

RAFAEL SELIGMANN AND THE GERMAN-JEWISH NEGATIVE SYMBIOSIS IN
POST-SHOAH GERMANY: BREAKING THE SILENCE

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ABSTRACT

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In the shadow of Auschwitz and the Shoah, the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans is strained. Many scholars have described this relationship as the German-Jewish negative symbiosis, or a mutually detrimental relationship from which neither group can escape. Considering the tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans living in post-Shoah Germany, why would Jewish Germans choose to live there and what is life like in Germany for non-Jewish Germans? In this thesis I examine three of Rafael Seligmann's (1947 -) novels, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* (1989), *Die jiddische Mamme* (1990), and *Der Musterjude* (1997) in order to better understand the effects of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis on life in post-Shoah Germany. Rafael Seligmann is one of the most controversial second-generation German-language Jewish writers because he breaks taboos and negatively portrays Jewish characters in his novels. He was one of the first German-language Jewish writers to write about contemporary life in post-Shoah Germany, but his works have received little attention by scholars to date. Seligmann feels there is a silence in Germany surrounding the Holocaust and the effects it has had on the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. He hopes to break this silence by provoking his readers to discuss how the Shoah has affected their lives.

My examination of these three texts revealed many manifestations of this German-Jewish negative symbiosis. Some issues he writes about are philosemitism, how

Jewish Germans profit from the Holocaust, Zionism, and why Jews choose life in Germany over Israel. While many Jewish Germans see themselves as Jews living in Germany, Seligmann supports the existence of a hybrid German-Jewish identity. I concluded that these three works support the existence of both a negative German-Jewish symbiosis and a hybrid German-Jewish identity. Consequently, I posit that a German-Jewish negative symbiosis – German-Jewish hybrid identity continuum is a more accurate description of Seligmann's portrayal of life in post-Shoah Germany. This is based upon my findings that each character in Seligmann's novels reacts to the impact the Shoah has had on his/her life differently. This continuum allows for this variation more effectively than previous constructs in German-Jewish negative symbiosis discourse.

For my grandmother, a truly inspiring woman.

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CHAPTER 1: THE GERMAN-JEWISH NEGATIVE SYMBIOSIS

Symbiosis, defined by the third edition of *The American Heritage College Dictionary* as “a relationship of mutual benefit or dependence”, is a term that has been used since the Enlightenment to describe the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. But can we still speak of a German-Jewish symbiosis nowadays? In the shadow of Auschwitz the nature of the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans has changed significantly; but some claim not as much as one might think. How long has this relationship been symbiotic in nature: since the Enlightenment, since Auschwitz? Scholars such as Gershom Scholem¹, Hannah Arendt², Dan Diner³, and Jack Zipes⁴ refer to this relationship as a negative symbiosis, while Katja Behrens⁵ defines it as a rift. If there ever was such a thing as a German-Jewish symbiosis, did the Shoah reverse the positive nature of this symbiosis resulting in a negative symbiosis? Is Katja Behrens’ rift a more appropriate explanation of the relationship that Jewish and non-Jewish Germans have with each other in modern day Germany? How does the addition of the term “negative” to the expression “German-Jewish symbiosis” change the nature of it and how are the two ideas “negative” and “symbiosis” bound together in post-Shoah Germany?

This thesis examines the representation of the negative German-Jewish symbiosis in a selection of Rafael Seligmann’s novels. I have undertaken this study in my own efforts to better understand the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in post-Shoah Germany. It analyzes how Rafael Seligmann’s works depict a post-Shoah Germany that simultaneously chokes on the limitations imposed upon it by the German-

Jewish negative symbiosis and finds hopes for peaceful cohabitation between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans when the rift shrinks to a crack. In this first chapter I introduced the German-Jewish negative symbiosis discourse. The second chapter discusses why Rafael Seligmann's contributions to the literary community are important and how scholars have received them. The third chapter gives a brief summary of the three texts that I analyze in this thesis. The final chapter is a close analysis of the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans as depicted in three of Seligmann's novels.

In this first chapter I will set the framework for my analysis of his texts by closely examining the construct of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis. First, I will define what a negative symbiotic relationship entails in post-Shoah Germany. After that, I will present the ideas of some prominent scholars who discuss the German-Jewish negative symbiosis and Jewish German identity. Finally, I will present my justification for choosing Rafael Seligmann as the subject of this analysis of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis in post-Shoah Germany.

Description of a Negative Symbiosis

Before discussing the finer points of whether the German-Jewish relationship is best described as a German-Jewish symbiosis, a negative symbiosis, or a rift, it should be established what a negative symbiosis is. If a symbiotic relationship is mutually beneficial, could a negative symbiosis be described as mutually detrimental? Since Auschwitz the Jewish and non-Jewish Germans have been bound to each other in much the same way as the early American settlers and Indians in United States. In both cases there is a clear oppressor and oppressed group.⁶ When viewed in their historical contexts,

their betrayals against and struggles with each other are the only existence that is ever mentioned regardless of what other events may have been happening during the same time period. Their historical interactions with each other have become so embedded in the consciousness of the generations that follow that it becomes difficult for people to think of one group without recalling its connection to the other. Effectively, their behaviors and attitudes seem to adapt to what society expects of them based on preconceived notions and responses to the events in the past that have bound them. Regardless of the amicable periods in the Jewish – non-Jewish German and early American settler – Native American relationships, it is the problematic period in their relationships that determines how others link them. Is it not true that most movies and books about life in early days of United States history and its westward expansion include some degree of conflict with the “red man” and that many books and movies about non-Jewish Germans since the Holocaust produced by German Jews or non-Germans focus on either the Shoah or the problematic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in post-war Germany? Scholars may disagree to what extent these groups had productive and positive relationships with one another prior to their periods of conflict, but the fact remains that these juxtaposed pairs made many positive contributions to each others’ societies prior to their period of conflict.⁷

Now that the similarities between early American settlers and non-Jewish Germans and Indians and Jewish Germans have been established, it is possible to return to the tricky task of defining negative symbiosis. The situation in contemporary Germany is especially complex since the horrible events of the Holocaust happened only about 65 years ago. The fact that the Nazis killed six million Jews under Hitler’s command

becomes especially horrendous when his methods are examined more closely. His policies separated families, confiscated everything Jews owned, used them for heinous medical testing, turned them into slaves, starved them to death, made them murder each other at times, and made them live in the most inhumane conditions in concentration camps and ghettos. The fact that some survivors of the concentration camps and some of the people who played a role in carrying out Hitler's policies are still alive, contributes to the awkwardness between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. The situation becomes even more complex when we consider that we are dealing with three generations of citizens in post-war Germany: those who experienced the Holocaust first hand, their children, and their children's children. With each new generation, the distance separating them from the Shoah gives them a slightly different perspective. The Jewish survivors⁸ who suffered and lost so much must deal with their fear, shame, and anger. They attempt to draw as little attention to themselves as possible as to not give the non-Jewish Germans a reason to foster such intense anti-Semitic feelings again. They are sometimes ashamed of the things they did to survive⁹ and often ashamed that they survived at all when their loved ones were killed. This generation is usually plagued by a lack of religious faith, an intense need to have a family and financial security, a sense of overprotectiveness of their children, and an inability to trust or help others. Even though the first-generation Jewish community in Germany was small, it was very tight-knit, and non-Jewish Germans were not accepted into it. The majority of their non-Jewish German counterparts either feared or fell under the spell of Hitler's cult of personality and became Nazis. Even most who did not directly help execute Hitler's plan for the extermination of the Jews did little to stop it. When proof of the extermination of the Jews was discovered by the allied forces,

the non-Jewish Germans were forced to face what Hitler had accomplished with their help, leaving most of them feeling guilty and ashamed. These feelings led to a German society that was hypersensitive concerning the treatment of Jews.

For both Jews living in Germany and non-Jewish Germans, the stress of the new situation in Germany caused tension and sometimes neurosis. This tense atmosphere caused the German-Jewish negative symbiosis that still plays a large role in German society more than half a century after-the-fact. It has been passed down from generation to generation, and with each new generation the rules change slightly. While the third generation of post-Shoah Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, the grandchildren of the survivors and their oppressors, are interacting with each other more naturally than the previous two generations, their journey to a normal functioning relationship with each other is still far from over.¹⁰ The fact that two leading American scholars of Jewish German literature, Jack Zipes and Leslie Morris, published an entire collection of essays reevaluating the negative symbiosis in 2002¹¹ proves that this topic is still relevant. Many discussions have taken place about when the non-Jewish Germans will no longer be blamed for the atrocities that took place over half a century ago. One possible scenario is when the last baby who was born prior to 1945 dies all the Nazis will be gone and this German guilt will be forgotten. This seems highly unlikely. Indeed, are the heinous acts of the first Americans against the Indians not still remembered?¹² With all the anger and guilt that plagues the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, it is understandable that there is tension and uncertainty between the two groups. They may even wish to carry on their lives without each other, but they cannot; history and society

will not allow them to forget that they are now negatively bound together, even if this is painful. This is the heart of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis.

