intellectual prominence—which turned Jews into “masters” of Central European culture—a fateful mirage, a deadly trap?

German Jews first appeared on the cultural scene at the height of the late 18th century *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment)—a movement identified with such illustrious names as Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven, Kant, Hegel, and Fichte. This decisive encounter took place under the civilizing aegis of *Bildung* (self-cultivation) which presumed to transcend all differences of nationality and religion through encouraging education, self-discipline, aesthetic harmony, and the full development of the individual personality. From Moses Mendelssohn to Leo Baeck and Sigmund Freud, German

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humanist ideals became an essential part of the substance of Jewishness but they were predicated on the false assumption that most of the German middle class in Central Europe actually shared them. It was a beautiful dream. But by the eve of World War I there was ample evidence that Imperial Germany was a *Machtstaat* striving for global hegemony and no paradise for Jews. When Albert Einstein returned to Germany in 1914, he observed:

I saw worthy Jews basely caricatured, and the sight made my heart bleed. I saw how schools, comic papers and innumerable other forces of the Gentile majority undermined the confidence even of the best of my fellow Jews.²

An even more dramatic testimony of the breakdown of the assimilationist dream came in a letter of the Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg to the painter Wassily Kandinsky, following rumors of growing antisemitism at the Bauhaus Design School in Germany. In this letter, written in April 1923, Schoenberg observes:

I have at last learnt the lesson that has been forced upon me during this year, and I shall not ever forget it. It is that I am not a German, not a European, indeed perhaps scarcely even a human being (at least, the Europeans prefer the worst of their race to me), but [that] I am a Jew.³

In a second letter of 4 May 1923, we can see more clearly still the depths of Schoenberg's religious and national identity crisis—which ten years later (in 1933) would provoke his official return to the Jewish faith and community. He tells Kandinsky:

But what is antisemitism to lead to if not to acts of violence? Is it so difficult, to imagine that? You are perhaps satisfied with depriving Jews of their civil rights. Then certainly Einstein, Mahler, I and many others will have been got rid of. But one thing is certain: they will not be able to exterminate those much tougher elements, thanks to whose endurance Jewry has maintained itself for twenty centuries.⁴

Schoenberg emphasized to Kandinsky that the German nationalist antisemites advocated a view of the world “whose aim is St. Bartholomew's nights in the darkness of which no one will be able to read the little placard saying that I'm exempt.....” In 1923, the same year that Schoenberg made his grim prediction, the Austrian novelist, Joseph Roth, born in Brody (eastern Galicia) but then living in Berlin, wrote: “For the East European Jews, Germany is still the land of Goethe and Schiller—the German poets whom every studious youth knows better than our Nazi grammar-school boys.”⁵

Roth had no illusions about the strength of literary antisemitism in Germany and Austria since the foundation of the Second German Reich in 1870. He believed that the best German writers, of Jewish or non-Jewish origins, had become strangers in the materialist and militarist Germany that Bismarck had created.

One of the sharpest critics of these siren voices of “*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*” and the illusions of late 19th-century German nationalism, was the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. In his early years, Nietzsche had still been under the hypnotic spell of Richard Wagner’s musical genius, occasionally echoing his prejudices about the growing “Judaization” (*Verjudung*) of German culture. In his notorious pamphlet *Judaism in Music* (1850) and again, in his essay “Was ist Deutsch?” (1878) Wagner had drawn a lurid picture of Jewish “domination” and the German failure to achieve “emancipation” from it. The “Jewish spirit” (*Jüdische Geist*) had penetrated so deeply into the culture that Wagner feared the German *Geist* would completely disappear, even if the nation would somehow persist in its outward shell. “Judaism” (*Das Judentum*) was for Wagner and his racist followers a dangerous opiate—simultaneously a form of spiritual contagion and an agent of “materialist” contamination.

