

FROM STIGMA TO SALVATION?
THE *HEIMATLOSIGKEIT* OF THE JEWS IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY
GERMAN-LANGUAGE LITERARY DISCOURSE

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It may, at first, seem redundant to speak of *Heimatlosigkeit* with reference to the Jews, who, at least up to the foundation of the state of Israel, were the epitome of a people in exile, wandering and rootless, torn from its native soil, and generally barely tolerated if not openly persecuted by the original inhabitants of the country in which they happened to live.¹ When referring to literature in German of the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, it is necessary, however, to historicize the concept without equating it with the diaspora as such, although the two are indeed closely related. To focus exclusively on *Heimatlosigkeit* involves adopting a new perspective which may provide a meaningful contribution to a debate on representations of the Jews and Judaism in twentieth-century German-language literature. This research terrain is as yet unexplored, except for a small number of recent pioneering studies, which, with reference to the afore-mentioned geographical area and the period from the late nineteenth century up to 1945, highlight the historical and cultural importance of the Jewish appropriation of the term *Heimatlosigkeit* to signify the bitterly distressing, but essentially irreducible and salvific status of the Jews and Judaism, and by extension, of modern literature and human beings in general. After the second World War the subject continues to be important but with differing connotations and implications as regards both literature and the historical and cultural background: now *Heimatlosigkeit* is, on the one hand, associated with the awareness and memory of those about to die, on the other with the determination to keep an ever vigilant eye on the present. In the second half of the twentieth century, discussion on and around the *Heimatlosigkeit* of the Jews was irredeemably – and definitively – connected with death, and, in particular, the threat of death at the hands of someone living in the same territory as the Jewish victim, someone who thinks he has a prior claim to the land. In order to better illustrate the pervasiveness and importance of this concept, I divide my paper into three parts. After an introductory section based on the above-mentioned sources laying out the principal coordinates of the literary discourse concerning *Heimatlosigkeit* in the first decades of the twentieth century, I proceed to show how the apolitical concept of *Heimat* takes on an ideological and anti-Semitic connotation in the first decades of the twentieth century. This will throw light on the true meaning of the many references to *Heimatlosigkeit* made by Jews themselves. Finally, I trace the late twentieth-century reverberations of the theme in such authors as Jean Améry and Peter Weiss, who, while representing *Heimatlosigkeit* as an experiential dimension in their fiction and non-fiction, are unable to find any trace of the redemptive power attributed to the phenomenon by their predecessors. However, no *redemption* does not signify no *meaning*, and it is this very meaning that I attempt to identify.

1. *The atavistic dimension of Heimatlosigkeit: the first decades of the twentieth century*

A slow, gradual realization, in the second half of the last century, that the Nazi *Konzentrationslager* had been the scene of the systematic extermination of the Jews and the destruction of European Judaism

¹ In the term, *Heimatlosigkeit*, the privative suffix (-los-) indicates a state of being “without *Heimat*”. Throughout this paper I shall use the German word in order to avoid the risk of inadequate translation, since there is no English word capable of rendering in full the complex meaning of *Heimat*, a key concept in my argument. As I shall show, *Heimat* may refer to a place (for example, the place of birth), as well as the community inhabiting that place, with reference to the person who feels “at home” in that particular country or community and an integral part of it (see *infra*). Furthermore, at the end of the nineteenth century the German word took on a nationalistic connotation that remained more or less intact right up to the end of the second World War.

was followed in the 1970s by a flurry of research which produced, and still produces, numerous publications pertaining to representations of Jews (not only anti-Semitic)² found in centuries of books and paintings, then, from the nineteenth century on, in the propaganda material of the dominant culture,³ and to the dichotomous binomial of cultural Zionism vs assimilation.⁴ In this scenario, the literature which, especially in the first decades of the twentieth century, deals with the diaspora and the *Heimatlosigkeit* of the Jews, constitutes a minority genre, but an important one, and as such merits careful consideration: it represents, in fact, an attempt (in some ways, paradoxical) to supersede the binary concept underlying the idea of vying opposites, both non-Jewish and Jewish, present in the structure of “us” and “the others”, without, however, eliminating the various religious and/or cultural peculiarities, which are, instead, carefully nurtured and directed towards a desirable vision of modern man and society.⁵

In order to understand fully this equidistant approach, it is important to emphasize that, especially at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, the stigmatization of *Heimatlosigkeit* brings together certain Gentiles and certain Jews, the former being those representatives of the dominant culture who use the concept to justify the exclusion of the Jews from a community of shared values (!) insofar as, “others” and “enemies”⁶ as they are, they are taken to constitute a threat; the latter, those Jews that either support Zionism or, on the contrary, are in favour of assimilation. In fact, these two positions offer two quite different, indeed quite opposite, reactions to the feeling of estrangement and *Heimatlosigkeit* seen as the inevitable consequence of the marginalization of the Jews: the “return home” on the one hand,⁷ and, on the other, an attempt to fit in completely and at all costs with the non-Jewish majority. Other writers, freeing themselves from the smothering embrace of these two opposing ideologies, turn, instead, to a transnational vision of Judaism, of mankind and of literature. In doing so, they attempt to revalue *Heimatlosigkeit*: the absence of a *Heimat* makes possible the retrieval and preservation of a supranational identity abundantly endowed with transcultural values, and therefore potentially universal.

Credit for a first, albeit cursory, appraisal of what he calls the «diasporic concepts» (*Diasporakonzeppte*) of Judaism in Jewish-German literature must be given to Andreas B. Kilcher.⁸ In these con-

² On the subject of antisemitism, see the important eight-volume “handbook” by W. BENZ *et al.* (eds), *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, De Gruyter, Berlin, New York 2008-2015.

³ The following are only a few of the most important studies of German literature from the seventeenth century to the present: H.O. HORCH, H. DENKLER (eds), *Conditio Judaica. Judentum, Antisemitismus und deutschsprachige Literatur vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, 2 Bde., Niemeyer, Tübingen 1988/89; H. O. HORCH, H. DENKLER (eds), *Conditio Judaica. Judentum, Antisemitismus und deutschsprachige Literatur vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis 1933/1938*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1993; P. O’DOCHARTAIG (ed.), *Jews in German Literature since 1945: German-Jewish Literature*, Rodopi, Amsterdam-Atlanta 2000; V. GUTSCHE, *Zwischen Abgrenzung und Annäherung. Konstruktionen des Jüdischen in der Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts*, De Gruyter, Berlin, New York 2014.

⁴ Once again, I cite only a selection of available studies, this time focusing on the literary context: Y. ELONI, *Zionismus in Deutschland. Von den Anfängen bis 1914*, Bleicher, Gerlingen 1987; A.A. WALLAS (ed.), *Jüdische Identitäten in Mitteleuropa. Literarische Modelle der Identitätskonstruktion*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 2002; P. Theisohn, *Die Urbarkeit der Zeichen: Zionismus und Literatur – eine andere Poetik der Moderne*, Metzler, Stuttgart - Weimar 2005; C. BATTEGAY, *Das andere Blut. Gemeinschaft im deutsch-jüdischen Schreiben 1830-1930*, Böhlau, Köln - Weimar - Wien 2011.

