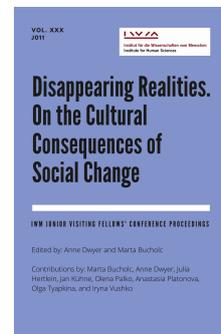


Sammy Gronemann's Lessing

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Abstract: “Sammy Gronemann’s *Lessing*” records yet another German-Jewish encounter, by tracing the literary imprints left by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing upon the German-Jewish writer Sammy Gronemann (1875-1952). The heritage of Lessing amounts to a legitimization of paradigmatic importance for Gronemann’s German-Jewish identity. By imitating Lessing, as well as by entering into a critical discourse with his works, especially with his dramatic poem *Nathan the Wise*, Gronemann incorporates a German voice into his Jewish habitus, with which he himself learned to speak in a polyvocal space of asymmetric identifications. Partly based upon hitherto unresearched material, I not only expose Gronemann’s attempt to lend a German voice to the Jews’ plight – especially to those of Eastern European origin, but I also document the literary contribution, with which Sammy Gronemann enriched German culture. Gronemann attempted primarily to reach his own assimilated German-Jewish kinsmen. Thus we are presented in his work with a marvelous possibility to examine an early German Zionist perspective, and we may follow his reflection on which groups may raise their voice in Germany.

Son of the great-rabbi Selig Gronemann, Sammy Gronemann (1875-1952) remained a practicing and devote German Jew throughout his life, while also dedicating himself to the Zionist cause and emigrating to Israel in 1936. This fusion of identities, spiced with ironic humor, is Gronemann’s trademark and in itself remarkable for his time.

Gronemann may be considered one of the pioneers of modern Jewish identity; the satiric criticism expressed in his articles, books, and plays exposes the absurdities of his assimilating kinsmen. Most famous in this regard is probably his novel *Tohuwabohu* (1920), wherein he depicts the German Jewish milieu of Berlin in the early twentieth century.^[1] One of the book’s central conflicts is the encounter between German Jews and Eastern European Jewry, and each group’s interactions with Christian populations.

In *Tohuwabohu* Gronemann tells the story of the kind German Protestant Pastor Bode, whose attitude towards Jews initially resembles that of German Enlightenment playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781). Bode dares to preach the faith of *Nathan the Wise* in the Russian town of Borytschew. The army commander Kujaroff kidnaps Bode’s daughter on the eve of Pesach, when the local pogrom tension is most charged—after Bode has delivered his sermon.^[2] Kujaroff tricks Bode into believing that Jews are responsible for the loss of his child and leaves it up to the pastor whether to use the explosive mob to search for his child among the Jews. Bode, out of his mind for fear of losing his only child rejects his own teachings and allows himself to be forced into acting against his own humanist stance towards Jews. Not even his best friend, the equally educated and liberal head teacher Strösser, is able restore his sanity:

“Bode!” Strösser grabbed him by both shoulders. “Mr. Pastor, what are you doing? – Do remember your preaching – do you really want to do this [i.e., incite the mob against the Jews]? Against your own teaching!?” “Leave me alone,” Bode cried beside himself frantically and tore himself away, rejecting the hands that sought to deter him. “Now is not the time to think of sermons and theories. I am looking for my child!”

[“Bode!” Strösser packte ihn an beiden Schultern. “Herr Pastor! Was richten Sie an? – Denken Sie an Ihre Predigt – Wollen Sie denn Ihre eigene Lehre -” “Lassen Sie mich”, schrie Bode außer sich und riß sich los, die Hände, welche ihn zurückhalten wollten, fortstoßend. “Jetzt ist nicht die Zeit, an Predigten und Theorien zu denken. Ich suche mein Kind!”][3]

Tohuwabohu ends with a pogrom against the Jews of Borytschew. It is based on an ethnographic account that digests Gronemann’s own experiences in Zhitomyr, at Easter 1905.[4] Through the relationship between Pastor Bode and Teacher Strösser, Gronemann represents the confrontation between German Protestantism and the Enlightenment – paradigmatic for Lessing’s life and work – but also of both ideologies with reality. The two men’s dialogues express Gronemann’s critique of the ideals of Christianity; in them he also casts a sober look at Lessing’s enlightened ideal Jew Nathan. After Bode’s sermon, but still before the pogrom, Strösser enters into a discussion with Bode about the good and noble in man and about ideal Jews. Strösser points to the presence of many Jews in Eastern European civilizations who have embodied and lived according to the highest values of Christianity. He argues that precisely these values in everyday life arouse the highest discomfort among Christians. Jews appear as saints to them, and not as humans, thereby leaving them confused. “Confused?” Bode replies and continues, “If they match your accounts, then they would be the true Christians!” Strösser responds:

Everything else can be read in Lessing’s Nathan! But we normal people do not want to see these ideals embodied in regular cobblers and tailors. We can only tolerate it when it appears completely isolated; there we render it harmless, by turning people into gods or saints. They become for us slightly more tolerable if at least in their youth they have sinned properly. It’s always the same story in the Catholic legend. First a sinner, then an ideal man, then martyrdom, and finally canonization. For them heaven, for us the earth. A saint who goes around un-crucified hurts our natural sensibility and evokes hostile feelings.

