

Cosmic Defiance admirably traces how Updike, inspired by Kierkegaard, justified and elaborated such a position. I would only add the observation that one can learn much from Updike's "illustration" of Kierkegaard and value the aesthetic dignity that he added to it without wholly subscribing to its theology. Those who believe that existential terror before the possibility of nonbeing need not be the only path to authentic faith are more likely to see Kierkegaard's—and Updike's—achievements as responses to specific historical pressures, effective and perhaps even necessary for many people in similar circumstances, but no more than that.

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**The Politics of Jewishness in Contemporary World Literature:
The Holocaust, Zionism and Colonialism.**

Isabelle Hesse

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Isabelle Hesse's *The Politics of Jewishness in Contemporary World Literature* seeks to address the ways in which the Holocaust and the birth of the State of Israel have marked both an affirmation of and a shift in the image of "The Jew" since the Enlightenment. Hesse argues that for the last several centuries, for better or for worse, Jewishness has been viewed within the Western tradition as a symbol of otherness and marginalization. From Otto Weininger to Jean-François Lyotard to Jonathan Boyarin, critics and scholars for many years have considered the implications of this symbolic rendering of the "Jew."

According to Hesse, the Holocaust has reified the image of "The Jew" as victim in the Western imagination. She goes on to argue, however, that the birth of the State of Israel has worked against this perception of Jewishness, with "The Jew" becoming a majority figure instead of a minority figure in the new Jewish state, particularly after the 1967 Six Day War. "The Jew," in Hesse's view, has come to be an aggressor instead of a victim, a colonizer as opposed to a victim of colonization. Hesse's mission, as she articulates it, is to try to understand how contemporary fiction from around the world, spanning Germany, Israel, Algeria, and the United States, addresses the shift in the image of "The Jew" as a result of the movement from Jewish powerlessness to Jewish empowerment. Her primary underlying question seems to be whether the contemporary reality of Jewish empowerment has

caught on within the literary world. Her conclusion is that it has not. In an invocation of Edward Said's notion of "traveling theory," she calls on authors and critics to "move beyond Jewishness as conflated with quintessential victimhood," and laments the reading and writing practices of those who "ignore the varied manifestations of Jewishness in the twenty-first century, both inside and outside of Israel, which can be productively used to challenge hegemonic discourses" (190).

The book's strength lies in Hesse's selection of a wide variety of fascinating literary texts, and in her ambitious engagement with theorists of trauma and post-colonial studies. While the discourse of trauma has had traction within Jewish academic discourse since the Holocaust, Hesse goes to great pains in order to situate the Jews within a post-colonial context. Given a history of deterritorialized diaspora, Hesse may be hard-pressed to argue for Jewish colonization, but she does so in order to establish a contrast between their historical status and their current role as colonizers. Despite the strengths of the book's literary and cultural criticism, this methodology risks over-determining its approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Hesse's analysis repeatedly returns to the question of different authors' "refusal" to acknowledge the shift in Jewish power (189). In her concluding reading of Boualem Sansal's *An Unfinished Business* (2008; 2010), Hesse observes that "he often uses ideas of Jewishness as conflated with quintessential victimhood since 1945, which not only deflects criticism addressed to Israel, but also eclipses the Palestinians and their plight from the public discourse..." (189). Yet the novel, as Hesse describes it, is about a son grappling with his father's history as a member of the SS. If the book is not about the plight of Palestinians, what does it mean to claim that an author of fiction "refuses" to discuss something? Novels are the study's focus, not manifestos or history textbooks. Despite Hesse's breadth of theoretical knowledge and sophistication as a close reader, the book's worthy political framework can compromise the integrity of its literary arguments.

In contrast, Hesse's strongest readings deal with Palestinian writings. Direct engagement with the Arab-Israel conflict and the Israeli treatment of Israeli-Arabs and extra-territorial Palestinians can be found in those chapters, and Hesse does not have to seek out "lacunae" or oblique allusions to a political situation.

The first of these chapters, "'Within the bounds of the permissible': Palestinians in a Jewish National Space," is the strongest of these discussions. In it she addresses the oft-cited literary debate between A. B. Yehoshua and Anton Shammas. While Yehoshua argued that you have to be Jewish to be an Israeli writer, Shammas—the Arab-Israeli author of the astonishing and brilliant meta-fictional Hebrew novel, *Arabesques* (1988)—argued that

Jewishness as a measure of Israeliness is the anti-democratic worm at the heart of the Jewish state. Shammas's use of the Hebrew language to explore Palestinian issues is a direct and powerful expression of the very questions that Hesse's book most strenuously seeks to answer. In a second chapter on Palestinian literature, titled, "Imagining the Other: Jewish Settlers, Soldiers and Civilians in Palestinian Literature," Hesse discusses the works of Sahar Khalifeh and Rajah Shehadeh, exploring the authors' "willingness," as she puts it, "to engage with the 'enemy' and exhibit the ability to show fellow feeling towards individual Jews" (155). Although Hesse again employs a rhetoric of authorial intent, this chapter addresses the question of the image of the Jew as a symbol of empowerment by virtue of the fact that these works themselves thematize the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Another particularly compelling moment in Hesse's argument takes place in her treatment of Edgar Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi und der Friseur* (1971) and Jureck Becker's *Bronstein's Children* (1986), in a chapter titled "Nazism and Zionism in German-Jewish Literature." In the first novel, according to Hesse, a former Nazi becomes a Jew and moves to Israel. In the second, a Holocaust survivor captures a former SS and tortures him. Both books take on the image of the Jew as aggressor, or the aggressor as Jew, within the context of the Holocaust and not the Arab-Israeli conflict. In most readings, Hesse seeks to connect novels' ideological echoes to authors' essayistic and journalistic writing. In her treatment of the German writers and the Palestinian writers, however, Hesse successfully addresses stylistic and thematic renderings of the image of the Jew since 1945, as empowered, oppressive, and human, as opposed to simply a symbol of marginality and victimization.

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