⁵ This train of thought presents affinities with the «third space» identified and studied thoroughly by Lorella Bosco. See L. BOSCO, *Tra Babilonia e Gerusalemme. Scrittori ebreo-tedeschi e il ‘terzo spazio’*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano - Torino 2012.

⁶ See below, pp. 174-176.

⁷ See C. SONINO, *German Jews in Palestine, 1920-1948: Between Dream and Reality*, Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, Boulder, New York, London 2016.

⁸ See A.B. KILCHER, *Diasporakonzeppte*, in H.O. HORCH (ed.), *Handbuch der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2016, pp. 135-150; A.B. KILCHER, *Einleitung*, in Id. (ed.), *Metzler-Lexikon der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur*, 2. aktualis. u. erw. Aufl., Stuttgart - Weimar 2012, pp. V-XXVII, in particular pp. XX-XXIII. For further discussion, see also A. EIDHERR, G. LANGER, K. MÜLLER (Hrsg.), *Diaspora – Exil als*

cepts, references to *Heimat/Heimatlosigkeit* recur frequently and with slightly different meanings every time. It may be useful to run through the concepts picked out by Kilcher,⁹ though in doing this I shall highlight the specific subject of my paper. In his survey of literary and essayistic texts by a considerable number of writers, Kilcher appears to recognize three fundamental types of diasporic concepts: the religious-metaphysical; the liberal and/or cosmopolitan; the anarchist and socio-revolutionary. The first category (religious-metaphysical), of which the most authoritative representative is Franz Rosenzweig, is tied to the Biblical concept of the Jews as an eternal people, a people typically in exile; for them no *Heimat* can ever exist. According to Rosenzweig, the only land the Jews acknowledge is holy; in other words it is a case of *Sehnsucht*, a yearning that cannot be satisfied, ever, anywhere: even where he is most «at home», the Jew will always be a *Fremdling* («outsider»)¹⁰ For Rosenzweig, however, the Jews are not only not subject to geographical constrictions; thanks to the Torah, they are lifted out of time and partake of eternity. Kilcher, like others before him, finds in this reflection of Rosenzweig's the pre-modern idea of the Jews as “the people of the book”, an idea given its most secular expression in the nineteenth-century German poet, Heinrich Heine.¹¹

The pivotal importance of “the book” lies at the heart of the concept that leads, *mutatis mutandis*, to a transnational idea of literature, of which it might be said that *Heimatlosigkeit* is both a founding element and a warranty. This idea of literature is central to the second type of diasporic concepts (liberal and/or cosmopolitan) and is represented by many well-known writers, each different to the others, such as Stefan Zweig, Joseph Roth, Karl Wolfskehl and Lion Feuchtwanger; all, in their own particular voice, sponsor the idea of the diaspora as a fruitful, open interaction and exchange of the cultural differences of various nations.¹² As to Zweig and Roth, Kilcher rightly emphasizes the close connection between their idea and the idealization of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Austrian empire. Leaving Kilcher and turning our attention to the works of a few of these writers, it may be said that, for them, *Heimatlosigkeit* is what enables a Jew on the one hand to safeguard himself and his essential identity, on the other to go beyond himself by means of a cultural agenda that embraces differences: based as it is on principles held to be universal, they consider it may be endorsed, ideally at least, by those who have never known what it means to be nationless. Such is their heart-felt conviction and hope, but also, for example, in the case of Zweig and Roth, the cause of deep despair when faced with the political events of the 1930s and the enforced separation from their country of birth (in their case, Austria), which they love and consider as their own. Zweig writes in his autobiographical *Die Welt von gestern* (*The World of Yesterday*):

Krisenerfahrung. Jüdische Bilanzen und Perspektiven. Zwischenwelt 10., Theoder Kramer Gesellschaft und Drava Verlag, Klagenfurt 2006; H. MITTELMANN, *Deutschsprachige jüdische Exilliteratur*, in H.O. HORCH (ed.), *Handbuch der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2016, pp. 189-200.

⁹ For brevity's sake, I discuss Kilcher's theses with reference to primary texts only in the case of Zweig. These theses are correct and have the advantage of being concisely expressed. Furthermore, of the authors referred to by Kilcher, I will cite only those that are directly relevant to the subject of *Heimatlosigkeit*.

¹⁰ In Rosenzweig the idea here is closely linked to the relationship he envisages as bonding a people, blood and the land. In book IV of *Stern der Erlösung* the author sees precisely in the relationship with the land of *Heimat* the element that distinguishes the Jews from every other people on earth. He states that the Jews place their trust in the blood ties of the community, thanks to which they are unafraid of exile, while other peoples, lacking this assurance, feel the need to cling to their land, their *Heimat* (which is in itself lifeless, even though it provides life-supporting nourishment), not hesitating to shed on its soil the blood of their own children. But, he goes on, while it is true that the earth provides nourishment, it is also true that it claims allegiance, so that a people that loves its *Heimat* more than life itself is always threatened by the idea that permanence is of the land not the people. There is much more to say on this subject. However, this idea should be borne in mind when I come to deal with the *Blut und Boden* ideology which epitomizes Rosenzweig's discourse on the non-Jewish peoples. Cf. F. ROSENZWEIG, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (1921), ed. Albert Raffelt, Universitätsbibliothek, Freiburg im Breisgau 2002, pp. 332-333.

¹¹ On this subject see BOSCO, *Tra Babilonia e Gerusalemme*, pp. 39-82.

¹² See KILCHER, *Diasporakonzepte*, p. 141.

Heute, da das große Gewitter sie längst zerschmettert hat, wissen wir endgültig, daß jene Welt der Sicherheit ein Traumschloß gewesen. Aber doch, meine Eltern haben darin gewohnt wie in einem steinernen Haus. Kein einziges Mal ist ein Sturm oder eine scharfe Zugluft in ihre warme, behagliche Existenz eingebrochen [...]. Ihre Lebensform scheint mir dermaßen typisch für das sogenannte ›gute jüdische Bürgertum‹, das der Wiener Kultur so wesentliche Werte gegeben hat und zum Dank dafür völlig ausgerottet wurde.