[Das Weitere ist in Lessings Nathan nachzulesen! Wir normalen Menschen aber wollen diese Ideale nicht in irgendwelchen Schustern und Schneidern verkörpert sehen. Wir können das nur dulden, wenn es ganz vereinzelt auftritt; da machen wir es unschädlich, indem wir die Betroffenen zu Göttern oder Heiligen machen. Etwas erträglicher noch werden sie uns, wenn sie wenigstens in ihrer Jugend ordentlich gesündigt haben. Es ist immer dieselbe Geschichte in der katholischen Legende. Erst Sünder, dann Idealmensch, dann Martyrium und zum Schluß Heiligsprechung. Für jene der Himmel, für uns die Erde. Ein Heiliger, der ungekreuzigt herumläuft, verletzt unser natürliches Empfinden und ruft feindselige Gefühle wach.][5]

In this context, Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* appears actually to strengthen antisemitic prejudices, rather than to diminish them. Gronemann's narration, which is based on personal experience, seems to suggest that goodness in Jews was accepted only on stage and in theory – in the remote fiction of an intellectual Enlightenment, but not close to the heart.[6] Indeed, hardly any German or Eastern European Christian would have at the time accepted the character of a Nathan the Wise in his contemporary Jewish neighbors. In the discussion with Pastor Bode, Strösser also presents Jews as the sole winners in Lessing's call for interreligious competition in the practice of unconditional love. Instead of focusing on their origin and on unverifiable claims of exclusive authenticity and totalitarian power, so Lessing, members of the three religions are called upon rather to practice practicing solidarity, loving kindness towards others, irrespective of their own origins or that of the others:

Let each feel honored by this free affection. / Unwarped of prejudice; let each endeavour / To vie with both his brothers in displaying / The virtue of his ring; assist its might / With gentleness, benevolence, forbearance, / With inward resignation to the godhead, / And if the virtues of the ring continue / To show themselves among your children's children, / After a thousand thousand years, appear / Before this judgment-seat—a greater one / Than I shall sit upon it, and decide. / So spake the modest judge.

[Es eifre jeder seiner unbestochnen/ Von Vorurteilen freien Liebe nach!/ Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette,/ Die Kraft des Steins in seinem Ring' an Tag/ Zu legen! komme dieser Kraft mit Sanftmut,/ Mit herzlicher Verträglichkeit, mit Wohltun,/ Mit innigster Ergebenheit in Gott/ Zu Hilf'! Und wenn sich dann der Steine Kräfte/ Bei euern Kindes-Kindeskindern äußern:/ So lad ich über tausend tausend Jahre/ Sie wiederum vor diesen Stuhl. Da wird/ Ein weiserer Mann auf diesem Stuhle sitzen/ Als ich; und sprechen. Geht!—So sagte der/ Bescheidne Richter.][7]

From the dialogue between Bode and Strösser, one might deduce Sammy Gronemann's opinion to be that Jews are the better Christians – a kind of re-inversion of a Christian inversion. Similar to Lessing and his ideal Jew Nathan the Wise, Gronemann refutes the Christian Theory of Substitution (Substitutionslehre, Enterbungslehre), according to which Christianity supposedly superseded Judaism. Gronemann restores to Jews their negated position in history by presenting Jews, in the words of Strösser, not only as despised humans, but as saints exposed to the Christian obsession with crucifixion. In a way then, Strösser's words reverberate with the Friar's "Our Savior was a Jew." (*Nathan the Wise*, IV/7: 3024: "Dass unser Herr ja selbst ein Jude war.")

In our context one needs to be aware that through Bode and Strösser Gronemann enters a historical inner-Christian debate, initiated by Lessing, which touches rather upon the question of who among the Christians is the better Christian. For Lessing, the better Christians are obviously those who respect and continue the Jewish tradition, rather than despise it and their agents. Gronemann could be said to agree, but not without pointing to the fact that reality still lagged behind Lessing's vision, more than one hundred years after its reception.