Perspectives on the German-Jewish Negative Symbiosis

There has been an ongoing dialogue since the end of the Holocaust and World War II about the problematic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. Scholars from a variety of disciplines seem to agree that the relationship is problematic, but there is disagreement about when it became mutually detrimental. Dan Diner¹³, a historian, agrees with Hannah Arendt¹⁴, a noted philosopher, that no symbiotic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans was present until after the Holocaust, and the relationship that henceforth exists is best described as a negative symbiosis. The important Judaic scholar and radical Zionist Gershom Scholem publicly spoke against the existence of the mythical German-Jewish symbiosis from the enlightenment up to the time of the Third Reich.¹⁵ While Jack Zipes, a German studies scholar, contends that the German-Jewish relationship has been a negative symbiosis during the entirety of the twentieth century,¹⁶ Katja Behrens, a Jewish German author, has recently redefined this relationship completely; rejecting both sides, she defines it as a rift that sometimes shrinks to the size of a crack, but can in the blink of an eye grow to an insurmountable gap.¹⁷ Todd Herzog, a German studies professor, feels that hybridity is a post-colonial construct that cannot be applied when speaking of Jewish Germans, consequently reinforcing the negative symbiosis construct.¹⁸ Personally, I view the negative symbiosis-hybrid identity debate in less black and white terms. I posit that there is a German-Jewish negative symbiosis-German-Jewish hybrid identity continuum. Some

individuals may identify more strongly with a German-Jewish negative symbiosis and see themselves as Jews living in Germany, while others have come to terms with their existence in Germany as a German-Jew. The arguments of these scholars will be discussed at greater length in the following paragraphs, but it is important to note that while scholars may disagree about the origins of this complex relationship, they all agree that it remains problematic. Scholars may not be in agreement about whether the alleged pre-Shoah German-Jewish symbiotic relationship was a reality, but it is apparent that a positive German-Jewish symbiosis is no longer an option in post-Shoah Germany.

Hannah Arendt was not the first to speak of this problematic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, but she was the first to use the term negative symbiosis to describe it.¹⁹ Hannah Arendt was a Jewish-German philosopher who emigrated to the United States. Her work had a significant impact on twentieth century moral and ethical thought. Her correspondence with her professor and mentor Karl Jaspers in 1946 contributed significantly to the dialogue about the German-Jewish negative symbiosis. Since then discussions among scholars of many disciplines such as cultural studies, sociology, and psychology have made reference to her ideas. According to Arendt the Holocaust marks the onset of a negative German-Jewish symbiosis because there is no legal punishment suitable for the crimes against the European Jews during the Shoah.²⁰ She writes to Karl Jaspers:

Diese Verbrechen lassen sich, scheint mir, juristisch nicht mehr fassen, und das macht gerade ihre Ungeheuerlichkeit aus. Für diese Verbrechen gibt es keine angemessene Strafe mehr; Göring zu hängen, ist zwar notwendig, aber völlig inadäquat. D.h., diese Schuld, im Gegensatz zu

aller kriminellen Schuld, übersteigt und zerbricht alle Rechtsordnung. (...) Ebenso unmenschlich wie diese Schuld ist die Unschuld der Opfer. So unschuldig, wie alle miteinander vor dem Gasofen waren, so unschuldig sind Menschen überhaupt nicht, (...) Mit einer Schuld, die jenseits des Verbrechens steht, und einer Unschuld, die jenseits der Güte oder der Tugend liegt, kann man menschlich-politisch überhaupt nichts anfangen. (...) Denn die Deutschen sind dabei mit Tausenden oder Zehntausenden oder Hunderttausenden belastet, die innerhalb eines Rechtssystems adäquat nicht mehr zu bestrafen sind; und wir Juden sind mit Millionen Unschuldiger belastet, aufgrund deren sich heute jeder Jude gleichsam wie die personifizierte Unschuld vorkommt.²¹

In this letter to Karl Jaspers, Arendt points out that it was necessary to hang Göring, but it is still a “completely inadequate” compensation for the suffering of European Jews who were killed, tortured, terrorized, and enslaved during the Shoah. In fact, she states that while the German guilt lies outside of the realm of the law, Jewish innocence lies outside the parameters of good and virtue and that the Jews now personify innocence. In Arendt’s opinion, it is this innocence beyond innocence and this insurmountable guilt that links these two nations.

Arendt’s prediction that *menschlich-politische* attempts to compensate for the atrocities of the Shoah will fail,²² appears to be supported by the events of the last sixty-five years. Numerous post-Shoah compensation measures have been taken by the German and Austrian governments.²³ These governments have built museums and memorials, passed laws outlawing anti-Semitic behavior, made official apologies, and returned art

treasures and property stolen from Jews during the mass deportations. Despite the attempts at reconciliation to date, Jews around the world continue to seek compensation for their suffering and frequently utilize legal means in the process.²⁴ Were these legal and political compensatory measures adequate in the eyes of the Jews, we would no longer hear about Jews suing German corporations that used slave labor during the Holocaust or Swiss banks that aided and abetted war criminals through their anonymous bank account policy. Until a solution is found to heal the wounds that seem to only grow larger with time, tensions will remain between these two populations and they will continue to have a negative symbiotic relationship despite their best efforts come to terms with their past.

Dan Diner, like Hannah Arendt, feels that the German-Jewish negative symbiosis is a real phenomenon and that prior to this negative symbiotic relationship, there was no symbiotic relationship, positive or negative, to speak of. His voice may not have been the first in this dialogue about the nature of the German-Jewish relationship, but it has certainly been one of the most quoted. In 1986 a German-language Jewish publication, *Babylon*, went into print with goal of reestablishing an intellectual discourse about Jewish problems in Germany,²⁵ and the first article in the first edition was Dan Diner's "Negative Symbiose: Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz." It was in this article that Diner's much quoted statement appeared:

Seit Auschwitz – welch traurige List – kann tatsächlich von einer „deutsch-jüdischen Symbiose“ gesprochen werden – freilich einer negativen: für beide, für Deutsche wie für Juden, ist das Ergebnis der Massenvernichtung zum Ausgangspunkt ihres Selbstverständnisses

geworden; eine Art gegensätzlicher Gemeinsamkeit – ob sie es wollen oder nicht.²⁶

Diner declares that since Auschwitz a German-Jewish symbiosis can finally be discussed, but it has become a negative one for both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. He argues that the mass annihilation of the Jews was the starting point for both Jewish and German identity, which he refers to as a “kind of contradictory commonality.” While both sides seem to attempt to overcome the negative impact of the Shoah in their identity construction, he insists neither can.²⁷ The claim has been made that the experience has turned both into neurotics at times. This statement may or may not be true or generalizable, but the strained relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans coupled with the “nicht-von-einander-los-kommen”²⁸, or inability to get away from each other, has had a psychological impact on both sides.

Dan Diner not only identifies the birth and impact of this negative German-Jewish symbiosis, he also makes some disconcerting predictions about when the German-Jewish relationship may normalize. He diagnoses the situation between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans with a negative prognosis when he predicts that the German-Jewish negative symbiosis will not only effect relations between them, but also their own self images and that the lessons that can be learned from this experience will continue to be discovered for generations to come. In fact, he predicts that as the shock of the experience wears off, people will be able to more clearly comprehend the ramifications and lessons of the Shoah.²⁹ The anger, guilt, fear, shame, horror, sadness, and memories of the Shoah are too intense to die with the survivors of World War II. Even if the Jewish and non-Jewish Germans are not aware they are doing it, both groups are passing their burden on to each

new generation because a large part of a person's identity is formed by observing his or her parents' behavior. And as Diner has stated, only these future generations will, however, be distanced enough from the event and the shock to think critically about it.

Prior to Dan Diner's proclamation of the existence of a negative German-Jewish symbiosis, Gershom Scholem had already taken a stand against the alleged existence of an idyllic German-Jewish symbiosis prior to 1933.³⁰ Beginning with the Enlightenment the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans was celebrated as a German-Jewish symbiosis by numerous scholars and artists. To support this claim, the great contributions in art, music, philosophy, literature, and many other fields by Jewish Germans are evoked. German-Jews such as Franz Kafka, Sigmund Freud, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arnold Schönberg, and Felix Mendelssohn are celebrated as being the most influential artists, writers, musicians, and philosophers in the history of German culture.³¹ Gershom Scholem, however, did not accept this argument as sufficient evidence of the mythical German-Jewish symbiosis. Instead in 1962 Gershom Scholem refuted the existence of a German-Jewish dialogue, and in the absence of a German-Jewish dialogue a German-Jewish symbiosis is not logically conceivable.³²

The allegedly indestructible community of the German and the Jewish natures always only existed – as long as these two natures did in fact cooperate – on the part of the chorus of Jewish voices and was, on the level of historical reality, never anything but a fiction....I dispute that there has ever been such a German-Jewish dialogue in any genuine sense as a historical phenomenon. It takes two to create a dialogue, two who listen to each other, who are prepared to become aware of the other, both

what he is and what he represents, and reply to him....Certainly, the Jews endeavored to enter into a dialog with the Germans, ... demanding, imploring and beseeching, both crawling on their knees and defiant, ranging through the whole diapason of heart-searing dignity and godforsaken lack of dignity; and today, now the symphony is over, it may be time to study its motives and attempt to critique its tones. Nobody, including those who have comprehended the hopelessness of this cry into the void from the beginning, will disparage its passionate intensity and the notes of hope and grief resonating in it.... In all of this I can see no sign of dialogue.³³

In this statement Scholem posits that the German-Jewish dialogue was always a one-sided dialogue in which only the Jewish Germans were doing all the listening and adapting. In a sense, the Jewish Germans were expected to assimilate to German culture and the non-Jewish Germans made no compromises. Equally, Scholem's request for others to reexamine this relationship and take a critical stance broke the silence that had been controlling Jewish German life.