[Today, now that the great storm has long since smashed it, we finally know that that world of security was naught but a castle of dreams; my parents lived in it as if it had been a house of stone. Not once did a storm, or even a sharp wind, break in upon their warm, comfortable existence. [...] Their way of life seems to me to be so typical of the so-called “good Jewish bourgeoisie,” which gave such marked value to Viennese culture, and which was requited by being completely uprooted.¹³

The following passage provides a key to understanding the «marked values» referred to by Zweig and the specific nature of the mission entrusted to Jewish writers like him: in it the author states that the cultural and spiritual dimension is the highest aspiration of the Jew, and his way of breaking out of the close-cramped condition of the ghetto:

Im allgemeinen wird angenommen, reich zu werden sei das eigentliche und typische Lebensziel eines jüdischen Menschen. Nichts ist falscher. Reich zu werden bedeutet für ihn nur eine Zwischenstufe, ein Mittel zum wahren Zweck und keineswegs das innere Ziel. Der eigentliche Wille des Juden, sein immanentes Ideal ist der Aufstieg ins Geistige, in eine höhere kulturelle Schicht. Schon im östlichen orthodoxen Judentum, wo sich die Schwächen ebenso wie die Vorzüge der ganzen Rasse intensiver abzeichnen, findet diese Suprematie des Willens zum Geistigen über das bloß Materielle plastischen Ausdruck [...], und vielleicht drückt sich darin sogar die geheime Sehnsucht aus, durch Flucht ins Geistige sich aus dem bloß Jüdischen ins allgemein Menschliche aufzulösen. Eine ›gute‹ Familie meint also mehr als das bloß Gesellschaftliche, das sie selbst mit dieser Bezeichnung sich zubilligt; sie meint ein Judentum, das sich von allen Defekten und Engheiten und Kleinlichkeiten, die das Ghetto ihm aufgezwungen, durch Anpassung an eine andere Kultur und womöglich eine universale Kultur befreit hat oder zu befreien beginnt. Daß diese Flucht ins Geistige durch eine unproportionierte Überfüllung der intellektuellen Berufe dem Judentum dann ebenso verhängnisvoll geworden ist wie vordem seine Einschränkung ins Materielle, gehört freilich zu den ewigen Paradoxien des jüdischen Schicksals.

[It is generally accepted that getting rich is the only and typical goal of the Jew. Nothing could be further from the truth. Riches are to him merely a stepping stone, a means to the true end, and in no sense the real goal. The real determination of the Jew is to rise to a higher cultural plane in the intellectual world. Even in the case of Eastern orthodox Jewry, where the weaknesses as well as the merits of the whole race are more intensely manifested, this supremacy of the will to the spiritual over the mere material finds plastic expression. [...] This elevation of the intellectual to the highest rank is common to all classes [...]; and perhaps it expresses a secret longing to resolve the merely Jewish—through flight into the intellectual—into humanity at large. A “good” family therefore means more than the purely social aspect which it assigns to itself with the classification; it means a Jewry that has freed itself of all defects and limitations and pettiness which the ghetto has forced upon it, by means of adaptation to a different culture and even possibly a universal culture. That this flight into the intellectual has become as disastrous for the Jew, because of a disproportionate crowding of the professions, as formerly his confinement in the purely material, simply belongs to the eternal paradoxes of Jewish destiny.]¹⁴

From this point of view, culture knows no boundaries of race, class or territory; it is available to all, and constitutes a safe house for the Jew. A year after Zweig’s suicide, Hanna Arendt penned a scathing attack on Zweig’s book, taking issue particularly with the «Jewish bourgeoisie» described by the

¹³ S. ZWEIG, *Die Welt von gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers, überarbeitete* Neuausgabe, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2020, pp. 19-20; English tr., S. ZWEIG, *The World of Yesterday. An Autobiography*, ed. and translated by S. Montis, Cassel, 4th ed., London, Toronto, Melbourne, Sydney 1947, p. 16. Written by Zweig in 1941 during his exile in Brazil, this autobiography was published posthumously in 1942, after the suicides of the author and his wife in February of the same year.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27; pp. 20-21.

author, which, «in sharp contrast to its German and Austrian equivalents was uninterested in positions of power, even of the economic kind». This bourgeoisie, Arendt goes on to say, «was content with its accumulated wealth, happy in the security and peace that its wealth seemed to guarantee», unaware of what was really «the world of yesterday»,¹⁵ since it basically lived, oblivious, at the margin of events. She concludes by saying: «Had the Jews of Western and Central European countries displayed even a modicum of concern for the political realities of their times, they would have had reason enough not to feel secure. For, in Germany, the first anti-Semitic parties arose during the 1880s».¹⁶

This stricture may not be totally unfounded, and, indeed, points to the political inadequacy of culture as a surrogate of *Heimat*;¹⁷ but it is not true to say that the Jews were uninterested in politics. Take, for example, Kilcher's third category, in which the concept of the diaspora is seen politically in socio-revolutionary terms, as exemplified in Rosa Luxemburg, who makes it her banner in opposition to both the monarchic ideal of Joseph Roth and the upper-middle-class ideal represented by Zweig. In literature, the political connotation of the concept characterizes authors such as Albert Ehrenstein, Alfred Wolfenstein and Alfred Kuhn. Of these, the most influential in the revaluation of *Heimatlosigkeit* is Ehrenstein, who comes out in support of revolutionary, antinational socialism, and, rather like Yvan Goll,¹⁸ turns to the archetypal figure of the Wandering Jew as a symbol of a modern, anti-bourgeois, international version of Judaism.¹⁹ Only *Heimatlosigkeit* guarantees non-confinement in a ghetto, in which concept Ehrenstein includes all nationalisms, including Zionism.

By reflecting on the principal coordinates posited by Kilcher with reference to the specific subject of this paper, the ambivalence of the Jewish-German discourse on *Heimatlosigkeit* in the first half of the twentieth century becomes clear. On the one hand, it is concerned with a strictly (and exclusively) Jewish project: the reference to *Heimatlosigkeit* is linked to the traditional, pre-modern, conception of Judaism as essentially diasporic, and is antithetical both to modern versions of Zionism and to the erasing of all Jewish uniqueness or particularity that would inevitably be entailed in a process of assimilation. On the other hand, the discourse exceeds the merely Jewish dimension and may be read as an attempt – rather feeble, in truth – to influence the awareness and culture of the dominant sectors of society: in effect, the claim to *Heimatlosigkeit* is equivalent to taking a stand against all nationalistic tendencies and new forms of marginalization. Ideally, *Heimatlosigkeit* preserves the transnational aspirations of modern man and the modern Jew, who, speaking of himself, aims to act as a caveat to Europe against the idea of the nation as a closed, exclusive, xenophobic entity. For many of these writers, the reference to the specific example of the Jews inherent in *Heimatlosigkeit* (dramatically experienced by some at first hand in their enforced exile during the Nazi regime), indeed the very word, seems sufficient to evoke the prospect of a Europe free from wars of aggression and inspired by a culture of peaceful co-existence. Rooted though these reflections are in history, *Heimatlosigkeit* itself assumes in this context an idealized, spiritual and basically a-historical significance. The salvific hope, in fact, lies largely in the atavistic and mythic tradition.

¹⁵ H. ARENDT, *Stefan Zweig: Jews in the World of Yesterday*, in ID., *The Jewish Writings*, ed. J. KOHN, R.H. FELDMAN, Schocken Books, New York 2007, pp. 317-328: 319.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

¹⁷ «The world citizenship of this generation, this remarkable nationality that its members claimed as soon as their Jewish origin was mentioned, somewhat resembles those modern passports that grant the bearer the right of sojourn in every country except the one that issued it». (*ibid.*, p. 326).