In fact, Jews received and accepted Lessing's Nathan much more warmly than their German contemporaries. It became the flagship of Jewish emancipation in the middle of the nineteenth century, what Mosse calls the "Magna Carta of German Jewry, the popularization of Bildung and the Enlightenment."^[8] Furthermore, so Mosse, with the Jüdischer Kulturbund production of Nathan the Wise in Berlin in 1933, German Jews could now claim Nathan the Wise as truly their own, since Nazi Germany had broken away from the German humanist tradition, and had aborted it.^[9] In the cultural ghetto of the Kulturbund, Jews carried their Nathan and its tradition through the Nazi terror, at least those few that survived.^[10] For example Fritz Wisten, who had recently returned from a concentration camp, launched the post-war repertoire of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin with a Nathan production on 7 September 1945.^[11] After the war Jewish artists were initiators of several post-war Nathan the Wise productions. Today Jewish artists still contribute considerably to the stage traditions of *Nathan the Wise* in German-speaking countries, Israel, and elsewhere.^[12]

Like most German Jews of his time, Sammy Gronemann was firmly acquainted with German culture. Even though his school years in Hannover were burdened with ignorant antisemitic teachers and students, he repeatedly amazed his literature teacher and classmates by writing essays "each in the style of another great German prose writer." In his memoirs Gronemann writes that his essays "were always read out loud first when the notebooks were returned. The class then would call out whether Lessing, Kleist or someone else had been the source of inspiration." ["In den oberen Klassen, in denen ich übrigens meine Literaturlehrer ebenso wie meine Mitschüler dadurch in einiges Erstaunen versetzte, daß ich meine Aufsätze jeweils im Stile eines der großen deutschen Prosaiker schrieb. Sie wurden dann bei der Rückgabe der Hefter immer zuerst vorgelesen, und die Klasse gab dann durch Zuruf zu erkennen, ob Lessing oder Kleist oder wer sonst Pate gestanden hatte. Viel Freude machten mir auch die Mathematik-Stunde, aber im ganzen blieb ich ein miserabler Schüler."]^[13] Such personal anecdotes are integral components of Gronemann's oeuvre. Although this anecdote is small, I find it significant that Lessing takes first place in Gronemann's list of "great German prose writers" in an account of events that would have taken place some time between 1891 and 1894.

The next anecdote, which will help us understand Gronemann's appreciation of Lessing, takes us to 1917, into the First World War, when Gronemann worked for the Press-Office-East in Kowno. Due to his known passion for the stage, he was charged with the task of managing the Front Theater:

I wrote a long Memorandum, in which I explained to the determining Colonel Hoffmann that here the opportunity was given to do real cultural work. At home the bulk of soldiers went to the theater, if at all, at best to silly burlesques or revues. Here, in a pinch, they would be ready to put up even with serious art and might be cultivated in a truly intellectual manner. I suggested plays such as “Minna of Barnhelm” or “The Torgau Wintercamp,” but without further ado it was decreed: “The Soldier Wants to Laugh.” The backbone of the repertoire remained “Charley’s Aunt,” an English farce – in itself quite funny, but devoid of any literary significance – which was of course His Majesty’s favorite piece, and he inevitably dragged each of his royal guests to this play, when he wasn’t having the play staged for himself in his palace in Potsdam.

[Ich fertigte ein großes Memorandum an, indem ich dem zur Entscheidung berufenen Oberst Hoffmann auseinandersetzte, daß hier die Gelegenheit gegeben sei, eine wirkliche Kulturarbeit zu leisten. Das Gros der Soldaten ging zu Hause, soweit es überhaupt ein Theater besuchte, allenfalls zu blöden Possen oder Revuen. Hier würden sie in der Not auch ernsthafte Kunst über sich ergehen lassen und vielleicht wirklich geistig gefördert werden. Ich schlug für das Repertoire Stücke wie “Minna von Barnhelm” oder “Das Torgauer Winterlager” vor, aber es wurd kurzerhand verfügt: “Der Soldat will lachen”, und das Rückgrat des Repertoires war und blieb “Charley’s Tante”, eine englische, an sich sehr lustige, aber jeder literarischen Bedeutung entbehrende Posse, die nun freilich das Lieblingsstück seiner Majestät war, der unweigerlich jeden seiner fürstlichen Gäste zu diesem Stück verschleppte, wenn er es sich nicht in Potsdam in seinem Schlosse vorspielen ließ.][14]

Apart from the reference to Lessing’s soldier drama *Minna von Barnhelm*, the accent here is clearly on “literary significance,” which also conveys how concerned Gronemann was with the cultural education of his contemporaries, regardless of their identities. In contrast to this humanist pursuit of *Bildung*, “that alternate German-Jewish religion,” we can also identify what might be called Gronemann’s critique of the pedagogic failure to instrumentalize entertainment for the transmission of cultural and humanist values.[15] This failure appears to express its consequences not only in the shortsightedness of political leaders and their society, but also on international grounds of diplomacy.