One scholar who responded to Scholem's request, although years later, was Jack Zipes. Jack Zipes, a professor of German at the University of Minnesota, completed a large study, albeit not exhaustive, of many of the literary works written by Jewish Germans prior to the Holocaust. Through this research he determined that Gershom Scholem was correct when he refuted the existence of a German-Jewish dialogue or symbiosis prior to 1933. He went one step further and proclaimed that, in fact, a negative German-Jewish symbiosis already existed at that point in time. Zipes' determined that

there was not a two-sided German-Jewish dialogue during this supposedly symbiotic period. He also points out that his research shows that Jewish Germans were expected to assimilate to the German culture. Jack Zipes continues to conduct research in this area and is a strong proponent of the idea that the German-Jewish negative symbiosis is ever-changing “[...]the relationship between Jews and Germans in the postwar period has shifted from what Gershom Scholem called a one-sided monologue to a dialogue about guilt and working through guilt and a reevaluation of German culture.”³⁴ In light of the ever-changing German-Jewish negative symbiosis that he observes, Zipes chooses to continue to study this phenomenon from a variety of different angles that other scholars have not focused on. In addition to editing a volume about the negative symbiosis with Leslie Morris³⁵ entitled *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000*, he personally contributed an article that analyzes the impact of the intellectual presence of two important German-Jewish literary critics, Hans Mayer and Marcel Reich-Ranicki, on the non-Jewish German literary scene since 1945.³⁶

While most have argued for the existence of a German-Jewish negative symbiosis since Dan Diner published his article in *Babylon* in 1986, this problematic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans has been reexamined and redefined by others. Karen Remmler remarks that many people studying the German-Jewish symbiosis cite the same anecdotes and draw the same conclusions. She posits that it is necessary to rethink the approach to studying the German-Jewish symbiosis. “We need to deepen the study of this troubled symbiosis by paying more attention to the conceptualization of the symbiosis as it emerges in interdisciplinary studies, in intertextual correspondences, and in recent theoretical debates about (West) German-(East) German relations in the aftermath

of unification.”³⁷ Katja Behrens appears to have similar sentiments and makes a compelling argument for her choice to define the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans as a rift³⁸. In her keynote address at “The Minnesota Forum on German Culture: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis 1945-2000” held in 2000 she discusses why her notion of a rift is a more accurate description of the German-Jewish relationship.³⁹

Behrens’ reasoning for denying the concept of a symbiotic relationship, negative or otherwise, is well illustrated with the support of anecdotes from her own experiences as a Jewish-German as well as other significant events in modern German history, such as Adenauer’s pardoning of war criminals. Behrens’ two main arguments show that her interpretation of the relationship as a rift is well-founded. First, she points out that Jewish and non-Jewish Germans do not coexist in any manner that adequately meets the requirements for a symbiotic relationship.

So it is the rift, the gulf, the dichotomy and not the symbiosis – which would mean that Jews and Germans related to each other as a whole. The majority of Germans have managed to evade the matter, and individual Jews have found an island on which they can live.⁴⁰

Behrens does not agree that Jewish and non-Jewish Germans are involved in each others’ lives to a great extent. Although the Jewish Germans live and work with non-Jewish Germans, they often only have limited personal ties to non-Jewish Germans and vehemently oppose being identified as “German.”⁴¹ Moreover, she claims that for a symbiotic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans to exist, it must extend

beyond politics to the general public. She maintains, based on her experiences and history, it does not.

Since then⁴² I have regarded the theory of “negative symbiosis” as wishful thinking, Jewish wishful thinking. On the level of politics it looks as if the extermination of the Jews were “the basis of how the Germans see themselves,” but there are hardly any traces of this in the German public at large. Even a half-century afterwards repression and denial are still predominant.⁴³

In the realm of the collective German identity the government has recognized their role in the Holocaust and taken steps to attempt to cultivate a better relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. They have funded museums and memorials as well as paid reparations to the families of victims of the Holocaust. The Germans individually, however, according to Behrens, still prefer to deny the past or simply not discuss it. It becomes clear that Behrens’ conclusion is logical when cross referenced with Diner’s claim that a negative German-Jewish symbiosis exists because Jewish and non-Jewish Germans have become inextricably linked by the Holocaust and Arendt’s suggestion that the insurmountable and unpunishable German guilt is a key factor in this negative symbiotic relationship. If the German public at large does not begin to openly speaking about the Holocaust and there is no close link between the lives of Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in German society, defining their relationship as a negative symbiosis is no longer viable.

The key to Behrens' rift is that it is not static, but instead shrinks and grows with the utterance of one wrong phrase. Jewish and non-Jewish Germans coexist in relative comfort and ease in many cases. She herself admits that she has many close non-Jewish German friends, but even with her own friends the rift is always present.⁴⁴ Behrens states that "[t]his rift between us, the progeny of both sides is an unstable thing. It isn't always the same size. Sometimes it closes and becomes a hairline crack, a fracture you can forget, and then it suddenly yawns wide and becomes unbridgeable."⁴⁵ Despite a person's best attempts to avoid expanding the rift, the phenomenon is unavoidable, because usually the comment that made the rift yawn was not made in spite. The speaker may not even realize the offensive nature of his/her comment, but as quickly as the comment is made the rift expands. It is also important to note that this rift exists not only between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, but also between non-Jewish Germans and between German and non-German Jews, according to Behrens.⁴⁶

Another scholar whose work does not directly address the question of a German-Jewish negative symbiosis, but is nonetheless important to mention is Todd Herzog. Todd Herzog is a Germanist who studies hybrid identity in the context of second generation post-Shoah Jewish Germans. He applies Homi K. Bhabha's Anglo-American postcolonial model of cultural hybridity to Jews in Germany today. Bhabha posits that hybrids are a positive force because they neither assimilate into the dominant culture nor collaborate with it. Instead, he maintains, they find their own niche in society that allows them to develop new "visions of community and versions of historic memory."⁴⁷ Herzog applies this model to the works of Barbara Honigmann, Maxim Biller, Esther Dischereit, and Irene Dische and concludes that in all cases a successful hybrid identity is not

constructed.⁴⁸ Instead, he argues that the German notion of *Mischlinge*, a concept reminiscent of the Nazi classification system that focuses on the negative effects of mixing two races, is a more appropriate description of the German-Jewish identity. For each of the four authors mentioned above, Herzog demonstrates how their Jewishness is stronger than their Germanness. He further claims that the hyphenated German-Jewish identity is plagued by “the dash that pulls apart even as it draws together.”⁴⁹ If Jewish-Germans demonstrate characteristics of a *Mischlinge* identity as opposed to a hybrid identity à la Bhabha, then the negative symbiosis will remain infinitely problematic in German society. There is, however, a major deficiency in Herzog’s work; he fails to define the parameters of or give an example of a successful hybridity. Without a clear idea of Herzog’s construct of a successful hybridity, one could dismiss most hybrid identities as failed hybridities.

After examining the spectrum of ideas concerning the negative German-Jewish symbiosis in post-Shoah Germany, I determined that it is more productive to speak of a German-Jewish negative symbiosis-Jewish German hybrid identity continuum. Considering that there are four different generations of Jewish Germans living in Germany today and a variety of different Holocaust experiences in each family tree,⁵⁰ each generation experiences the effects of the Shoah on their lives differently. Some Jewish Germans have come to terms with their lives in Germany and interactions with non-Jewish Germans more successfully; this enables them to coexist more comfortably with their non-Jewish German counterparts. These Jewish Germans would be placed at the Jewish German hybrid identity end of the continuum. Other Jewish Germans still identify themselves as Jews living in Germany and continue to hold onto their negative

feelings towards their non-Jewish German counterparts tightly. They live their lives in Germany finding excuses for why they have not yet left the land of their murderers and speak of their intentions to emigrate, but for some reason continue to stay. This group of Jewish Germans is located at the German-Jewish negative symbiosis end of the spectrum. While time may heal all wounds, not all people heal at the same rate, depending on how well a Jewish German has been able to cope with the effects of the Holocaust, s/he could fall anywhere on the continuum. Additionally, a person's place on the continuum could change from day to day and could fluctuate between progressing toward the right or left end of it.

The continuum is not only a measure of a Jewish German's place in post-Shoah German society. It can also be used to measure a non-Jewish German's perception of the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. Those non-Jewish Germans who were alive during the Holocaust carry a lot more emotional baggage because of it than their grandchildren. Therefore, many do not have a clear conscience like most of their grandchildren. Subsequently, older generations experience the German-Jewish negative symbiosis more strongly. Often, the younger generations' main complaint is that they are tired of being blamed for something that happened before they were even born. While this demonstrates that the Shoah and the German-Jewish negative symbiosis affects their lives, the effects are much smaller. Consequently, they identify more with the possibility of a hybrid identity than the elder generations. While the concept of a continuum may be more complex than previous scholars have discussed, I feel it is appropriately complex. Individuals have free will and perceive situations differently. It is not logical to offer a

one-size-fits-all label to a situation as complex as life in post-Shoah Germany and the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans.