¹⁸ On Yvan Goll see the study by Elisabetta Terigi, who throws light, in particular, on how the idea of *Heimatlosigkeit* shaped the poetic universe of the author. E. TERIGI, *Yvan Goll ed il crollo del mito d'Europa*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2013.

¹⁹ The figure of the Wandering Jew was already present in German literary tradition thanks to the Romantic *topos* of the solitude of the modern poet. See P. COLLINI, *La leggenda dell'ebreo errante nella letteratura romantica*, in A. DOLFI (ed.), *Gli intellettuali/scrittori ebrei e il dovere della testimonianza. In ricordo di Giorgio Bassani*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2017, pp. 35-42.

2. *Heimat as myth and Heimatlosigkeit as stigma: the stirrings of Blut und Boden*

In attributing to *Heimatlosigkeit* a positive, antinationalistic value, the writers referred to so far do not intend to deny the importance of the place of birth in the sensorial, perceptive and cognitive make-up of the individual. But, at the end of the nineteenth century, the word *Heimat* takes on a sense of exclusion: it sheds its purely anthropological, emotional connotation and becomes an ideological construct that soon assumes anti-Semitic implications. The Jewish revaluation of *Heimatlosigkeit* should be seen as a reaction to this ideologization of *Heimat*. This ideological process is centered in Germany and is accompanied on one hand by the transformation of German nationalism from liberal to conservative, and, on the other, a change in the economic system of the country, from agrarian to industrial, so that the big landowners are considerably weakened as a result. They resort to countermeasures in the form of political and cultural initiatives in support of agriculture.²⁰ Among the factors which, especially after 1890, contribute to the decline of the big landowners it is worth remembering the following: the rise of new forms of capitalism (industrialist cartels with the backing of the banks); competition from cheaper agricultural produce from overseas, more easily distributed thanks to improved means of transport and better infrastructure; an increase in population which agriculture is unable to absorb; the birth of the modern metropolis. These transformations take their toll on the social fabric of the country, destabilizing not only the landowning system but the entire population as well. They create a widespread feeling of uncertainty, fear and resentment, especially in the lower-middle and middle classes, who, impoverished in terms of capital, find that their socio-cultural standing,²¹ too, has been compromised.

This period is marked nationwide by a host of cultural manifestations in support of country towns and villages, the agrarian tradition, and provincial life in general, all summed up in the concept of *Heimat*, now redolent of farm life where time is measured not by the clock but by the seasons, or small county towns and age-old trades and skills; at this point in time, the metropolis is like a new-born, healthy child, growing so steadily as to provoke a feeling of disorientation, and of estrangement. These cultural shifts, together with the above-mentioned fears, lead to an outpouring of literary works extolling the moral superiority of the county, the bonds of soil and kin, the blood, sweat and tears of hard work, the village or hamlet, often shown as being threatened by the big city in the form of dubious, shady, unscrupulous characters – sometimes, Jews – who upset the equilibrium of the village, often irreversibly, bringing suffering and death to the inhabitants.²²

In 1897 Adolf Bartels, haughty anti-Semite and avid reader of writers like Paul de Lagarde, Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Julius Langbehn, coined the word *Heimatkunst* (the art of *Heimat*),²³ as a means of intercepting and concentrating in one project the literary and cultural phenomena briefly referred to above. From this moment on, right up to the end of the first decade of the twentieth century,

²⁰ On the relationship between culture and land ownership in the period in question see P. ZIMMERMANN, *Der Bauernroman. Antifeudalismus, Konservatorismus, Faschismus*, Metzler, Stuttgart 1975. In his nine years as Chancellor (1900-1909) Bernhard von Bülow proposed and enacted policies that favored collaboration between landowners and industry, who agree to compromise in order to turn Germany into a world power.

²¹ For an in-depth account of the historical background and the resistance to the changes imposed by the development of industry see, *inter alia*, T. NIPPERDEY, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866-1918*. Bd. 2: *Machtstaat vor der Demokratie*, C.H. Beck, München 1992; W. J. MOMMSEN, *Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1969; H.-P. ULLMANN, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1995.

²² The exponents of this literary trend turn their backs on modernity and remain faithful, as far as setting and viewpoint are concerned, to the realistic tradition of *Dorfgeschichte*, albeit in a trivialized form, much reducing, for example, the psychological complexity of the characters. On the differences between the works mentioned above and the actual genre of *Dorfgeschichte* see S. GRAZZINI, *Il progetto culturale Heimatkunst. Programma, movimento, produzione letteraria*, Carocci, Roma 2010, pp. 23-30.

²³ Bartels lays claim to the name in A. BARTELS, *Einführung in das deutsche Schrifttum für deutsche Menschen*. In *52 Briefen*, Koehler & Amelang, Leipzig 1933². On Bartels see S. N. FULLER, *The Nazi's Literary Grandfather. Adolf Bartels and Cultural Extremism 1871-1945*, Lang, New York 1996.

Heimatkunst indicated a politically conservative movement close to the interests of the big landowners.²⁴ The name is itself a manifesto: harnessing the fears sweeping the country, the leaders and members of the movement – who numbered, besides Bartels, writers like Friedrich Lienhard, Heinrich Sohnrey and Ernst Wachler – proclaim *Heimat* a national value to be defended at all costs in the face of the onslaught of modernity. With this semantic shift towards nationalism, they attribute to the concept of *Heimat* a vision of the world and human affairs which is far from being natural or “true”: behind the declared intention to give voice to a community lies the real aim, which is, in fact, to create that community and mould it, bringing it into line with a handful of values presented as fundamental to German culture, among which the exaltation of nature against the advance of artifice, an organic vision of life and nature, and again, loyalty, a spirit of sacrifice, generosity and pride in one’s homeland.²⁵

The ideologization of *Heimat* is made possible thanks to the evocative power of the word itself, which, needing no explanation, strikes straight home to the listener, conjuring up a familiar world, a world that he remembers, or imagines as being his own, and ends up by believing it to be true. What is more, this applies to everyone, since *Heimat* is where the individual first makes contact with himself and the world, so that every time he hears the word he focuses on himself as an individual and as a *bona fide* member of a given community. In this sense the concept of *Heimat* is open to ideologization: vague and shifting in content (as varied as the individuals who engage with the word, and as multifarious as the meanings attributed to the places of each individual’s lifetime) it has no resistance against whatever specific content one might want to attach to it. In the period in question, the above-mentioned values are grafted onto the idea of *Heimat*, and elevated to the role of true custodian of the nation. Participation in *Heimat* becomes, in short, a political imperative.