The following documents provide us with deeper insight into Gronemann’s own profound personal appreciation of Lessing and his works. This excerpt from his anecdotal autobiography *Erinnerungen* shows his acceptance of Lessing’s character Nathan not only as a role model, but primarily as a realistic representation of existing human character traits. In this case Gronemann identifies Nathan not as an ideal figure or fictitious character, but as a living individual, namely the Jew David Wolffsohn (1856-1914). Gronemann had known Wolffsohn since May 1900, when he attended his first Zionist Conference in Berlin. Starting with the fifth Zionist Congress in Basel one year later, where he represented the local Zionist group of Hannover, Gronemann attended every Zionist congress until his death in 1952. David Wolffsohn, however, had known Gronemann since 1877, when he had held the two year-old Sammy in his arms at a wedding in Prostken, East-Prussia. Wolffsohn therefore used to call Gronemann his oldest acquaintance among the German Zionists, or so the anecdote goes.[16] In his

Erinnerungen Gronemann repeatedly mentions Wolffsohn, expressing his respect and admiration for this close friend and successor of Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), the founder of the Zionist movement. According to Gronemann, Wolffsohn had been responsible for familiarizing Herzl with the Jewish tradition;^[17] he further lamented that Wolffsohn's remarkable achievement of preserving the Zionist movement through hard times had gone widely unnoticed. He therefore decided to erect a literary memorial for Wolffsohn, all the while conceding that "one greater than himself" had already done so before Wolffsohn was even born:

I am speaking of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Nathan the Wise. I cannot imagine this wonderful figure today, other than in the appearance of David Wolffsohn, who was truly an incarnation of this poetic character. He walked among us, both simple and majestic, sharing from the inexhaustible spring of his memories and knowledge. He gladly opened himself up, yet he always looked out, good-hearted and sly, cunningly with fraught attention, for the faults of the other; somehow always on alert, closely monitoring his interlocutor, he was always focused on his intention for the conversation, which he tried almost always to reach via digressions, with the help of parables and anecdotes; he thus obscured intention and orientation until he had suddenly reached the point he wanted to make. He was a genius of friendship, ready to help and advise, but nonetheless armed with a dose of suspicion. Thus he always found the right tone for a Daja or Recha; for Templars, dervishes, or monks; and he could even adapt himself to a Saladin. He was able to represent himself as a worthy and self-conscious leader, and then to appear to let himself go as a child. And he thereby always remained himself: a proud Jew, who was too proud to be moderate, in order to transgress the limits set for him. Around himself he had a small circle of friends, but no one who could support his arms in battle – the sort even Moses had needed. He lacked the loyal and often directive admonitory comrade who would lead the straying tenderly back to his path – the sort of comrade he himself had been for Herzl. And just as Nathan remains alone when Recha, whom he had rescued and brought up, is led to her new friends in the Sultan's palace, Wolffsohn saw what he had rescued and protected go over into other hands. But resigned, like Nathan who upon returning to his emptied home comforts himself with the thought of having entrusted the future of his charge into good hands, David Wolffsohn, too, after letting go of his leadership of the organization, contented himself with watching calmly from afar. He died with the consciousness of having rescued and protected the precious heritage left to him by his friend Herzl, of bringing it through most dangerous times over to a happier era.

[Ich spreche von Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Nathan der Weise. Ich kann mir diese wunderbare Figur heute gar nicht anders vorstellen als in der Erscheinung David Wolffsohns, der wirklich eine Inkarnation jener dichterischen Gestalt war. Er wandelte unter uns, zugleich schlicht und hoheitsvoll, mitteilend aus dem unerschöpflichen Born seiner Erinnerungen und Kenntnisse, sich gern erschließend und dabei doch in jedem Moment gutmütig schlau mit gespannter Aufmerksamkeit nach Fehlgängen des anderen spähend, stets irgendwie auf der Hut und scharf den Partner beobachtend, immer das Ziel des Gespräches im Auge behaltend, zu dem er führen wollte, aber fast immer auf Umwegen mittels Gleichnissen und Anekdoten, Ziel und Wegrichtung verschleiern, bis er dann plötzlich überraschend an den Punkt gelangt war, zu dem er wollte. Er war ein Genie der Freundschaft und zu Rat und Tat gerüstet, aber doch mit einer Dosis Misstrauen gewappnet. Und so fand er stets den rechten Ton für eine Daja oder Recha, für Tempelherren, Derwische oder Klosterbrüder, und auch einem Saladin wußte er sich anzupassen. Er konnte würdig und auch seines Wertes bewusst den Führer markieren und dann wieder übermütig wie ein Kind sich scheinbar gehen lassen. Und dabei blieb er immer derselbe, ein stolzer Jude, der zu stolz war, um bescheiden zu sein, um die ihm gesteckten Grenzen zu überschreiten. Er hatte um sich einen kleinen Kreis von Freunden, aber keinen, der im die Arme stützen konnte in der Schlacht, wie deren selbst ein Moses bedurfte. Ihm fehlte der treu ergebene und oft leitende, ermahnende und sanft den Abirrenden auf den Weg zurückführende