Nietzsche came to sharply reject this antisemitic view and deplored the degeneration of Wagnerism into a chauvinist celebration of “German virtues,” deeply infected by “the humbug of races” and antisemitism.⁶ Henceforth, he repeatedly expressed his contempt for the racist antisemites of his own generation, such as the schoolteacher Bernhard Förster (his sister’s husband), Theodor Fritsch, Paul de Lagarde, and Eugen Dühring. In these antisemitic agitators, he detected the *ressentiment* felt by social failures and losers (*Schlechtweggekommene*) towards those who surpassed them in wealth, wit, or natural endowment. A positivist philosopher like Dühring (who combined nationalism and socialism) was *the* modern embodiment in Nietzsche’s eyes of the vengeful spirit of “slave morality.” Reacting sharply against Theodor Fritsch’s efforts to recruit him to the German antisemitic camp, the philosopher responded in 1886:

They [the antisemites] are all men of *ressentiment*, physiologically unfortunate and worm-eaten, a whole tremulous realm of subterranean revenge, inexhaustible and insatiable in outbursts against the fortunate and happy.⁷

Nietzsche despised the social psychology of envy which I examine in this book and which was increasingly rampant in Central Europe.⁸ He saw it as a

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lubricant of the new plebeian culture that threatened his own Dionysian vision of a post-Christian Europe. Nietzsche contrasted German racist “inferiority complexes” with the “mastery” of the Jews, who if they so desired “or if they were driven to it, as the antisemites seem to wish—could now have...literally the supremacy over Europe.”⁹ The Jews were not “masters” in the sense of seeking domination. They wished above all to be absorbed, settled, accepted, and respected by Europeans. Their deepest aspiration was to end their exilic existence as “Wandering Jews” and become good Europeans. For this reason, he believed “it would perhaps be useful and fair to banish the antisemitic bawlers out of the country.”¹⁰

It would however be simplistic to regard Nietzsche as a “philosemite.” His assault on ancient “priestly” Judaism was as fierce and uncompromising as his attack on German antisemitism. In the Second Temple and its priests, in the theology of St. Paul and the New Testament, he diagnosed the Jewish origins of the “slave morality,” responsible for the “denaturation” and reversal of values that had led to the disaster of Christianity.¹¹ In *The Antichrist* (1888) Nietzsche even blamed the Jews for having radically falsified nature and all “naturalness” by their invention of Christianity. Through the crucified Jewish Redeemer (Jesus of Nazareth) Israel had attained “the ultimate goal of its sublime vengefulness”—its decisive historic triumph over noble Roman values.¹² In *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887) he was equally extreme, inveighing against the world-historic mission of the Jews in disposing of the “masters” in the name of the common man and democratic mob morality. This was a victory which Nietzsche characterized as “a blood poisoning” (mixing of the races)—the kind of reckless phraseology which would later be seized upon by the Nazis. In this same text, Nietzsche wrote that “the ‘redemption’ of the human race (from the ‘masters,’ that is) is going forward; everything is becoming Judaized, Christianized, mob-ized (what do the words matter!).” The words did, of course, matter a great deal. Two decades after his death, a crude plebeian version of Nietzscheanism would be appropriated by Hitler and his Nazi thugs—despite Nietzsche’s disgust for mass politics and unequivocal opposition to political antisemitism.¹³

Yet Nietzsche himself exercised an astonishing hold over the “marginal Jews” (*Grenzjuden*) of Central Europe, with whom we are concerned in this book. They included such distinguished men of letters as Jacob Wassermann, Arthur Schnitzler, Franz Werfel, Karl Kraus, Sigmund Freud, Stefan Zweig, Martin Buber, Theodor Lessing, and Walter Benjamin.¹⁴ He had been one of

the first European thinkers to diagnose many of the agonies they would experience, their crises of identity, their search for self and personal authenticity in a “godless” world. For some, like Stefan Zweig, he was the ultimate “free spirit” and “good European” offering an exalted new path to self-overcoming and a life of creative fulfillment.¹⁵ For those secular Jews who were already cut off from their own tradition, Nietzsche provided a complex but fascinating roadmap to individual liberation without the easy consolations of dogmatic belief. Nietzsche’s high regard for Jewish intellectual mastery laid out the hope that contemporary Jews could once again become the “founders and creators of values.”