It is worth noting that the literary works associated with the movement never question the positive link with *Heimat*. It follows that the literary obeisance paid to the values approved by the movement make for a static, lifeless world, where all possibility of development is denied, and where death rules supreme. The characters in a story are not actors in a plot: they are acted upon, and spurred to autonomous action only to commit suicide. Otherwise they accept their, usually cruel, lot. This passive acceptance of one’s fate, the inability to reach a compromise with history, this absolute attachment to the homeland to the point of dying for it, are presented as marks of elevated morality in the characters of the typical *Heimat* novel. On the other hand, characters who have strayed from the *Heimat*, or who have rebelled against her laws, are seen as lost, vulnerable, often corrupt: consequently, *Heimatlosigkeit* represents a danger, and is duly stigmatized.

Although this genre does often fall back on anti-Semitic stereotypes – when present, the Jew is always and only either a corrupt city capitalist or a revolutionary socialist out to bring down the regime – not all *Heimatkunst* literature is anti-Semitic.²⁶ *Heimat* becomes exclusive and xenophobic above all when the movement edges towards ever more Nationalpopular positions. Concurrently, a biological interpretation of *Heimat* raises its head, hitherto hidden when not altogether absent. The bond with one’s *Heimat* is expressed more and more in atavistic terms: the dwelling land is the land your ancestors have tilled and made inhabitable, taming the primordial forces of nature. It is a land made fertile by their sweat and blood, by their bodies laid to rest.²⁷ The Jew is and will always be excluded from this intermingling of soil and blood. His *Heimatlosigkeit*, his biological affiliation to a diasporic, timeless people, make him different, and worse still, a danger for the community and the “natural” order of things, whatever the degree of assimilation achieved by the individual. This marks a crucial development in the meaning

²⁴ On this movement, see K. ROSSBACHER, *Heimatkunstabewegung und Heimatroman. Zu einer Literatursoziologie der Jahrhundertwende*, Klett, Stuttgart 1975; GRAZZINI, *Il progetto culturale Heimatkunst*.

²⁵ For more on the semantic centrality of *Heimatkunst* see GRAZZINI, *Il progetto culturale Heimatkunst*.

²⁶ Suffice it to say that his contemporaries saw in the Jewish writer, Berthold Auerbach, the initiator of *Dorfgeschichte* and the definer of its paradigms. We have already seen the fundamental importance of this genre in the literary context in question.

²⁷ The imagery is taken from the poem, *Urheimat*, by Agnes Miegel, who uses poetic condensation to give aesthetic body to a widespread concern in the collective imagination. See A. MIEGEL, *Die Frauen von Nidden. Gesammelte Gedichte von unserer “Mutter Ostpreußen”*, Verlag Gerhard Rautenber, Leer 1996.

of *Heimat*, which is extended to include the biological sphere, so that blood becomes the measure of the qualities and purity of a people. It is no coincidence that just before the first World War, and, more so, immediately after the conflict, the *Heimatkunst* label disappears. Germany is now a great world power: life on farm and field is no longer a suitable model for a social and economic system, but it will serve in providing a biological foundation for the “Germanness” of the Germans. So the *Heimat* of the *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) genre envisages a community based not only on shared values – as in the case of *Heimatkunst* – but also and specifically on blood and the soil that has received it. From such a point of view, the Jews are *necessarily* excluded.

Already in 1890, in his *Rembrandt als Erzieher (Rembrandt as Educator)*, which in only a few years sells millions of copies, Julius Langbehn, a reference point for many exponents of *Heimatkunst* and a convinced anti-Semite, states that «Rembrandt’s Juden waren echte Juden; die nichts Anderes sein wollten als Juden; und die also Charakter hatten» («Rembrandt’s were real Jews, they wanted to be nothing other than Jews, and in this showed character»)²⁸. The fact that Jews now want to be Germans or French or English is tantamount to betraying their true character (which, for Langbehn, is founded on blood) and is synonymous with dishonesty: the Jews are different to Germans and, indeed, Europeans, and such they must remain: in other words, outsiders in the community in which they live and which it is their job to serve. *Heimatlosigkeit* for the Jews, not belonging biologically to the territory they inhabit, is both a stigma and a judgment: it is not given to the Jews to become an integral part of the *Heimat* and of the nation. With Hitler – who finds in the *Heimatlosigkeit* of the Jews a perfect justification for cutting them off from all other peoples²⁹ – political power is able to bring into effect the exclusion of the Jews from the *Heimat*, and this exclusion takes the form of extermination.

3. *The experiential dimension of Heimatlosigkeit: Jean Améry and Peter Weiss*

Gewiß ist der Ahasverismus, die Heimatlosigkeit, ein bitteres Schicksal dem Einzelnen, aber sie ist ein Grund der verhältnismäßig großen Leistungen vieler Juden.

[It cannot be denied that the experience of *Heimatlosigkeit* as Ahasverism, is a bitter fate for the individual, but it is, nonetheless, the foundation upon which many Jews have based great achievements.]³⁰

In 1926, when Albert Ehrenstein writes these words in his *Nationaljudentum*, the real experience of exile and the struggle for survival is still to come. Like many Jews who, more fortunate than numberless others, managed to flee in time from race laws and deportation to the death camps, Ehrenstein too was forced to taste the «bitter fate» of life without *Heimat*.

Though he was always aware of being considered an outsider, exile became, first, definitive, and, in the long run, a death sentence. The version of reality sanctioned by the Nuremberg Laws and the concentration camps, sheds a ghastly light on the difference between the mythic and atavistic dimension of *Heimatlosigkeit* as the essence of Jewishness and as a form of resistance to the nationalism of exclusion, and the *Heimatlosigkeit* of real life. So true is this that many who escaped Nazi ferocity are all but destroyed by the humiliation of exile, the enforced separation from home and country, and the loss of their native language. With the advent of Nazism, *Heimatlosigkeit* is experienced by the Jews of Germany and

²⁸ J. LANGBEHN, *Rembrandt als Erzieher. Von einem Deutschen*, Hirschfeld, Leipzig 1890, p. 42, my translation. On Langbehn see G. MOSSE, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, Grosset & Dunlap, New York 1964 (I refer to the Italian trans. *Le origini culturali del Terzo Reich*, il Saggiatore, Milano 1968, pp. 62 ff.); C. MENCK, *Die falsch gestellte Weltenuhr: Der “Rembrandtdeutsche” Julius Langbehn*, in K. SCHWEDHELM (ed.), *Propheten des Nationalismus*, List, München, 1969, pp. 88-104; GRAZZINI, *Il progetto culturale Heimatkunst*, pp. 41-46.

²⁹ See E. JÄCKEL, *Hitler in History*, University Press of New England, Hanover, NH 1984.

³⁰ I take the quotation from KILCHER, *Diasporakonzepte*, p. 142; my translation.

Austria as a catastrophe, as is evident in the following words by Jean Améry (Hans Mayer), a survivor of Auschwitz, words that are even more cogent than those of Zweig quoted above:

Wir aber hatten nicht das Land verloren, sondern mußten erkennen, daß es niemals unser Besitz gewesen war. Für uns war, was mit diesem Land und seinen Menschen zusammenhing, ein Lebensmißverständnis. Wovon wir glaubten, es sei die erste Liebe gewesen, das war, wie sie drüben sagten, Rassenschande. [...] Bei einiger geistiger Redlichkeit war es uns, die wir während des Krieges unter feindheimatlicher Besatzung lebten, ganz unmöglich, die Heimat als von einer fremden Macht unterdrückt zu denken.