As the preceding discussion has illustrated, there are a variety of scholarly opinions concerning the nature of the problematic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in post-Shoah Germany. Zipes and his position that there has been a negative symbiotic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans since the beginning of the twentieth century is the most pessimistic stand on the issue. Gershom Scholem's view that there never was a German-Jewish dialogue, and consequently never a German-Jewish symbiosis, is not significantly more optimistic. He, however, does not comment on the situation in post-Shoah Germany. Most scholars who deal with the interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in post-Shoah Germany do not comment significantly on whether there was a German-Jewish symbiosis in Germany prior to 1933. Among them are Hannah Arendt and Dan Diner,⁵¹ who feel that the Shoah has linked Jewish and non-Jewish Germans to each other in a mutually detrimental manner. Arendt and Diner point out that the crimes of the non-Jewish Germans against European Jews lack an adequate legal punishment, thereby making them nearly impossible to overcome, which, according to Diner, has created a society that is so weighed down with its own guilty conscience that it is constantly seeking relief.⁵² Katja Behrens has reexamined this debate and feels this problematic relationship is best described as a rift. She dismisses the negative symbiosis because she does not feel that Jewish and non-Jewish Germans have enough contact with each other. Her construct of a rift is an interesting contribution to the discussion of the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans because it is not static in nature and can widen or shrink at the snap

of a finger depending on the situation. Todd Herzog denies the possibility of hybridity for Jewish Germans and equates their attempts at hybridity with the more negative term *Mischlinge*, thereby focusing on the negative aspects of their dual identities and supporting the German-Jewish negative symbiosis construct. Finally, my contribution to the discussion is the German-Jewish negative symbiosis – Jewish German hybrid identity continuum. This continuum is flexible and dynamic like Behren's rift and it accounts for the whole range of feelings that the Jewish and non-Jewish Germans as individuals may encounter. While this was merely a sampling of the dialogue about the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in post Shoah Germany, it should serve as a road map for the issues that will be discussed throughout the rest of this thesis.

The German-Jewish Negative Symbiosis in Contemporary Literature

As my discussion demonstrates, for roughly the past 20 years the German-Jewish relationship and the existence, or lack thereof has been attracting more attention by scholars, especially in the United States. While many researchers choose to concentrate their efforts on the Holocaust itself, the aftermath of the Holocaust and the German-Jewish relationship that has ensued is by no means a more important topic, but it is a more contemporary topic and one that may lead to the discovery of the key to normalizing the problematic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in modern day Germany. One approach to unraveling the complexities of this issue is through the study of literary works. Fiction often reflects reality and serves as a medium for authors to express opinions that are controversial and/or difficult to discuss. When we as scholars study German-language Jewish literature, we gain insight into many aspects

of the post-Shoah Jewish – non-Jewish German relationship in Germany that are otherwise not discussed in public forums.

The German-Jewish authors directly following the Holocaust were mainly Holocaust survivors and their works focused on their personal experiences during that horrible time. They are commonly referred to as first generation German-Jewish writers and their focus on past events was a medium for awareness-building, documentation, and working through their painful memories. The children of Holocaust survivors in Germany belong to second-generation literature, on which this paper will be focusing. These writers address the issues surrounding living as a Jewish German in modern day Germany, which they often refer to as a land of murderers or Nazis. In addition to dealing with the memory of the Holocaust these works examine many other themes that dominate their daily lives in Germany, one of which is the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans and the negative German-Jewish symbiosis. In this paper I will examine the phenomenon of the negative German-Jewish symbiosis in selected works from Rafael Seligmann. Specifically, I will examine *Rubensteins Versteigerung* (1989), *Die jiddische Mamme* (1990), and *Der Musterjude* (1997). I will show that evidence of this phenomenon is present in his works and analyze the various ways in which it manifests itself.

Rafael Seligmann writes novels and regularly publishes articles and political commentaries in Germany's major newspapers and magazines. His first novel, *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, was first published in 1988. He has also written *Die jiddische Mamme* (1996), *Der Musterjude* (1997), *Schalom meine Liebe* (1998), *Der Milchmann* (1999), *Israels Sicherheitspolitik* (1982), *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung: Juden, Deutsche,*

Israelis (1991) *Das deutsch-jüdische Verhältnis: Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven* (1995), *Hitler. Die Deutschen und ihr Führer* (2004) and made contributions to collections such as *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature Since 1989* (1994), *Speaking Out: Jewish Voices from United Germany* (1995) and *Die Finkelstein-Debatte* (2001). Seligmann's works have not been well-received by the Jewish German community, a group that has labeled him a "Nestbeschmutzer." He earned this title by centering his novels around flawed, negative Jewish protagonists. His insistence on writing stories about unpleasant Jewish characters is probably the main reason his critics dislike him, but he also writes about Jewish life in Germany and the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in a highly controversial manner that adds to their distaste for his works. He is most commonly compared with Maxim Biller, another political fiction writer and journalist.⁵³

Since Rafael Seligmann's career as a journalist began in the 1980s he has been a respected member of the Jewish German community. His articles are published in reputable newspapers, magazines and scholarly collections. His work as a novelist, however, is largely ignored by the literary community. While the literary community chooses to ignore his fictional works, they are ignoring a plethora of valuable insights into life in post-Shoah Germany. Moreover, Seligmann is an expert on Israeli politics and a spokesperson for the Jewish German community. He incorporates his real life expertise into his fiction. His novels explore a variety of topics that affect daily life for Jewish Germans in an attempt to bridge the rift between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. The manner in which he represents both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in these works is considered quite radical because both Jewish and non-Jewish German characters

frequently have negative characteristics that are taboo to discuss in post Shoah Germany. This is why it is especially important to study Seligmann's works of fiction. They offer scholars a fresh and different perspective on a topic that is having a negative effect on the lives of German residents. If scholars begin to study the thoughts and emotions of Seligmann's characters more closely, they may find that they begin to better understand their own existence in Germany. The next chapter presents an in-depth examination of Rafael Seligmann's career as a writer, what his motivations are for writing, and how his works have been received.

Notes for Chapter 1

¹ Gershom Scholem will be discussed at more length later in this chapter. His role in the German-Jewish negative symbiosis debate became important in 1962 when he claimed that there has never been a German-Jewish dialogue, therewith negating the possibility that there was ever a German-Jewish symbiosis.

² Hannah Arendt will be discussed at more length later in this chapter. She is credited with coining the term German-Jewish negative symbiosis and being one of the first to begin serious discussion of the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans after the Shoah.

³ Dan Diner will be discussed at more length later in this chapter. He wrote an important article on the German-Jewish negative symbiosis in 1986.

⁴ Jack Zipes will be discussed at more length later in this chapter. He began contributing to scholarly discussion of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis in the mid 1990s and has become an important contributor to this area of research.

⁵ Katja Behrens will be discussed at more length later in this chapter. She is a Jewish German writer who deals with life for Jews living in contemporary Germany in her stories. She attempts to redefine this notion of a German-Jewish negative symbiosis.

⁶ When the colonists arrived in the New World they did not have the tools to survive their strange new environment. It was the Native Americans who traded with them and helped them adapt to their new surroundings. These same Native Americans, however, were later driven off their lands as more and more people arrived from Europe. If a tribe attempted to defend its land, the entire tribe, including the elderly, women and children, was massacred. With the birth of the newly formed United States of America, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was founded and official government policies concerning Native American relations were implemented. One policy was to force Native American children to attend boarding schools where they were educated in the ways of the “white man” and punished for speaking their own mother tongues or observing Native American customs. Another policy was to force Native American nations to sign treaties with the US government and relocate them to reservations in the West. The terms of most of these treaties were inevitably broken by the US government as the nation and its need for more land grew.

Some tribes fought back, others split up and went into hiding. It was not until the twentieth century that relations between Native Americans and the US government began to improve. The US government was forced to shut down the BIA in the 1970s and has since paid reparations to recognized Native American tribes and slowly begun returning Native American lands. Today, the Native American population is merely a fraction of the size it was before the first colonists. Moreover, many of their traditions and languages have been forgotten because of the assimilation policies enforced by the BIA. Consequently, many Native Americans still dislike and distrust the “white man.”

⁷ Most scholars agree that there has only been juxtaposition between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans since 1933.

⁸ I intentionally chose to speak of Jewish survivors for this generation. Many of the Jews that remained in Germany after the war were actually eastern European Jews who were placed in Displaced Person camps in Germany after they were freed and for various reasons were unable to or chose not to leave. This is a generation that is frequently portrayed as sitting on their packed suitcases and making plans to leave Germany every day, without ever actually leaving.

⁹ For example, Rafael Seligmann’s protagonist Jakob Weinberg in *Der Milchmann* sets up the other members of his block in the concentration camp to be punished for something he himself had done. But no one catches on to his deceit and he becomes a legend for risking his life to steal powdered milk for his block mates. Actually, he stole the milk for himself and never intended to share it, but his deceit haunts him for the rest of his life when he becomes known as *der Milchmann* by Munich’s Jewish community. Rafael Seligmann, *Der Milchmann* (München: DTV 1999) 9 – 36.

¹⁰ There is not yet a substantial body of literature by third generation post-war Jewish and non-Jewish Germans to study, but I have made some observations in my interactions with non-Jewish Germans and Austrians that support this fact. While I was in a graduate level seminar one evening the professor told a story about a woman to whom she referred as the “photo Nazi”, because this woman was being too aggressive in her picture taking. After class a non-Jewish German friend of mine in the class talked with me at length about how disturbed she was by this comment. On another occasion I gave a non-Jewish Austrian friend of mine, whom I have known for five years, some quotes from Rafael Seligmann’s *Rubensteins Versteigerung* and asked him how he felt when he read the text. He responded by saying “Du liest aber

Sachen.” and refused to comment further. On another occasion a Jewish graduate student in the Spanish program got agitated and said “I would never study a language spoken by the people that killed six million of my people” at the mere mention that I study German. For me, all three of these occasions made me realize that the German-Jewish negative symbiosis is still very prominent.