Early Zionism in Central and Eastern Europe with its strong emphasis on restoring natural powers lost in exile and recharging Jewish physical as well as spiritual energies, also showed unmistakable Nietzschean traces.¹⁶ These regenerative and vitalistic echoes can be found in the writings of Theodor Herzl, Max Nordau, and Martin Buber.¹⁷ There were also others, like the vehemently “anti-Zionist” German novelist Jacob Wassermann, who eagerly embraced Nietzsche’s psychology of antisemitism, as a peculiarly *German* pathology.¹⁸ Nietzsche’s savage critique of Germans did much to encourage such conclusions. Did he not proclaim that only Germans who “*de-Germanized*” themselves, could ever understand him? Did he not say that “Jews among Germans are always the higher race—more refined, spiritual, kind—*l’adorable* Heine, they say in Paris.”¹⁹

Jacob Golomb has shrewdly observed that a remarkable number of marginal Jews attempted to overcome their own loss of tradition, their ultra-Germanism, and self-hatred under Nietzsche’s guidance.²⁰ However, by the late 1920s, the primary emphasis in German and Austrian culture was moving from *Geist* (spirit) to *Volk* (race). The cosmopolitan notion of *Bildung* itself became nationalized. By 1933, Central European Jews like Arnold Zweig, Stefan Zweig, Ernst Cassirer, and Sigmund Freud seemed like increasingly isolated upholders of the 18th-century Enlightenment faith in Reason and the civilizing effects of education. No Central European author expressed this more poignantly than Stefan Zweig, whose whole life was devoted to the primacy of culture and the concept of *Bildung*. In 1925 he wrote to Emil Ludwig: “Sometimes I am oppressed by the feeling that we who possess an encyclopedic knowledge, men who passionately work at extending their *Bildung*, are already a kind of fossil.”²¹ In his biography of Erasmus nine years later, Zweig acknowledged that “the great humanistic dream of the solution of disagreements in a spirit of justice, the longed-for

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unification of the nations under the aegis of a common culture, has remained a Utopia....”²² His close friendship with Sigmund Freud confirmed him in his growing realization that “the barbaric, the elemental destructive instinct in the human soul was ineradicable.”²³ Above all, it was Hitler’s persecution of the German Jews and the terror unleashed by the *Anschluss* in Austria with its orgy of lawlessness, brutality, and violent antisemitism, that brought Stefan Zweig to the realization that the age of humanistic culture was crumbling before his eyes.

Antisemitism acquired renewed intensity once Jews moved into the center of German social, economic, and cultural life during the Weimar Republic. But the Judeophobic obsession had much deeper roots in Central Europe, going back at least sixty years when the Conservative historian Heinrich von Treitschke solemnly declared that “the Jews are our misfortune.” In the same fateful year of 1879, the Protestant court preacher, Adolf Stoecker, launched his Christian-social antisemitic movement in Berlin, attacking the subversive effects of Jewish capital, the liberal press (owned mainly by Jews), and Social Democracy—invented and inspired by two German Jews—Karl Marx and Ferdinand Lassalle. It was also in 1879 that the radical atheist Wilhelm Marr first employed the highly confusing term “antisemitism,” to suggest that the new doctrine was “racial,” cultural, and socio-economic in inspiration rather than purely religious. More importantly, within less than a decade of Jewish emancipation in Germany and Austria, Jews were being held responsible for secular liberalism, the degeneration of Christian-German morality, capitalism, socialism, and most of the negative effects of industrial modernity. This was an ominous sign. By 1880, virtually the whole arsenal of modern antisemitism—Christian and anti-Christian, conservative and radical, patrician and plebeian—was already in place in Central European states like Germany, Austria, and Hungary.