Genosse, wie er es einst Herzl gegenüber gewesen war. Und wie Nathan einsam zurückbleibt, wenn Recha, die er gerettet und erzogen, zu neuen Freunden in des Sultans Palast geleitet wird, sah er, was er gerettet und behütet hatte, in andere Hände gehen. Aber resigniert, wie Nathan in sein einsam gewordenes Haus zurückgeht, von dem Gedanken getröstet, die Zukunft seines Schützlings guten Händen anvertraut zu sehen, hat auch David Wolffsohn in den letzten Jahren, nachdem er die Leitung der Organisation aus den Händen gegeben hatte, sich damit begnügt, geruhig von weitem zuzuschauen. Er starb mit dem Bewusstsein, daß er ein kostbares Erbe, das sein Freund Herzl hinterlassen hatte, durch Jahre hindurch gerettet und bewahrt hatte, in gefährlichster Zeit hinüber zu einer glücklicheren Epoche.][18]

This obituary dates to the time between Wolffsohn's death and the first publication of Gronemann's *Erinnerungen*, i.e. between 1914 and 1945. It leaves few clues to how Gronemann might have responded to the Sultan's question, though one suspects he would have embraced the diplomatic qualities he praises in Wolffsohn. What I find interesting is not only Gronemann's respectful address to both Lessing and Wolffsohn, but also the characterization of Nathan through Wolffsohn. When Gronemann calls Wolffsohn an "incarnation" (eine Inkarnation) of the poetic character Nathan, I cannot but notice the religious connotations of the term. It suggests that Lessing's Nathan may be understood as a spiritual entity in the Jewish heavens, the eternalized memory of Lessing's friend Moses Mendelssohn. It follows that Gronemann's Wolffsohn might even be considered a re-incarnation of Mendelssohn himself. Wolffsohn thus not only continues Herzl's calling in Gronemann's eyes, but also roots it in the Jewish tradition, thereby enriching Herzl's Zionism with the enlightened heritage of Lessing and indirectly also with that of Mendelssohn. This unique fusion allows for the co-existence of Jewish tradition, secular Enlightenment, and Zionist Nationalism, without negating their differences in Nathan's reincarnation Wolffsohn. Gronemann himself, however, does not comment further on his choice of the word incarnation, and we cannot know if he would have imagined it to be taken so literally.[19]

It is a commonly accepted view that Lessing erected with Nathan a literary monument for his friend Moses Mendelssohn. When Gronemann appropriates this poetic memorial, he emphasizes the human qualities of his Nathan, the "kluger Jid" Wolffsohn:[20] wisdom, genius of friendship, honesty, empathy, loyalty – an assessment he reiterates elsewhere in his memoirs.[21] These qualities made Wolffsohn capable of steering the Zionist cruiser, but also wore him down and isolated him. Just like Nathan (or Moses, to whom Gronemann draws parallels), Wolffsohn is left out in the final scene when all the other characters embrace each other: the Zionist cruise continued without him towards Palestine.[22] To my knowledge, Gronemann is the first to observe and contextualize Nathan's loneliness not only as a Jew among non-Jews, but as a Jew among his fellow Jews.

Nathan's loneliness is a reappearing topos especially in the play's theatrical interpretations. A comparison of the endings in two historical theater productions shall serve as an illustration for the central importance of Nathan's variously emphasized stand in solitude at the play's finale. When we turn to the above mentioned 1933 Jüdischer

Kulturbund production in Berlin, we find that Nathan remained alone on stage, after the curtain had fallen.[23] By this emphasis the isolated position of the Jewish minority in Nazi Germany was represented and criticized. Jews figured as active contributors to German culture and politics, yet remained marginalized, suppressed and despised by the German establishment.