¹¹ Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes, eds., *Unlikely History: the Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

¹² Native Americans in the United States still regularly organize protests on Columbus Day because Christopher Columbus and other explorers swindled and enslaved them.

¹³ Dan Diner, “Negative Symbiose: Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz,” *Babylon* 1 (1986): 9.

¹⁴ Diner 11.

¹⁵ For more information about Gershom Scholem’s influence on the Zionist movement and his ideas, consult: David Biale, “Gershom Scholem Between German and Jewish Nationalism,” *The German-Jewish Dialogue Reconsidered: A Symposium in Honor of George L. Mosse*, ed. Klaus Berghahn (New York, Peter Lang, 1996) 177-188.

¹⁶ Jack Zipes, “The Negative German-Jewish Symbiosis,” *Insiders and Outsider: Jewish and Gentile Culture in Germany and Austria* eds. Dagmar C.G. Lorenz and Gabriele Weinberger (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press 1994) 144-145.

¹⁷ Katja Behrens, “The Rift and Not the Symbiosis,” *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000*, eds. Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 31-45.

¹⁸ For more information about Herzog’s ideas concerning the application of Homi K. Bhabha’s postcolonial hybridity theory to German-Jewish identity in second generation post-Shoah German-language Jewish literature read: Todd Herzog, “Hybrids and *Mischlinge*: Translating Anglo-American Cultural Theory into German,” *The German Quarterly* 70.1 (Winter 1997): 1 – 17. or Todd Herzog, “Germans and Jews After the Fall of the Wall: The Promises and Problems of Hybridity,” *German Studies in the Post-Holocaust Age: The Politics of Memory, Identity, and Ethnicity*, eds. Adrian Del Caro and Janet Ward (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000) 93 – 102.

¹⁹ Dan Diner discusses Arendt’s contribution to the German-Jewish negative symbiosis dialogue. Diner 11.

²⁰ Diner 11.

²¹ Hannah Arendt cited in: Diner 11.

²² In other words, both attempts were made by individuals and governments to compensate for the pain caused to European Jews because of the Holocaust.

²³ The German government began making attempts at reconciliation much earlier than the Austrian government, who only in the past couple years began providing monetary compensation to survivors/victims' families and returning land and property confiscated from Austrian Jews.

²⁴ Some of the more recent cases of Jews seeking compensation involve German and Austrian companies that utilized Jewish *Zwangsarbeiter* during the Holocaust. They are now being sued by advocacy groups who maintain that Holocaust survivors, or their families if the *Zwangsarbeiter* is no longer alive, should be paid retrospectively for their work. The Swiss banks are also being sued. The families of Jews who had opened Swiss bank accounts before the Holocaust feel they have a right to this money, but the banks refuse to release it to them.

²⁵ „Editorial,” *Babylon* 1 (1986): 7.

²⁶ Diner 9.

Translated by M.J. Walker 1999 for Morris and Zipes, eds.: “Since Auschwitz it has indeed been possible to speak of a German-Jewish symbiosis—but of a negative one. For both Germans and for Jews the result of mass extermination has become the basis of how they see themselves, a kind of opposed reciprocity they have in common, willy-nilly.”

²⁷ Diner writes that “[B]eide Leben in jeweils notwendig anderer, ja gegensätzlicher Weise mit der Erinnerung and das Ereignis, bzw. sind bemüht, ihr auszuweichen. [...] Doch der Versuch solch verstehbaren Entweichens bleibt vergebens; die Allgegenwärtigkeit des Ereignisses führt den Flüchtenden sisphyshaft immer wieder an die mit Auschwitz gekränkte Erinnerung zurück.” Diner 10.

²⁸ Barbara Honigmann, *Damals, Dann und Danach* (München, Wien: Carl Hanser, 1999) 15.

²⁹ Diner 9-10.

³⁰ Diner 9.

³¹ It is important to note here that these celebrated German-Jews did not focus on their Jewishness in their respective arts or fields. Nowadays, Jewish artists and intellectuals often stress the fact that they are

Jewish. They are often recognized as a great Jewish writer, composer, filmmaker, or comedian, whereas the influential 19th century German-Jews were simply recognized as a great writer, musician or philosopher.

³² Scholem was asked to make a contribution to *Festschrift* that was both a “tribute” and “document of a basically indestructible German-Jewish dialogue.” Instead his contribution did just the opposite and argued that there was no German-Jewish dialogue. Behrens 32.

³³ Gershom Scholem qtd. in Behrens 32.

³⁴ Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes, Preface, *Unlikely History: the Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) xv.

³⁵ Leslie Morris is also a professor of German at the University of Minnesota who does extensive research in the area of post-Shoah German-Jewish literature.

³⁶ These two literary critics are credited as being key players in the rebirth of the German humanistic tradition in post-war German literature. Their lives are almost oxymoronic though, for in their professional lives they are major forces in the non-Jewish German community but they are vehemently opposed to being identified as German. To read more on this topic, consult: Jack Zipes, “The Critical Embrace of Germany: Hans Mayer and Marcel Reich-Ranicki,” *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000*. Eds. Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 183-201.

³⁷ Karen Remmler, “Encounters Across the Void: Rethinking Approaches to German-Jewish Symbioses,” *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000*, eds. Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 3.

³⁸ Behrens 31-45.

³⁹ Translated by M.J. Walker and published in: Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes, eds. *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000*. (New York: Palgrave, 2002.)

⁴⁰ Behrens 39.

⁴¹ As an example she mentions the German literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki who does not object to being called “the pope of German literature” but does object to being called German: “You cannot consider me a German. I’m not a German. Don’t make me into a German. I’m a citizen of the Federal Republic: no question and with pleasure. I like this state in spite of everything. I am a German literary

critic, I write in German, I belong to German literature and culture, but I'm not a German and will never be one." Behrens 39.

⁴² "Then" refers to her experiences while doing research on Arthur Mayer. She met great opposition from the residents of Seeheim who were unwilling to discuss Arthur Mayer with her and denied that he was incarcerated and died at Auschwitz. She received death threats for digging too deeply and looking into something that was not for her to investigate.

⁴³ Behrens 42.

⁴⁴ "I am among friends. One word recalling the persecution and expulsion and already silence takes over, and embarrassed silence among people who only just now were close to me, a silence that tells me: oops, you've put your foot in it. In the stillness the rift between us becomes palpable." Behrens 37.

⁴⁵ Behrens 37.

⁴⁶ Behrens 38.

⁴⁷ Todd Herzog, "Hybrids and *Mischlinge*: Translating Anglo-American Cultural Theory into German," *German Quarterly* 70.1 (Winter 1997): 1.

⁴⁸ Herzog mentions Seligmann in his article, but he does not analyze any of his work. "As they seek to justify life in the German Diaspora, it seems as if the "Third Generation" [second generation in this thesis] of German-Jewish writers – such as Maxim Biller, Esther Dischereit, Irene Dische, Barabara Honigmann, and Rafael Seligmann – have been attentively reading their postcolonial criticism. There is a marked tendency among these authors, as they attempt to reconcile German and Jewish identities and carve out a space for themselves in the German Diaspora, to adopt and thematize an "impure" identity – to occupy a hybrid position vis-à-vis German society." Herzog 1-2.

⁴⁹ Herzog 8.

⁵⁰ Some survivors lost their entire families, others experienced life in the concentration camps, others lived in exile, some survived in hiding, some were only children, etc.

⁵¹ Dan Diner does point out that one can finally speak of a German-Jewish symbiosis – a negative one - only since Auschwitz, and he does state that he agrees with Gershom Scholem. He, however, does not discuss the Jewish – non-Jewish German relationship prior to 1933 at length. Diner 9.

⁵² Diner 10.

⁵³ In many ways Rafael Seligmann and Maxim Biller are two sides of the same coin. Both are second generation Jewish Germans who depict taboo topics in their fictional works. They both come from Eastern European Jewish families. Both are respected journalists. Both come from families that chose to live in post-Shoah Germany. Yet despite their similarities, Biller has received a much better critical reception from the German-speaking literary community.

CHAPTER 2: RAFAEL SELIGMANN: RADICAL OR REACTIONARY?

“Hier gibt es nichts mehr zu verbessern, die Deutschen haben jetzt genau die Juden, die sie verdienen – und umgekehrt.”¹ Jonathan Rubenstein, protagonist in Seligmann’s first work of fiction makes this claim, a claim that the Jewish and non-Jewish Germans have created their identities and their relationship with each other, both a German-Jewish negative symbiosis and a rift. Only the Jewish and non-Jewish Germans truly have a right to pass judgment on the validity of this claim, but it seems that Seligmann, through the thoughts, actions, and words of his protagonists, makes a convincing case for the existence of this negative German-Jewish symbiosis. In his works he shows manifestations of the German collective guilt, Jewish-German feelings of hate and weakness, confusion on both sides about how to deal with the other and how the German-Jews exploit their victim role to succeed in their personal, professional and academic endeavors. Those same characters that seem to interact so uncomfortably with each other can change their tune at the drop of a hat, though, and suddenly appear to genuinely enjoy each other’s company. Throughout Seligmann’s novels his protagonists appear to be in a constant state of flux between a love and hate of their life in Germany. At times they interact very amicably with their non-Jewish German counterparts, but that can quickly change with one wrong phrase. This chapter discusses how Rafael Seligmann has influenced and contributed to second generation post-Shoah Jewish German literature and how his works have been critically received by the literary community.