[However, we had not lost our country, but had to realize that it had never been ours. For us, whatever was linked with this land and its people was an existential misunderstanding. What we believed to have been our first love was, as they said there, racial disgrace. [...] Given some intellectual honesty, it was quite impossible for us, who during the war lived under the occupation by the hostile homeland, to think of our country as oppressed by a foreign power.³¹

So far the Jews had been able to inhabit a national territory and been free to oppose nationalistic, xenophobic ideologies – in short, those based on national and racial supremacy; they had also laid claim, ideally, to *Heimatlosigkeit*, as opposed to an ideologized, degrading concept of *Heimat*. Now, with the Nuremberg Laws and the actual experience of exile, they felt all the trepidation caused by an existential condition described thus by Améry, when he suggests implicitly that myth is incapable of interpreting reality: «Der Wanderjude hatte mehr Heimat als ich» («The itinerant Jew had more of a home than I»).³² This is all the more true for someone, like him, who does not dispose of «so etwas wie mobile Heimat oder zumindest Heimatersatz» («a transportable home, or at least an ersatz for home») such as «Religion [...], wie die jüdische [...], Geld [...] [oder] Ruhm und Ansehen» («religion, like the Jewish one [...] money [...] [or] fame and esteem»).³³

At a time when the concept of *Heimat* aroused suspicion, it is all the more significant that it should have been a writer like Jean Améry to rehabilitate it: «Daß rückschrittliche Bärenhäuterei den Heimatkomplex besetzt hat, verpflichtet uns nicht, ihn zu ignorieren» («That reactionary indolence has taken over the entire complex of ideas associated with home does not obligate us to ignore it»).³⁴ Focusing the attention on what *Heimat* means for the individual and for the very constitution of the subject – as, indeed, for literature –, he breaks the ideological chains that bind it, invalidates the equation with this or that set of moral principles, and highlights the basic epistemological value for each single individual:

Heimat ist Sicherheit, sage ich. In der Heimat beherrschen wir souverän die Dialektik von Kennen-Erkennen, von Trauen-Vertrauen: Da wir sie kennen, erkennen wir sie und getrauen uns zu sprechen und zu handeln, weil wir in unsere Kenntnis-Erkenntnis begründetes Vertrauen haben dürfen. [...] Sicher aber fühlt man sich dort, wo nichts Ungefähreres zu erwarten, nichts ganz und gar Fremdes zu fürchten ist. [...] Nur jene Signale, die wir sehr früh aufnahmen, deren Deutung wir zugleich mit der Besitzergreifung der Außenwelt erlernten, werden zu Konstitutionselementen und Konstante unserer Persönlichkeit: So wie man die Muttersprache erlernt, ohne ihre Grammatik zu kennen, so erfährt man die heimische Umwelt. Muttersprache und Heimatwelt wachsen mit uns, wachsen in uns hinein und werden so zur Vertrautheit, die uns Sicherheit verbürgt. [...] Was [...] wäre Joyce ohne Dublin, Joseph Roth ohne Wien, Proust ohne Illiers?

³¹ J. AMÉRY, *Wieviel Heimat braucht der Mensch?* In Id., *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne. Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2015, pp. 82-113: 96; J. AMÉRY, *How Much Home Does a Person Need?* in Id., *At the Mind's Limits. Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, transl. by Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN 1980, pp. 41-61: 50. Améry's essay was first published in 1966.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 87; p. 44.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 88-89; pp. 44-45.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93; p. 48.

[Home is security, I say. At home we are in full command of the dialectics of knowledge and recognition, of trust and confidence. Since we know them, we recognize them and we trust ourselves to speak and to act—for we may have justified confidence in our knowledge and recognition. [...] One feels secure, however, where no chance occurrence is to be expected, nothing completely strange to be feared. [...] Only those signals that we absorbed very early, that we learned to interpret at the same time as we were gaining possession of our external world, become constitutional elements and constants of our personality. Just as one learns one's mother tongue without knowing its grammar, one experiences one's native surroundings. Mother tongue and native world grow with us, grow into us, and thus become the familiarity that guarantees us security. [...] What [...] would Joyce be without Dublin, Joseph Roth without Vienna, Proust without Illiers?]³⁵

Améry salvages the idea of *Heimat* – as applied to nations too³⁶ – so as to denounce, not exile so much as the complete disorientation of someone who sees his identity as a free individual radically endangered. On the other hand, this salvage is paradoxical in that it is carried out by one who has been forced to recognize that *Heimat* itself was a bluff: far from being a place of life, security and familiarity, *Heimat* turned out to be enemy-occupied territory, snatched from the individual of the «dialectics of knowledge and recognition». ³⁷ Through this paradoxical salvage operation, Améry brings out something that defies logic and rationality and pertains, instead, to the dimension of feeling: the nostalgia of the fleeing Jew that persists even though he realizes that “home” now means death. Homesickness triggers in the individual an insoluble conflict: «Was zu hassen unser dringender Wunsch und unsere soziale Pflicht war, stand plötzlich vor uns und wollte ersehnt werden: ein ganz unmöglicher, neurotischer Zustand, gegen den kein psychoanalytisches Kraut gewachsen ist» («What we urgently wished, and were socially bound, to hate, suddenly stood before us and demanded our longing. A totally impossible, neurotic condition for which there is no psychoanalytic remedy»). ³⁸ He adds: «Therapie hätte nur die geschichtliche Praxis sein können [...]. Aber die Revolution fand nicht statt, und unsere Wiederkehr war für die Heimat nichts als seine Verlegenheit» («The only therapy could have been history in practice. [...] But the revolution did not take place, and our return was nothing but an embarrassment for our homeland»). ³⁹

If the revaluation of *Heimatlosigkeit* examined in the first part of this paper transcends the experience of the individual and projects it onto the entire people of the diaspora, whose duty it is to save European culture, the *Heimatlosigkeit* debated by late-twentieth-century writers like Améry is above all experiential – and, offering no way out, dramatically final. As I have said, it undermines the very essence of the individual, and involves both temporal and spatial dimensions. The homesickness of the Jew repudiated by the country he considers his own and whose language he speaks obliges him to reconsider his own personal history and that of his community, and re-examine the cognitive co-ordinates once taken for granted and become familiar: taking the idea of *Heimat* proposed by Améry a step further, one might say that these very co-ordinates are shared by victims and butchers. To be sure, Améry himself does not go so far, because in this particular essay he attempts no sociological reflection, unlike Peter Weiss, who in the documentary drama *The Investigation* has Witness 3 speak the following lines:

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-93; pp. 47-48.