A different approach was taken, however, in the 1966 production of Israel's National Theatre Habimah, where the lonely and marginalized figure Nathan turns into a proud redeemer of his own kinsmen. Having escaped the Diaspora, its dangers of assimilation, and its "thick darkness," Nathan is displayed as once again becoming a harbinger of light for the world. Nathan delivered an added epilogue while standing at the front of the stage, after the "mutual embraces" with the rest of the characters behind him. This can be seen as an inversion of the Kulturbund ending. Nathan, albeit standing aside and alone, stands not as a reminder of the marginality of Jews in Germany, but represents their newly gained national autonomy, which he enhances with elements from Jewish religious traditions.[24]

In the context of Lessing's ring parable, Habimah's presentation of the Jew's exclusive stand in solitude, still singled out among the nations (albeit as a nation), leads us to the speculative question of how Gronemann, as a Zionist, would have staged *Nathan*. Though this necessarily remains a speculation, we can approach this question on another level. How would Gronemann have wanted the Jewish nation to present itself before its Muslim and Christian neighbors? Further: what importance does Gronemann attribute both to the practice of Jewish tradition and to German Humanism within the secular-national framework of modern Jewish identity? If one were to secularize the Sultan's question in the ring parable's of which religion is best, one would arrive at the question of which nation, people, or form of society is to be preferred.

Yet one must keep in mind that in the Sultan's original quest for the best religion, he bore the intention of blackmailing Nathan. In response, Nathan reacted diplomatically and evaded being trapped through his opinion by postponing and recontextualizing his own judgment. By deferring to the words of a greater judge, who would appear "after a thousand years,"[25] Nathan managed to open up a mezzanine in the hierarchical levels between himself and the Sultan. Thereby, at least theoretically, the possibility of a shared neutral space was evoked. Thus it is not only Nathan's loneliness and exclusive stand in solitude on which Gronemann bases his comparison between Wolffsohn and Nathan. Just like Nathan, David Wolffsohn showed much diplomatic and rhetoric skill, which Gronemann – himself a lawyer and judge – appreciated and admired.

In the above-cited passage from Gronemann's memoirs, Nathan's adopted daughter Recha figures as an allegory for the Zionist movement: "Recha, whom he had rescued and brought up, is led to her new friends in the Sultan's palace." For Gronemann, Nathan's treatment of Recha illustrates how Wolffsohn adopted the direction of the Zionist World Organization from Herzl, who had himself adopted the European notion of nationalism and continued it. But the comparison also reminds us that for more than a hundred years after the publication of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* in 1779, liberal Jews remained loyal to Lessing's utopian vision of the government of reason. They had, allegorically speaking,

adopted Recha—who now stands for German culture— despite their long history and experience of pogroms and persecutions in Europe. Recha supplanted for many assimilated Jews the traditional image of the Jewish Shekhina, God’s divine feminine presence. For them, the adoption of this “immaculate” love also replaced their Jewish passion for the female metaphor of Zion or Jerusalem, and for its rocky counterpart, i.e. the concrete city of Jerusalem. May this encounter of German culture and Zionism within the allegorical reading of Recha be said to reflect the encounter of both within Gronemann himself?

Nathan the Wise did become a paradigm for modern Jewish identity, the corner stone of *Bildung* and Enlightenment, that “Magna Carta of German Jewry” referenced at the opening of this article. The appropriation was so intense that in the course of history, Jews actually saved *Nathan the Wise* across Nazi dictatorship, terror, and tyranny. Nathan, to again cite Mosse, was understood by Jews to be part of “Germany’s better self.” How then did Gronemann participate in this cultural preservation and tradition? How did he stand to his German enlightenment inheritance outside of Germany? Did he remain as loyal to it as he remained to the Jewish tradition when he was in Germany?

In April 1933, Gronemann fled with his wife Sonja to Paris, where they stayed in exile until their immigration to Palestine in February 1936. Due to the familiarity he gained with French language, culture, and its Jewry during this exile, Gronemann was sent to France by the Jewish National Fund in 1937 to talk about the situation in Palestine. Though he was conversant in French, Gronemann decided to speak publicly in German, since he could express himself more fluently in his mother tongue. This choice, however, also required a diplomatic gesture. Since many German refugees and immigrants were in France at the time, Gronemann emphasized that his German speech in France would be “not in Hitler’s idiom but in Lessing’s” (im Idiom wenn nicht Hitlers, so doch Lessings [zu] reden.)^[26] Put differently, in contrasting Lessing to Hitler and by referring to the language of the former, Gronemann chose to speak in the language of “Germany’s better self.”