Overview of Rafael Seligmann's Life and Works

Rafael Seligmann set himself apart from other German-Jewish authors as he was one of the first to write about contemporary life, or life after the Shoah, for Jews living in Germany. According to Seligmann, prior to the release of his first novel, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* (1988), only Jurek Becker's *Bronsteins Kinder* (1986) addressed life for Jews living in postwar Germany.² Seligmann's representation of contemporary life for Jews living in Germany makes many perceive him as an iconoclast and a "nest dirtier"³, which has not won him any popularity contests in Germany. Sander Gilman notes that he is "the most radical or perhaps most reactionary" of the second generation of Jewish writers in post-Shoah Germany.⁴ Born in Tel Aviv in 1948, Seligmann's parents did something rather exceptional in 1957; they decided to move back to Germany. Again, while working towards his Ph.D. in history and political science in both Munich and Tel Aviv, Seligmann himself chose Germany over Israel. After completing his Ph.D. Seligmann, an expert on Israeli policy, worked as a political scientist at the University of Munich. His career as an author of both fiction and non-fiction began in 1978.⁵ He founded and was editor of the *Jüdische Zeitung* from 1985-89. Seligmann is currently living in Berlin, Germany where he is an active member of the Jewish community and is still writing and being published.

While the focus of this paper is Seligmann's fictional oeuvre, it is important to discuss his non-fictional works as well. Indeed, the majority of Seligmann's publications to date are non-fiction. His non-fiction writing is extensive and consists of both books and free-lance political commentaries which are published in most of the major renowned

German newspapers and magazines. To date he has written three full-length non-fiction books; *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung: Juden, Deutsche, Israelis* (1991) *Das deutsch-jüdische Verhältnis: Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven* (1995) and *Hitler. Die Deutschen und ihr Führer* (2004). His dissertation, *Israels Sicherheitspolitik*, was also published in 1982. Seligmann is known for taking unpopular stands on issues related to Jewishness and the Holocaust. During the famous Finkelstein Debate⁶ Seligmann supported Finkelstein's stand that Jews are using the tragedy of the Holocaust for their own material gains. He concludes that "Finkelstein ist Agent provocateur, Gaukler und Aufklärer zugleich. Sein Buch ist verletzend. Er selbst ist verletzlich. Es wäre falsch, seine Kritik als destructive Polemik abzutun. Sie ist anregend. Vor allem aber notwendig wie ein Reinigungsmittel."⁷ As this quote illustrates, Seligmann does take issue with some of Finkelstein's arguments and states Finkelstein's facts are either exaggerations or lies, but in general he supports Finkelstein and feels his book was "necessary like a cleaning product."

In addition to his non-fiction body of literature, Seligmann wrote and had published five novels between 1988 and 1999. His first novel *Rubensteins Versteigerung* was published by a vanity press in 1988.⁸ This book was followed by *Die jiddische Mamme* (1990), *Der Musterjude* (1997), *Schalom meine Liebe* (1998) and *Der Milchmann* (1999). The protagonists in his first four novels are second generation post-Shoah Jews living in Germany while *Der Milchmann* is written from the perspective of a Holocaust survivor living in Germany. Seligmann is frequently referred to as the German Philip Roth due to the sarcasm, irony, sexuality and provocative nature present in his novels.⁹ Above all he is a taboo breaker in the way in which he presents extremely

negative images of his Jewish and non-Jewish German characters and their interactions with each other. Most shocking are perhaps his dialogues and inner monologues, for they effectively verbalize thoughts that are not acceptable to speak of in post-Shoah Germany.

Why does Seligmann feel the need to break taboos and provoke? Why has he broken the long standing “silence” that has kept Jews who write in German from expressing feelings of hate and animosity towards the non-Jewish Germans? Seligmann’s main mission in his writing is to show both Jews and non-Jews that those Jews living in Germany today with jobs and families are a part of the German cultural and political scene and that they are indeed German-Jews¹⁰ instead of “Jews living in Germany.”¹¹ He feels the only way to stimulate the notion of a hybrid German-Jewish identity is to bring both sides, Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, into dialogue with each other, which is best accomplished when spurred by a catalyst. As Helene Schruff puts it: “Zu diesem Zweck provoziert Seligmann Juden wie Nichtjuden mit Leidenschaft, läßt sich dafür anstandslos als ‘Hoffnarr der Gesellschaft’ bezeichnen und nimmt auch die Beschimpfungen seitens der jüdischen Gemeinde als “Nestbeschmutzer” in Kauf.”¹² In “Die Juden Leben,” published in *Spiegel* in 1992, Seligmann states his reason for writing in a provocative manner: “Beklommenes Schweigen ist allemal schlimmer, denn es läßt die Juden weiterhin im Ghetto ihrer Angst. Da hilft ihnen schon eher einer der provoziert.”¹³ Thus in Seligmann’s opinion, whether he is popular or unpopular among his fellow German-Jews is not important. What he is striving to do is indeed make people upset so that they break the silence. Alas, it is only then that the Jewish and non-Jewish Germans will work through their anger, fear and guilt and embrace the ideas of being German-Jews instead of “Jews living in Germany.”

In his efforts to promote a dialogue between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, Seligmann recognizes the need to reflect on life in Germany after the Holocaust instead of simply recounting personal experiences during it. Since the publication of *Rubensteins Versteigerung* in 1988 many other Jewish authors who write in German have followed suit: Maxim Biller, Esther Dischereit and Doron Rabinovici, to name a few. It is above all important for him to recount the reality, as he interprets it, of life for and the sentiments of Jewish Germans instead of upholding the positive image that Jews present in response to the expectations of their philosemitic non-Jewish German countrymen. According to Seligmann, works prior to *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, with the exception of Becker's *Bronsteins Kinder* (1986), represent a German-Jewish reality that recount events of the past without providing insight into the terror, hate and inferiority Jewish Germans felt, and to a large extent still experience, towards non-Jewish Germans.¹⁴ Having broken this trend of looking back instead of looking ahead is certainly a step in the right direction towards finding a solution to the negative German-Jewish symbiosis that scholars such as Diner, Scholem, Arendt, Zipes and others have described.

In Seligmann's reflections on post-war/post-Shoah life in Germany, he focuses on a wide spectrum of themes. The most important aspect is Seligmann's representation of interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans and how Jewish Germans feel about their situation living in Germany after the Shoah. In other words, why do Jews choose to live in Germany and how does this choice affect their identity as Jews? Part of this discussion includes the German-Jewish negative symbiosis – German-Jewish hybrid identity continuum. This continuum is noticeable in the choices Seligmann's protagonists make on the quests to figure out their place in post-Shoah German society. Additionally,

the reader learns how Jewish Germans feel about philosemitism in Germany¹⁵ and how non-Jewish Germans try to compensate for the events of the Shoah while Jewish Germans occasionally use German guilt caused by the Shoah to their advantage. These ideas as well as others related to interactions among Jewish and non-Jewish Germans come to light in all of Seligmann's works.

Seligmann not only concentrates on Jewish – non-Jewish German issues, but also helps his readers gain insight into the Jewish world as Jews know it in his texts.

According to Helene Schruff:

Honigmann, Dischereit, Biller, Schindel und Rabinovici erläutern also hebräische Ausdrücke oder religiöse Begriffe und Bräuche nicht oder nur ansatzweise im Text. Ihre Leser müssen mit diesen Themen schon eine gewisse Vertrautheit haben oder zum Lesen die Bereitschaft mitbringen, sich anderweitig zu informieren, um die Geschichten zu verstehen. Die Autoren Seligmann und Schöne nutzen ihre Texte hingegen, um die Leser über jüdische Lebensvorschriften und Traditionen zu unterrichten.¹⁶

When a reader delves into a Seligmann text, s/he encounters Yiddish expressions or Jewish traditions on almost every page. To help readers who are unfamiliar with these terms and customs Seligmann provides his readers with glossaries and footnotes explaining them. Two aspects of Jewish life are key elements in his texts: Zionism and the fact that there are many types of Jews and biases that go along with each one. Israel, the “promised land”, is the center of Zionism, which according to Seligmann is not without its flaws. Also, non-Jews who are unfamiliar with Jewish society are probably not aware that there are several branches of Judaism, which have varying customs and

beliefs. Specifically, he suggests that Jews living in the Diaspora, especially Germany, are strongly criticized by their Israeli counterparts and that the Sephardic Jews, or the “Schwarzen”, are considered inferior to other Jews by other branches of the Jewish community. After reading Seligmann’s works the reader has a better understanding of Jewish life that s/he did not have before reading them, which can also contribute to a more productive dialogue between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans.

Reception of Rafael Seligmann’s Works

As the previous section explains, Seligmann stands his ground and writes about what no one wants to talk about – the problematic Jewish and non-Jewish German relationship. Not only does he continue to write about it despite heavy criticism, his pen makes his characters say things that simply make his Jewish and non-Jewish German readers extremely uncomfortable. The provocative nature of Rafael Seligmann’s œuvre has sparked mixed reactions from his critics. At one end of the spectrum, Henryk M. Broder and young Jews living in Germany strongly support Seligmann and feel he accurately represents life for Jews living in contemporary, post-Shoah Germany.¹⁷ At the other end of the spectrum, however, critics such as Gertrud Koch question the literary merit of his books,¹⁸ and Manya Gutman claims Seligmann is nothing more than a rumor mongerer and “nest dirtier”¹⁹. Many critics have drawn a connection between Seligmann and the renowned American Jewish author Philip Roth and his highly-acclaimed novel *Portnoy’s Complaint*. In general, it can be said of the Jewish community in Germany that mainly only the youth approve of his works. In the non-Jewish community, however, critics feel Seligmann provides them with great insight into the thoughts of German-Jews

and approve of his works.²⁰ The mixed critical reception of Seligmann's works signifies that they contain an innovative element that has touched a nerve with his readers, thus making the spectrum of critical response worthy of closer examination.