³⁶ In the final part of the essay, Améry reflects on the relationship – for him fundamental and indissoluble – between nation and *Heimat*, contrasting the latter to the nascent global imperialism which he clearly saw in the contemporary scenario. This is not the place to go further into this subject: here I refer to this aspect of his argument only in order to underline that his speaking out on the subject of *Heimatlosigkeit* does not imply an anti-national political stance.

³⁷ «For many reasons then, my considerations will contrast very clearly with the ones of those Germans, for example, who were expelled from their homelands in the East. They lost their possessions, homestead, business, fortune. Or perhaps only a modest job; beyond that, they lost the land, meadows and hills, a forest, a silhouette of a city, the church in which they had been confirmed. We also lost the people: the schoolmate from the same bench, the neighbor, the teacher. They had become informers or bullies, at best, embarrassed opportunists. And we lost our language». *Ibid.*, p. 42

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98; p. 51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*.

Zeuge 3: Wir müssen die erhabene Haltung fallen lassen / daß uns diese Lagerwelt unverständlich ist / Wir kannten alle die Gesellschaft / aus der das Regime hervorgegangen war / das solche Lager erzeugen konnte / Die Ordnung die hier galt / war uns in ihrer Anlage vertraut / deshalb konnten wir uns auch noch zurechtfinden / in ihrer letzten Konsequenz / in der der Ausbeutende in bisher unbekanntem Grad / seine Herrschaft entwickeln durfte / und der Ausgebeutete / noch sein eigenes Knochenmehl / liefern mußte

[Witness 3: We must get rid of our exalted attitude / that this camp world / is beyond our comprehension / We all knew the society / which had produced the regime / that could bring about such a camp / we were familiar with this order / from its beginnings / and so we could still find our way / even in its final consequences / which allowed the exploiter / to develop his power / to a hitherto unknown degree / and the exploited / had to deliver up his own guts].⁴⁰

As I have said, Améry, a survivor of Auschwitz, does not go so far. However, in one passage of the text he admits to not having been immune to the appeal of *Blut und Boden* as a literary genre, and to being aware that *Heimatlosigkeit* represented, besides all the rest, an opportunity for acquiring knowledge and broadening cultural horizons. However, broader horizons in no way compensate for the disorientation caused by *Heimatlosigkeit*:

Freilich, nur ungern lasse ich mich für einen verspäteten Nachzügler der Blut- und Boden-Armee halten, und darum will ich deutlich aussprechen, daß ich mir auch der Bereicherungen und Chancen, welche die Heimatlosigkeit uns bot, wohl bewußt bin. Die Öffnung auf die Welt hin, die die Emigration uns gab – ich weiß sie mir zu schätzen. Ich ging ins Ausland und kannte von Paul Eluard nicht viel mehr als den Namen, aber einen Schriftsteller, der Karl Heinrich Waggerl hieß, hielt ich für eine wichtige literarische Figur. Ich habe siebenundzwanzig Jahre Exil hinter mir, und meine geistigen Landsleute sind Proust, Sartre, Beckett. Nur bin ich immer noch überzeugt, daß man Landsleute in Dorf- und Stradtstraßen haben muß, wenn man der geistigen ganz froh werden soll, und daß ein kultureller Internationalismus nur im Erdreich nationaler Sicherheit recht gedeiht.

[Only reluctantly, of course, will I permit myself to be regarded as a straggler of the Blood and Soil army, and therefore I want to state clearly that I am also well aware of the enrichments and opportunities that homelessness offered us. I know how to appreciate the broader view of the world that emigration gave us. I went abroad and didn't know much more of Waggerl as an important literary figure. I have twenty-seven years of exile behind me, and my spiritual compatriots are Proust, Sartre, Beckett. Only I am still convinced that one must have compatriots in village and city streets if the spiritual ones are to be fully enjoyed, and that a cultural internationalism thrives well only in the soil of national security].⁴¹

Firmly convinced that literature needs a home soil in order to grow and flourish, Améry is forced to write far away from his homeland. After Auschwitz he does not return to his native Austria, but writes as an exile in German, the language which, to use his own metaphor, has grown with him. In his literary works, in his strong stance on questions of current affairs, culture and politics, he appears to find a surrogate, not so much for *Heimat* as for the historical analysis that Germany as a nation failed to carry out then and has failed to carry out long after the horrendous crimes of the Nazi regime.

In Améry, the use of the German language in a situation of definitive *Heimatlosigkeit* becomes one of the many paradoxes experienced by those who have, not a *Heimat* but an «enemy-*Heimat*» (*Feindheimat*). For Jews like him, the greatest paradox pertains to identity: deprived of a prior relationship with Judaism, after the Nuremberg Laws, they realize that they can be nothing but Jews. These are «die wohl nach Millionen zählenden Zeitgenossen, auf die ihr Judesein hereinbrach, ein Elementarereignis, und die es bestehen müssen ohne Gott, ohne Geschichte, ohne messianisch-nationale Erwartung. [...] Als Nicht-Nichtjude bin ich Jude, muß es sein und muß es sein wollen» («contemporaries, probably numbering

⁴⁰ P. WEISS, *Die Ermittlung. Oratorium in 11 Gesängen*, in ID., *Werke in sechs Bänden, Dramen 2*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1991, pp. 7-200: 85-86; P. WEISS, *The Investigation. Oratorio in 11 Cantos*, Marion Boyars, Engl. version by Alexander Gross, London, New York 2010, p. 88.

⁴¹ AMÉRY, *Wieviel Heimat braucht der Mensch?*, pp. 89-90; AMÉRY, *How Much Home Does a Person Need?*, p. 46.

into the millions, whose being Jewish burst upon them with elemental force, and who must stand this test without God, without history, without messianic-national hope. [...] As a Non-non-Jew, I am a Jew; I must be one and must want to be one».⁴² The identity paradox is encapsulated in that double negative which does not equal a positive affirmation of identity but an absolute negation of it. For German-speaking «non-non-Jews» like Améry, therefore, *Heimatlosigkeit* is an absolute experiential dimension, unavailable to mythic transfiguration, and not even representing either an alternative to assimilation or Zionism, or a way of connecting with Judaism in the positive sense of a belief or a tradition.