The clearest evidence yet of Gronemann’s appreciation for Lessing, however, is a document which shows not only Lessing’s influence on Gronemann’s construction of his personal identity, but possibly also one path via which the German humanist tradition arrived in Israel. In 1945, Gronemann and Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak Binetter, who 59 years earlier had both attended the Halberstadt Klaus of Rabbi Dr. Selig Auerbach, met again in Tel Aviv. Back then, Gronemann had presented Binetter, who was then still a *Studiosus Philosophiae* by the name of Isidor, with the gift of a volume of Lessing’s writings. The frontispiece contains the following rhymed dedication by Gronemann. (See Figure 1 below)

He who equals Lessing in poeticizing – may judge critically,
And he who is like Lessing criticizing – may write poetry!

[Wer dichtend Lessing gleicht, – darf kritisch richten,
Und wer wie Lessing kritisiert – darf dichten! ’] ^[27]



Fig. 1: Rhymed book dedication by Sammy Gronemann to Yitzchak Binetter

According to the document, the dedication appears to have been written in 1894 in Halberstadt and was then probably returned by Binetter to Gronemann when they met again in Tel Aviv, festively decorated, perhaps intended as a reminder of their student years. Unfortunately, hardly anything is known about Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak (Isidor) Binetter, and Gronemann does not mention him in his published works. We know only that he was the Rabbi at the Beth-Hamidrasch-Community of Hohensalza (Inowroc?aw), until 1911 and then in Breslau until about 1934. There he became a member of the local Agudos Yisroel, a forerunner to the Israeli political party by the same name that represents the Orthodox parts of the Jewish population.[28] From a small newspaper note on the occasion of his parting from Hohensalza, we are furthermore informed that he had apparently been very popular, even among the non-religious members of the Jewish community.[29] What had been his relation to Gronemann?

For the moment it shall suffice to note the importance of Gronemann's motto, which I perceive to be a kind of inverted poetic license, in the sense that by referring to Lessing and by imitating him, one legitimizes raising one's voice in Germany. We thus have another document, which shows microscopically how German Jews of the fin de siècle thought to emancipate their position in German society. By appropriating the cultural codes of their Christian contemporaries, Jews reached for civil, social, and cultural emancipation, even though German Christians predominantly expressed contempt of Jews, their tradition, and culture.

Sammy Gronemann's references to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing confirm the enlightener's historical interconnection and continued interweaving with modern Jewish identity. Among Jews, Lessing is a role model for criticism, and himself an object of criticism. As disciples of Lessing, Jews like Gronemann were to enter German culture as skeptics and critics. Characteristic for the Zionist criticism of that Jewish hope, which perceived in Lessing not only an advocate for their emancipation, but also a solution for the "Jewish problem," Gronemann provides an interesting border-case study. Thus, on the base of the evidence and arguments brought before you, I surmise we will be rewarded by further investigation into the relations between Gronemann's and Lessing's works; therefore also into that polyvocal other space, or heterotopia, within which Jewish-German encounters take places, "which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another."^[30]

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Notes:

¹ Sammy Gronemann, *Tohuwabohu* (Leipzig: Reclam, 2000).

² I read this plot as a variation on Shakespeare's Shylock/Jessica or Lessing's Nathan/Recha theme.

³ Gronemann, *Tohuwabohu*, 300. All translations mine, if not indicated otherwise.

⁴ Gronemann, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Philo, 2002), 283.

⁵ Gronemann, *Tohuwabohu*, 178.

⁶ The German novelist and poet Theodor Fontane remarks cynically in a review from 1880 that despite its popularity, the then century-old reception of "this Gospel of Tolerance" had left neither a profound impact, nor had changes in stage conventions appeared to result in any substantial transformations or progressive developments. See

Horst Steinmetz, *Lessing – ein unpoetischer Dichter – Dokumente aus drei Jahrhunderten zur Wirkungsgeschichte Lessings in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1969), 382. In real life, posits theater scholar Chaim Shoham, few Germans would have related Nathan's humane posture to a contemporary Jew: "He was some kind of ideal and utopian figure, whose exotic demeanour proved, how remotely distanced he was from reality." See Chaim Shoham, "Nathan der Weise unter Seinesgleichen: Zur Rezeption Lessings in der hebräischen Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts in Osteuropa," in *Lessing Yearbook 1980* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 8. In her 1960 speech about Lessing, "Von der Menschlichkeit in finsternen Zeiten" [Of Humanity in Times of Gloom], the philosopher Hanna Arendt states that the German public was not yet ready for Lessing and had apparently never honored Lessing during his lifetime. Steinmetz, *Lessing*, 486.