Critical response to Seligmann's first novel, *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, may have been mixed, but the German language publishers unanimously agreed; not a single publisher, Jewish or non-Jewish German, would publish it. Seligmann was already a respected journalist and had published a well-received book on Israel's national security policy²¹ when he began searching for a publisher in 1984. Despite his status as an established German-Jewish writer, he was told that the book was anti-Semitic by one publisher, others said it contained too much sex, and Hoffmann & Campe thought it was "fascinating" but were disconcerted by the manner in which the protagonist spoke to his mother, so they refused to publish it.²² Four years after his search for a publisher began Seligmann gave up and published *Rubensteins Versteigerung* with his own money.²³

When *Rubensteins Versteigerung* finally hit the shelves of German bookstores, the literary critics began responding. Some of these responses were extremely positive. As was mentioned earlier in this section, Henryk M. Broder sang the praises of this work and what Seligmann was trying to accomplish with it:

Rubensteins Versteigerung ist das erste Buch eines deutsch-jüdischen Autors nach 1945, das den herrschenden Konsens—Nur nicht unangenehm auffallen! Die Antisemiten würden sich freuen!—einfach ignoriert. Es nimmt auf die Angst der Juden vor Selbstentblößung ebensowenig Rücksicht wie auf die Bedürfnisse der Antisemiten nach Absolution. Deswegen kommt er der Wirklichkeit jüdischen Lebens in der

Bundesrepublik weit näher als die vielen gutgemeinten Dokumentationen zu diesem Thema.²⁴

After all, it is not possible to find a solution to an uncomfortable situation unless uncomfortable things are discussed. Others also recognized that Seligmann wrote the truth, and it was this recognition that Seligmann had written the truth that made some Jewish Germans uncomfortable. A member of the board of the Jewish community approached Seligmann in 1988 and told him „Sie haben die Wahrheit geschrieben. Aber gerade deshalb darf man so ein Buch nicht veröffentlichen.“²⁵ There were, however, others besides Broder who appreciated Seligmann’s honest portrayal; Aron Krochmalnik of the youth magazine, *Nudnik*, observes the following:

We, as young Jews in Germany, are without any cultural roots worth mentioning, our family saga is similar to that of Jonny. This may seem depressing, but we are not the heirs of the accomplishments of prewar Jewry in Germany. Sadly, the rich roots of our parents from the Shtetl can no longer be integrated into our present life in Germany. That culture disappeared with Auschwitz. Thus Seligmann’s ‘journal intime’ remains one of the rare descriptions of the realities of the first generation of young Jews in Germany after the war.²⁶

Not having experienced the Holocaust first hand, yet still living in its shadow, it seems logical that this young generation would experience the ramifications of the Holocaust differently than their parents. This generation will inevitably identify more closely with someone born after the Shoah than someone who experienced it. Therefore, Broder and Krochmalnik’s praise of *Rubensteins Versteigerung* could almost be anticipated.

While some praised Seligmann, others harshly criticized him. One of his most severe critics was Gertrud Koch, who was not offended by the content of his works, but by its lack of literary merit. She dismissed *Rubensteins Versteigerung* as “[E]in echtes Stück Bekenntnisliteratur der trivialen Art”²⁷. In her review, she states that “[...]der ganze Roman liest wie eine zynisch verfertigte Inhaltsangabe, die noch etliche explanative Teile enthält, um den zuständigen Lektor für den Stoff zu interessieren.”²⁸ In contrast to others who feel that Seligmann captures the historical situation of Jews born in Germany after the Shoah, she states that this situation “kommt dann nur noch als Kurzsatz-Stakkato wie aus einem dpa-Ticker rüber, kaum noch als innerer Monolog eines Ich-Erzählers.”²⁹ Despite Koch’s low opinion of Seligmann’s literary technique, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* received significant critical attention; much more than his following works.

Koch may disapprove of the literary quality of Seligmann’s works, but many members of the Jewish community in Germany are offended by its content. Sander Gilman nicely summarizes the views of several of these opponents in his book *Jews in Today’s German Culture*, and one of these critics is Manya Gutman.³⁰ Gutman says that Seligmann is “too visible and too ‘Jewish’ in a negative sense”.³¹ In fact, she attempts to diminish the impact of Seligmann’s works on the non-Jewish German community, by putting the validity of these works in question; she says Seligmann claims to speak for all Jews, but he does not speak for her and that his experience is not an authentic German-Jewish experience. Indeed, she states that Seligmann is “sucking up” to non-Jewish readers, who appreciate any absolution for the years 1933 – 1945.³² The comments of

Gutman, a respected member of Munich's Jewish community, carried weight with other Jewish Germans.

Gutman makes the claim that Seligmann is writing for a non-Jewish audience, an audience that almost unanimously, positively reviewed *Rubensteins Versteigerung* and *Die jiddische Mamme*. According to Seligmann, his non-Jewish German readers like the "authenticity and non-conformity" of *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, which helps them understand the feelings and thoughts of Jews living in Germany.³³ Non-Jewish German critics, however, still had some negative critiques of *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, mainly about the "graphic sexual episodes", which, in their opinion, were, however, still within acceptable parameters.³⁴ Gilman points out that non-Jewish Germans all across Germany, whether living in Munich or Berlin, the city or the countryside, liked Seligmann. Whether Seligmann was writing for a non-Jewish readership, as Gutman claims, or not, he has appealed to it.

In addition to the discussion of whether Seligmann actually describes the reality of Jewish life in Germany as he sets out to do, a multitude of scholars³⁵ have reflected on his "Rothian"³⁶ style. In fact, some critics feel that *Rubensteins Versteigerung* is too similar to *Portnoy's Complaint*. Anat Feinberg writes that Jonathan Rubenstein's character in *Rubensteins Versteigerung* is "influenced to an embarrassing degree by Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*"³⁷; Helene Schruff considers *Rubensteins Versteigerung* and *Die jiddische Mamme* "Paradebeispiele" of the influence that *Portnoy's Complaint* has had on "neue jüdische Literatur"³⁸. The root of this Seligmann-Roth comparison stems from Seligmann's use of sexuality, irony, Jewish stereotypes, Yiddishisms, the coming of age theme³⁹ and his overbearing Yiddish mother characters⁴⁰. The comparison between

Seligmann and Roth was natural in the late 1980s when *Rubensteins Versteigerung* was published, for Seligmann was breaking new literary ground for German language Jewish writers and Roth was the closest model of comparison. After Seligmann broke the silence for Jewish writers in Germany, others also began to portray these “bad” Jews⁴¹ and utilize stereotypes and Yiddishisms; consequently they, too, were compared to Roth as well.⁴²

While it is true that there are commonalities between Roth’s and Seligmann’s literary styles, there are distinct differences between these two writers. As Schruoff points out, family plays a more central role in Seligmann’s works, and the Shoah is a key factor in the personal development of Samy and Jonathan, but not Portnoy.⁴³ Manya Gutman and *Nudnik* agree that the Rothian influence is not as prominent as Schruoff and Feinberg maintain it to be. *Nudnik* readers were told “Rafael Seligmann is no Philip Roth and his novel no *Portnoy’s Complaint*”,⁴⁴ while Gutman feels *Rubensteins Versteigerung* is lacking true “Jewish humor.”⁴⁵ After carefully reading *Portnoy’s Complaint* and Seligmann’s fictional oeuvre, I concur that Seligmann’s works contain elements typical to the brand of humor common to Jewish writers, filmmakers and entertainers living in Diaspora⁴⁶. To claim, however, that Seligmann has copied Roth, is exaggerated. Seligmann has not copied Roth any more than filmmaker Woody Allen⁴⁷ with his neurotic sexuality, Jewish-American stand-up comedian Richard Lewis⁴⁸ with his self-esteem issues and numerous physical ailments⁴⁹, or the writers of *The Nanny*⁵⁰ and their use of Yiddishisms and portrayal of Nanny Fine’s mother and her incessant whining about her daughter’s lack of husband and children. If Seligmann is “influenced to an embarrassing degree by” Philip Roth, then so are many other Jewish writers and entertainers that followed him.

After thorough examination of the critical response received by *Rubenstein's Versteigerung* and *Die jiddische Mamme*, Sander Gilman determined that this response “enact[s] Seligmann’s central hypothesis.” Although Gilman does not explicitly state what he considers to be Seligmann’s central hypothesis, it is clear from the context that Gilman is referring to commentary Seligmann has made about philosemitic non-Jewish Germans and Jewish Germans who live in “shame” and “fear.”⁵¹ The philosemitic Germans appreciate any opportunity to get to know and understand their fellow Jewish countrymen better. In fear of being accused of Nazi-like behavior, they embrace “things Jewish”⁵² and go out of their way to be kind to Jews living in Germany. The Jewish-Germans on the other hand live in a state of “fear” and “shame.” Fear of the repercussions if they were to express their hatred towards the Germans and shame that they have such feelings in the first place.⁵³ They try to be the images of exemplary behavior, so as not to give the Germans a reason to think unkindly of them. To support his theory that critical response to Seligmann’s works proves that Seligmann’s central hypothesis is accurate, Gilman cites two letters published in response to Seligmann’s “Die Juden leben”.⁵⁴ The first, a German respondent, thanks Seligmann for the “wonderful present of a Jew to us Germans”; the second, a German-Jewish respondent, expresses his concern that Seligmann is an “apostate” who is trying to set rules for how “good German-Jews should act.”⁵⁵ These responses along with the comments of literary critics support Gilman’s claim; Seligmann’s negative German-Jewish image can neither be accepted by other Jewish Germans nor condemned by his fellow non-Jewish German countrymen.