And yet, though the *Heimatlosigkeit* of the «non-non-Jew» is in no way a bearer of hopes of redemption, it does have an extremely important historical significance: the exclusion from one's *Heimat*, and not being able or not wanting to define oneself a «non-Jew» implies not being, not having become, not wanting to be like a butcher. This point is underlined by Peter Weiss, who, like Améry, does not seek comfort in a Jewish tradition which has never been his. In the passage from *The Investigation* quoted above, he does express a political judgment on the kind of society that produced Auschwitz, and Witness 3's statement may strike one as offensive or even debatable; but it does not amount to placing victims and butchers on the same scale. Weiss seems to be saying that if one accepts a certain kind of society (the witness speaks of society and the rules that govern it), the roles of each of us are assigned totally at random. This reflection lies at the heart of Peter Weiss's work, and has deep roots, as is witnessed by the moment in his autobiographical *Abschied von den Eltern* (1961) (*Leavetaking*) when the narrator, still a child, discovers during a Nazi parade, that his father is a Jew:

Wäre ich nicht plötzlich vor eine einschneidende Veränderung gestellt worden, so wäre ich von der Flucht der Kolonnen mitgerissen worden in meinen Untergang. Diese plötzliche Veränderung geschah nach dem Anhören einer der Reden, die damals aus dem Lautsprecher brachen, und die, vor dem Erkennen, eine unfaßbare Gewalt besaßen, und die, nach dem Erkennen, wie ein wirres Geschrei aus der Hölle waren. Neben mir saß Gottfried, mein Stiefbruder, und wir lauschten dem heiseren Schreien, wir waren überwältigt von diesem Schreien, fühlten nur unsere Überwältigung, den Inhalt faßten wir nicht, es war ja kein Inhalt da, nur unerhörte Ausmaße von Leere, Leere mit Schreien gefüllt. So übermächtig war die Leere, daß wir uns völlig darinnen verloren, es war als hörten wir Gott in Orakeln sprechen. Und als es endlich still geworden war, und der Orkan der Freudenrufe über den Tod und die Selbstaufopferung, die damals wie Freudenrufe über eine goldglänzende Zukunft erschienen, verbräust war, sagte Gottfried, wie schade daß du nicht dabei sein darfst. Ich spürte bei diesen Worten weder Überraschung noch Schreck. Und als Gottfried dann erklärte, daß mein Vater Jude sei, so war mir dies wie eine Bestätigung für etwas, das ich seit langem gehant hatte. Verleugnete Erfahrungen lebten in mir auf, ich begann, meine Vergangenheit zu verstehen, ich dachte an die Rudel der Verfolger, die mich auf den Straßen verhöhnt und gesteinigt hatten, in instinktiver Überlieferung der Verfolgung anders Gearteter, in vererbtem Abscheu gegen bestimmte Gesichtszüge und Eigenarten des Wesens. Ich dachte an Friederle, aus dem einmal das Vorbild der heroischen Vaterlandsverteidigung werden sollte, und so war ich mit einem Male ganz auf der Seite der Unterlegenen und Ausgestoßenen, doch ich verstand noch nicht, daß dies meine Rettung war.

[Had I not suddenly been faced with a drastic change I would have been borne along in the torrent of marching columns, into my destruction. This sudden change took place after hearing one of the speeches which in those days spewed out of the loudspeakers and which before my realization possessed an inconceivable power over me, but which afterward seemed like an incoherent screaming from hell. Next to me sat Gottfried, my half brother, and we listened to the hoarse screaming, we were overcome by this screaming, felt only that we were overpowered, we did not grasp its content, indeed there was no content, only emptiness of unprecedented dimension, emptiness filled with the screaming. So overpowering was this emptiness that we completely lost ourselves in it, it was as if we were hearing God speaking in oracles. And when the hurricane of jubilant summons to death and self-sacrifice, which at the time seemed like so much cheering for a gold-gleaming future, had run its course, Gottfried said, What a pity you can't be with us. I felt neither surprise nor fear at these words. And when Gottfried then explained that my father was a Jew, this came to me like the confirmation of something I had long suspected. Disclaimed awareness came to life in me, I began to understand my past, I thought of the gang of persecution of those who were different and had inherited contempt for certain facial features and essential

⁴² J. AMÉRY, *Über Zwang und Unmöglichkeit, Jude zu sein*, in ID., *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, pp. 145-173: 162-163. J. AMÉRY, *On the Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew*, in ID., *At the Mind's Limits*, pp. 82-102: 94.

characteristics. I thought of Friederle, who was one day to become a model of the heroic defender of the Fatherland, and at once I was entirely on the side of the underdog and the outcast, though I still did not understand that this was my salvation].⁴³

Given the historical period, it might seem paradoxical to refer to the discovery that one's father is a Jew as «my salvation». Yet, the context leaves no doubt as to the correct interpretation of the words: if the discovery reveals to the protagonist the hidden identity of his innermost being, hitherto concealed by his father's silence as to his origin, the boy's «salvation» consists in that fact that this very origin protects the inner person from being swept away by the «hurricane of joy, joy of death and of holocaust». The self can do nothing about being Jewish, but this very Jewishness becomes a highly effective safeguard against the risk of turning into a «butcher».

However, while one's origin is dictated by chance, chance is followed by choice. Peter Weiss chooses, and chooses to side, in his writings too, with the victims (the defeated). Though he himself was not deported, he knows that – to use Améry's words – «being Jewish is not just a task; it is – beyond being a duty – also *fear*».⁴⁴ Not just fear in general, but the fear experienced by those about to die, and those deprived forever of their *Heimat*.⁴⁵ Weiss does not exalt his own *Heimatlosigkeit*, but endows it with a significance beyond mere autobiography by means of his literary skills and the aesthetics of perception, which enable the reader to partake in his experiences and, possibly, learn from them. Once all reference points have been destroyed, and a death sentence represents the only future possible, when the historical dimension of Nazism has been acknowledged, these writers cannot (and do not want to) look for religious or mythic horizons. In their writings, firmly based on history, they do not find (and maybe do not look for) a surrogate for *Heimat*. What they offer as writers is not a project concerning identity, but rather one about memory and awareness, which notwithstanding its human fallibility, represents one way of standing up to those political systems, social structures and cultures that invoke death as aim, ally and instrument.

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⁴³ P. WEISS, *Abschied von den Eltern*, in ID., *Werke in sechs Bänden. Zweiter Band: Prosa 2*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1991, pp. 57-141: 97-98. P. WEISS, *Leavetaking*, in ID., *Exile*, Delacorte, New York, 1968, pp. 1-88: 47.

⁴⁴ AMÉRY, *On the Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew*, p. 94.

⁴⁵ On the pervasiveness of death in the works of Peter Weiss see A. SCHNABEL, “*Nicht ein Tag, an dem ich nicht an den Tod denke*”. *Todesvorstellungen und Todesdarstellungen in Peter Weiss' Bildern und Schriften*, Röhrig Universitätsverlag, St. Ingberg 2010.

SUMMARY

In this essay I explore the different meanings of Jewish *Heimatlosigkeit* (homelessness) in the German-language literary discourse from the end of the 1800s to the 1970s. The first part shows how in the first decades of the twentieth century the concept forms for several Jewish authors a resistance against nationalism and a possible salvation of cultural values seen as potentially universal in scope. The second part illustrates the political origin of this idea with which many authors reacted to the antisemitic stigmatization of the Jews as *heimatlos* by those who consider themselves the true representatives of the national culture. The last part highlights how after the Second World War the discourse about Jewish *Heimatlosigkeit* is not at all abandoned but it concerns either the memory of the near past or refers to the condition of contemporary man, for whom it is impossible to clearly define identity based on bonds of belonging as presupposed in the concept of *Heimat*.

KEYWORDS: *Heimat* and *Heimatlosigkeit* in German-language literature; Jewish-German literature; Nationalism and Antisemitism.