⁷ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise – A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts*, trans. Bayard Quincy Morgan (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1955), III: 7; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan der Weise*, III:7, 2041-2054.

8. George L. Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985), 15.

9. Ibid., 79.

10. Ibid.,

82. For Mosse, German-Jews became agents of German culture and its humanist tradition, yet, according to Elchanan E. Scheftelowitz, this occurred against their own will. Cf. E.E. Scheftelowitz “Von Deutschland nach Israel” cit. in: Hanni Mittelman, *Sammy Gronemann (1875-1952)* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2004), 124.

11. Anat Feinberg, *Wiedergutmachung im Programm – Jüdisches Schicksal im deutschen Nachkriegsdrama* (Köln: Prometh Verlag, 1988), 65.

12. I am thinking here especially of George Tabori and Peter Zadek. See Feinberg, *Wiedergutmachung*; Jan Kühne, ‘A Multi-Tragic Paradigm’: *Nathan the Wise in Israel* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011).

13. Gronemann, *Erinnerungen*, 46.

14. Sammy Gronemann, *Erinnerungen an meine Jahre in Berlin* (Berlin: Philo, n.d.), 295ff.

15. Jeanette R. Malkin, introduction to *Jews and the Making of Modern German Theatre*, ed. Jeanette R. Malkin and Freddie Rokem (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 8.

16. Gronemann, *Erinnerungen*, 189.

17. Ibid., 151.

18. Ibid., 278.

19. In any case, incarnation can be used to denote the metaphysic aspect of the secular revelation process which a dramatic character undergoes within an actor in theater and on stage.

20. Gronemann, *Erinnerungen an meine Jahre in Berlin*, 69.

21. Ibid., 41, 67ff, 69, 70.

22. Gronemann, *Erinnerungen*, 282; Gronemann, *Erinnerungen an meine Jahre in Berlin*, 41.

23. Eike Geisel, “The Cultural League Is Formed,” in *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096-1996*, ed. Sander Gilman and Jack Zipes (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 506-511; Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews – A Dual Identity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 42;

Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism*, 16, 72ff, 75, 79; Kühne, “‘Nathan the Wise’ - Germany’s Better Self in Israel.” Nonetheless, I find it necessary to add that the loneliness in Nathan’s character, as it stands in the play, also points to the biography of Lessing, who had lost child and wife, while having been marginalized by society due to his criticism of the religious establishment in his times (*Fragmentenstreit*). Nathan’s loneliness reflects Mendelssohn biography to a lesser degree, were one to consider the many descendants of his family. Also Gronemann’s biography hints towards a sad loneliness after the tragic loss of his wife. However, no indications exist that Gronemann identified himself with the character of Nathan the Wise.

24. Gad Kaynar, “Lessing and Non-Lessing on the Israeli Stage: Notes on Some Theological, Political and Theatrical Aspects,” *Lessing Yearbook* 32 (2000): 362; Kühne, ‘A Multi-Tragic Paradigm,’ 30.

25. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan der Weise* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1980), III, 7.

26. Mittelmann, *Sammy Gronemann (1875-1952)*, 122. Letter to the Jewish Agency (Keren Kajemet), Central Zionist Archives Jerusalem (CZA), A135/25.

27. The complete inscription reads: “Halberstadt 1894-1945 ?????-?? ‘*Wer dichtend Lessing gleicht, – darf kritisch richten, Und wer wie Lessing kritisiert – darf dichten!*’ Diesen Wahlspruch zum Gedenken von Ihrem Sammy Gronemann.” The volume is dedicated to ‘*I. Binnetter stud. phil.*’ on the cover page of the first volume of the edition “Lessings Werke in sechs Bänden,” CZA A135/58.

28. Michael Brocke and Carlebach, Julius, eds., *Biographisches Handbuch der Rabbiner – Teil 2: Die Rabbiner im Deutschen Reich 1871-1945*, vol. 1 (München: K.G. Saur, 2009), 79.

29. L., “Hohensalza, 26. März” in “Der Gemeindebote,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* (Leipzig, March 31, 1911). I only just recently managed to get into contact with his grandson in Tel Aviv, and hope to be able to soon describe his life and relation to Gronemann more precisely.

30. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias [1967],” <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.htm>), Foucault Info, accessed May 2 2011. Jerusalem, much like Gronemann’s Zion and Lessing’s dramatic and theatrical site as depicted in his *Nathan the Wise*, merits a reference to Foucault’s concept of heterotopia (both of illusion and compensation), i.e. “one of those real places that exist probably in every culture, in every civilization, ... –places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (Ibid.).

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