Political antisemitism had acquired a special resonance in the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—the cradle of intense nationality struggles that favored a Social Darwinist view of history as a “battle of races.” It was in Vienna that expatriate Englishman Houston S. Chamberlain wrote and published his best-selling *Die Grundlagen des XIX Jahrhunderts* (Foundations of the 19th century) in 1899. Chamberlain was a Teutomaniac dilettante who regarded the “apocalyptic struggle” between Germans and Jews as the key to the future destiny of civilization—a viewpoint which profoundly influenced both the Emperor Wilhelm II and Adolf Hitler. Nor was it a coincidence that Hitler himself was an Austrian from the provinces,

whose outlook was decisively shaped by his formative years in Vienna. When the 18-year-old Hitler settled in the Imperial capital in 1907, the city was still ruled by an avowed antisemite, the Christian-Social party leader, Dr. Karl Lueger. The Mayor of Vienna would become one of his first role-models. Hitler's admiration for the Catholic Mayor's political virtuosity is repeatedly expressed in *Mein Kampf*, along with his ideological debt to the fanatically racist world-view of the Austrian Pan-Germans.

In this book I show how Lueger conquered Vienna in 1897 by appealing to the Christian *Volk* of Austria to "liberate" itself from its "Semitic" and Jewish masters—the personification of liberal capitalism, Social Democracy, and secularizing atheism. Lueger's political success was an important factor in convincing the young Hitler of the electoral advantages in using antisemitism as a weapon of mass mobilization. However, the founder of Nazism sharply disapproved of Lueger's conciliatory attitude to "the struggle of nationalities in old Austria." Unlike the Viennese Mayor, he rejected the supranational Habsburg dynasty for having "betrayed the needs of the German people." In *Mein Kampf* (1924) Hitler identified strongly with the Pan-German atmosphere at his school in Linz: "Heil was our greeting, and instead of the imperial anthem we sang *Deutschland über alles*, despite warnings and punishments."²⁴ He deplored the pious hypocrisy of Lueger's "Christian" Jew-baiting which he despised as opportunist rather than principled. Hitler much preferred the Pan-German appeal to blood and soil.

The seeds of Hitler's violently racist nationalism were—as I argue in this book—planted in the ethnic cauldron of the multicultural Austrian Empire. His *völkisch* paranoia reflected the identity crisis of those German Austrians who felt increasingly on the defensive in the wake of Slav encroachment and Jewish emancipation. In that very specific sense, Habsburg Austria was indeed a laboratory for world destruction, even though this became apparent only twenty years after its demise. Hitler himself, it is worth noting, was of obscure and uncertain ancestry, which aggravated his sense of insecurity. An unemployed bohemian artist from the provinces, leading an unhappy and rootless life in multiethnic Vienna, his embrace of racist antisemitism was a reflection both of ethnic angst and his sharp fall in social status.²⁵ He displayed precisely those feelings of envy, fear, *ressentiment*, and desire for revenge—projected against Jewish *Geist* (spirit) and *Geld* (money)—which Nietzsche had diagnosed twenty years earlier as being absolutely typical of petty-bourgeois German antisemites. Hitler's response to his definitive rejection by the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts in 1908 (which he

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characteristically blamed on the Jews) was a perfect illustration of this social psychology. His racism exuded the endemic fears of the “little man” (*kleine Mann*) threatened with sinking into the proletariat by the dual specter of capitalist competition and socialist class-struggle. Not belonging to any definite social stratum and thoroughly alienated from the big city melting-pot, the young Hitler felt existentially threatened by what he found in Vienna—especially the cosmopolitan mixture of races, the powerful Marxist labor movement, and the modernist culture in which Jews played so prominent a role.

By the eve of the First World War, Hitler had already transformed himself into a *Vaterlandsloser* (a person without a fatherland), rejecting his Austrian identity to the point of shirking military service in the Habsburg Imperial Army. Already consumed by half-baked conspiracy theories, he had convinced himself that he, too, was a victim of “Jewish rule” (*Judenherrschaft*) in Austria. Like many other Austrian Germans, he found it easy to define the Jews as the “masters” of Vienna—those who were pulling the strings and controlled the press, the economy, culture, and radical politics. All the multiple and “unacceptable” faces of modernity—liberalism, capitalism, parliamentary democracy, moral permissiveness, pornography, or avant-garde art, merged into a monolithic “Jewish conspiracy” to undermine the “Aryan-Germanic” race. These were “lessons” that the young Hitler learned from the Linz Pan-Germans, from the artistic legacy of his alter ego, Richard Wagner, the writings of Theodor Fritsch, Houston Stewart Chamberlain and mystical Austrian racists like Lanz von Liebenfels—even before he arrived in Germany.²⁶ In this twisted “world-view” (which first crystallized in the lower depths of Vienna), the Jew was definitively stereotyped as coldly cerebral, uncreative, imitative, egotistical, destructive, and parasitic. However, it was only in postwar Munich, under the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution and social chaos, that Hitler fully elaborated his anti-Communist credo which fused biological antisemitism, anti-liberalism, and a cleverly disguised hatred of Christianity.

Fin-de-siècle antisemitism liked to present itself as a “defensive” backlash against Jewish success, prominence, and “domination” in key areas of modern life. Though this picture was greatly distorted it was not wholly false. Not only did Jews rapidly master the German language, they had clearly become primary movers and shakers of modern Central European culture by the 1890s—whether as physicists, chemists, biologists, psychoanalysts, sociologists, journalists, composers, novelists, playwrights, and literary

critics. In cities like Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, or Prague, secular assimilated liberal Jews increasingly set the cultural tone and became arbiters of taste in the first decades after their full political emancipation between 1867 and 1871.²⁷ This Jewish rise in social status, economic weight, and cultural influence was typically seen as undermining long-established traditions, Christian values, and ethnic-national solidarity.²⁸ It aroused the snobbish disdain of the nobility, the morbid anxiety of professors, students, and middle-class professionals, the pious wrath of the clergy, as well as the anti-capitalist rancor of impoverished artisans and craftsmen. In Austria and Hungary, in particular, Jews were seen not only as master-entrepreneurs and modernizers in the economic field (with a central role in banking, commerce, and industry) but as allies of so-called “master races” (Germans, Hungarians, and Poles) against the smaller Slav peoples and Romanians. This perception contained a grain of truth even though it ignored the ingratitude, suspicion, and hostility shown by the dominant nationalities towards their “Jewish allies.” After all, the antisemitism of Austro-Germans proved to be politically far more potent than that of the more backward Slavic peoples in the Danubian Monarchy. Czech, Slovak, and Polish national movements, while undoubtedly tainted by Judeophobic sentiment, were noticeably less prone to biological racism than their counterparts in Germany and Austria.

There was also another ominous strand in modern antisemitism which surfaced well before the traumas of the First World War and the revolutionary upheavals of 1917-1920. This was the belief that Jews consciously masterminded all the subversive forces of radicalism and revolt. Individual Jews like Adolf Fischhof, Gabriel Riesser, or Johann Jacoby had indeed been prominent as leaders of German and Austrian democratic radicalism during the 1848 Revolution. Karl Marx had invented the “scientific” doctrine of Communism a year earlier. Ferdinand Lassalle was the founder of German Social Democracy in the early 1860s. Jews would be even more active in the emerging Socialist party of German Austria (created by a converted Jew, Victor Adler) just as they stood out in Russian or East European Marxist politics.²⁹ This pattern continued and intensified with the central roles played by radicals like Kurt Eisner, Rosa Luxemburg, and Béla Kun during the revolutions of 1918-1919 in Germany and Hungary. Above all, the prominent role of Jews like Leon Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Sverdlov, and Karl Radek in the victorious Bolshevik Revolution in Russia created a flood of conspiracy theories nourished by antisemitism. The visibility of Jewish radicals led in turn to the demonization of all Jews as

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Communists and subversive internationalists seeking to overthrow the entire established order in Central Europe.³⁰ Again, this radicalism was no invention of antisemites, but it did not represent Jewry as a whole, the Jewish communities, or Judaism as a faith. The radicals were culturally *de-Judaized*—having cut themselves off from their own religious heritage while often repudiating the national traditions of their adopted societies. This syndrome was embodied by Communist internationalists such as Rosa Luxemburg, who straddled the highly diverse traditions of the Polish, Russian, and German labor movements.

Messianic revolutionary fervor was only one of many symptoms of a striking loss of psychic balance, whose seeds can be traced to the acute identity problems exhibited by prominent Central European Jewish intellectuals and artists well before the First World War. Franz Kafka, the Prague-born Jewish novelist, was incontestably an expert on this convoluted syndrome. He wrote of a whole generation of Jewish writers in Central Europe who drew their inspiration from the despair of having “their hind legs bogged down in their father’s Judaism” while their front legs could find no new ground on which to stand. Kafka’s sense of anguish extended to the German language in which he himself wrote as a member of the German-speaking minority in Prague. Though he felt attached to this deeply-loved symbolic fatherland of so many German-speaking Jews, he could never rid himself of the schizoid feeling that German-Jewish writing (including his own), involved a “secondhand acquisition of someone else’s property.”³¹ This was, of course, a claim constantly made by the Central European antisemites! Kafka’s self-hatred was paralleled by that of other Jewish intellectuals like Walther Rathenau, Theodor Lessing, Otto Weininger, and Karl Kraus. They repeatedly attacked the vulgarity and “materialism” of Jewish nouveaux riches as well as their less assimilated co-religionists. Lessing, himself the author of a well-known volume on Jewish self-hatred, prophetically wrote in 1930 (three years before his murder by the Nazis) that the brilliance of Jewish creativity in Central Europe reminded him of “the phosphorescent shimmer of a dying body.” Perhaps, he suggested, “it was only the brief flickering of a European bonfire in which our nobility has immolated itself.”³²

Few, if any, contemporaries were as aware of the imminent dissolution of the culture which they simultaneously cherished and attacked, as Vienna’s foremost satirist, Karl Kraus. It was he who first described his Austrian homeland as an “experimental station for the end of the world”—the

haunting image which provides a leitmotif for this book. The case of Karl Kraus was especially revealing, since few could match his mastery of the German language or the sarcastic wit of his polemics. Nor could his rivals and critics compete with the prophetic aura of authority that Kraus assumed as the self-appointed guardian of moral values in German culture. In lambasting the duplicity and corruption of Austrian society, Kraus often sounded like a modern-day Jeremiah reprimanding his people for their backsliding ways. His targets were legion, including the liberal press, the literary establishment, psychoanalysis, feminism, Zionism, sexual hypocrisy, and the criminal justice system. But as I show, Kraus was particularly stinging about Jews. Having renounced the Jewish faith for the Catholic Church at the age of twenty-four, his hostility towards Jewry displayed the vitriolic edge of the neophyte. A decade later he abandoned Catholicism as well.

Kraus, no less than Herzl or Freud, was perfectly aware that racist antisemitism in Central Europe ignored the mystical properties of baptismal water. Yet, more than once the satirist confessed that as far as “race” was concerned, he was at a loss. He felt just as angry at the “stupidity of Germanomaniac editors and politicians” as he did about the “kosher intellect” for claiming him as one of the “chosen people.” But this even-handedness was at best a show. Kraus singled out Jews because he genuinely regarded them as the “masters” of the Viennese press and culture. In his eyes, they were an unmistakably dominant clique who abused their excessive monetary power. Not only did they brazenly worship the “Golden Calf” but they had corrupted the German language and commercialized Central European high culture beyond repair. Kraus took special delight in charging Zionists like Theodor Herzl with being “Jewish antisemites”—an accusation repeated down to the present day by some of his heirs among contemporary anti-Zionists of Jewish origin.³³ It would be more accurate to say that both Kraus and Herzl internalized hostile stereotypes about Jews, reproducing them in different ways. For the former, only total assimilation could eradicate the stain of “Jewishness”; for Herzl, Zionism was assigned a similar task.

Kraus himself perfectly fitted the antisemitic image of the *zersetzende* (“disintegrating”) Jew, whose acerbic critique undermines all social conventions and institutional hierarchies. However, in his own self-understanding, Karl Kraus believed himself to be the *insider* speaking in the name of classical German literature against the (“Jewish”—liberal) forces of financial corruption and cultural nihilism. Was he not the quintessential Viennese satirist? Did he not command the enviable role of *Censor*