Although Seligmann has made a major impact on the focus of contemporary German-Jewish literature, scholars have not acknowledged his influence by failing to produce a significant body of secondary literature about his works. In my research for this thesis, I discovered only seven articles, two books and one doctoral dissertation that discuss Seligmann's works in more depth than a couple sentences. Unfortunately, the majority of these secondary sources focus on the same things: *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, Jewish stereotypes, the provocative nature of his works, and how his works have been received. While there has been some limited examination of his other works,⁵⁶ sexuality of his characters and negative symbiosis in his works, literary critics have yet to produce enough in-depth study of Seligmann's body of fiction.

Given the impact that Seligmann has made on contemporary German-Jewish literature, it seems logical that a larger corpus of secondary literature should exist to chronicle why it has been so influential. One reason for the limited quantity of quality secondary sources could be Gertrud Koch's critique of *Rubensteins Versteigerung*. Koch's article is the earliest article to be published about Seligmann's first novel that can be interpreted as literary criticism addressed to literary scholars instead of a book review intended for the German-speaking reading public. In her article published in *Babylon* in 1990 she acknowledges that Seligmann, Biller and Dische are influential writers, but spends the remainder of her discussion of *Rubensteins Versteigerung* summarizing the plot and pointing out its lack of literary merit as compared with Biller and Dische's superior works. This icy reception of Seligmann on the literary scene may have influenced the opinion of other scholars and contributed to the limited corpus of

secondary literature that exists today about him despite his five novels, three works of non-fiction and numerous newspaper, magazine and journal articles.

Even though Seligmann's second novel *Die jiddische Mamme* appeared on bookstore shelves in 1990, there were no scholarly works published about him between Koch's 1990 article and Sander Gilman's⁵⁷ 1995 book, *Jews in Today's German Culture*. In this book Gilman discusses the plot and characters in Seligmann's first two novels, gives information about Rafael Seligmann's life and motivation for writing, gives a historical account of Seligmann's struggle to find a publisher for *Rubensteins Versteigerung*⁵⁸ and its critical reception. It is not until the final chapter of the book that Gilman discusses the juxtaposition of Jewishness and male sexuality⁵⁹ in *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, a topic that is more representative of typical literary analysis. This book can be considered a decisive work in the direction that literary scholars have taken in their own discussions of Seligmann's works, as many of the articles that came after it discuss many of the same aspects of his life and works. Most articles that appeared after this book focus on *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, but briefly discuss *Die jiddische Mamme* as Gilman does. They also use significant portions of their articles to discuss Seligmann the man, his struggle to find a publisher, the reception of his works, and essentially spend more time summarizing his stories than critically examining their content.⁶⁰

Sander Gilman's recognition of the validity of Seligmann's works and a growing body of literature by other German speaking Jewish writers about contemporary life in Germany sparked more interest in Seligmann and his novels. Helene Schruoff used *Rubensteins Versteigerung* and *Die jiddische Mamme* as two of her primary texts for her 1998 doctoral dissertation⁶¹, *Jüdische Identität in erzählender Prosa der "Zweiten*

*Generation” in Deutschland und Österreich*⁶². Her analysis of Seligmann’s first two novels is the first detailed scholarly analysis of the content of these novels. Her conclusions about Jonathan’s and Samy’s⁶³ relationships with their families and girlfriends are significantly more developed than previous attempts by other scholars and are useful for other scholars investigating this topic. Inga-Marie Kühl cites Schruff extensively in her 2001 doctoral dissertation, *Zwischen Trauma, Traum und Tradition: Identitätskonstruktionen in der Jungen Jüdischen Gegenwartsliteratur*. Kühl also chose to use two Seligmann novels, *Die jiddische Mamme* and *Schalom Meine Liebe*⁶⁴, in her dissertation. Even though her dissertation also focuses on identity construction for various Jewish-Germans, she focuses on different aspects of identity such as the German-Jewish negative symbiosis, gender roles and physical traits. It seems that almost ten years after Seligmann paid to have *Rubensteins Versteigerung* published by a vanity press, thus revolutionizing contemporary German-language Jewish literature, that the scholars finally accepted Seligmann’s fictional works as a valid expression of Jewish-German sentiment and worthy of study.

With the exception of the Gilman, Schruff and Kühl studies, scholarly studies of Seligmann’s works have been mainly broad and superficial. Since it was Rafael Seligmann who broke the silence of contemporary Jewish-German writers and has been such a controversial figure in Germany’s literary scene since 1988, his works merit more in-depth analysis, especially concerning the area of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis-German-Jewish hybrid identity continuum. My thesis goes beyond a discussion of how controversial Seligmann’s works are and explores the negative symbiosis-hybrid identity continuum in Germany. Seligmann feels that this candid

representation of the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans is the key to spurring dialogue between the two groups and thus merits more attention by scholars.

Notes for Chapter 2

¹ Rafael Seligmann *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, 1989 (München: DTV, 1997) 71.

² Rafael Seligmann, "What Keeps the Jews in Germany Quiet?," *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature since 1989*, eds. Sander Gilman and Karen Remmler (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 178.

³ "Nest dirtier" or "Nestbeschmutzer" was a term originally used by the Nazi party before they came to power to describe intellectuals, especially Jews, who opposed their politics. Manya Gutman, in her review of *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, was the first to refer to Seligmann as a Nestbeschmutzer. Opponents of Seligmann picked up on this idea and began referring to him as such as well. Sander Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 49.

⁴ Although Gilman does not explicitly qualify what he means when he characterizes Seligmann's works as "radical" and "revolutionary", it is safe to assume he is referring to Seligmann's tendency to break taboos, such as having his protagonists refer to other Jews as "Nazis" and his negative representation of Jewish German characters in his novels. Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 47.

⁵ "Seligmann-Vortrag durch Bombenalarm gestört," *Netzeitung.de* 21 June 2001, 21 March 2004 <<http://www.netzeitung.de/ausland/148849.html>>.

⁶ This debate centers around claims made by Dr. Norman Finkelstein in his controversial book *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* published by Verso in 2000. A second, expanded edition of this book was published in September 2003 by Verso. The thesis of Finkelstein's book is that Jews are profiting from the Holocaust.

⁷ Rafael Seligmann "Wird der Holocaust vermarktet?," *Die Finkelstein Debatte*, ed. Petra Steinberger (München: Piper, 2001) 24-32. Originally published in: *Welt am Sonntag* (30) 23 July 2000.

⁸ After trying for almost a decade to find a publisher for *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, Seligmann published it with his own money.

⁹ Seligmann is most frequently compared to Maxim Biller by literary critics. It is also interesting to note that Henryk M. Broder, also an extremely provocative writer, has great respect for Seligmann, considering him to be someone who writes the truth.

¹⁰ In her dissertation, Inga-Marie Kühl points out that while Rafael Seligmann supports the concept of being a “Deutscher-Jude” in his works, he does not actually use this terminology when referring to the Jewish minority living in contemporary Germany other than himself. Instead he utilizes terms such as “die Juden Deutschlands”, “jüdische Autoren aus Deutschland” or “real existierende Juden in Deutschland.” She states: “Es scheint, als ob Seligmann noch nicht das nötige Vertrauen besitzt, daß sich die Gesamtheit der jüdischen Minderheit in Deutschland in diesem Begriff repräsentiert fühlen würde. Für ihn scheint der Begriff des deutschen Juden ein bestimmtes Selbstverständnis zu verkörpern, welches er zwar selber befürwortet, aber nicht anderen Juden aufzwingen will.” Inga-Marie Kühl, “Zwischen Trauma, Traum und Tradition: Identitätskonstruktionen in der Jungen Jüdischen Gegenwartsliteratur,” diss. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2001, 62-3.

¹¹ In general, “Jews living in Germany” do not refer to themselves as “German-Jews”, which suggests a hybrid identity in which both Jewish and German identities are of equal importance. In scholarly writing referring to this group, common language is “Jewish and non-Jewish Germans”, “Jews living in Germany” or simply “Jews and Germans.” It is important to note that this discussion is relevant in Germany mainly, because Jews living in Israel and elsewhere in the Diaspora identify Jews living in Germany as Germans. Katja Behrens discusses this phenomenon, noting that “...Jews and Germans related to each other on a whole. The majority of Germans have managed to evade the matter, and the individual Jews have found an island on which they can live.” She uses Marcel Reich-Ranicki, a Jewish literary critic known as “the pope of German literature”, who vehemently opposes being identified as being “German” although he’s lived in Germany since 1958, as an example: “You cannot consider me a German. I’m not a German. Don’t make me into a German. I’m a citizen of the Federal Republic: no question and with pleasure. I like this state, in spite of everything. I am a German literary critic, I write in German, I belong to German literature and culture, but I’m not a German and will never be one.” Behrens 39.

¹² Helene Schruff, “Seligmann, Rafael,” *Metzler Lexikon der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur: Jüdische Autorinnen und Autoren deutscher Sprache von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Andreas B. Kilcher (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000) 528.

¹³ Schruff, “Rafael Seligmann“ 528.

¹⁴ Rafael Seligmann, "What Keeps the Jews in Germany Quiet?", *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature Since 1989*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 178.

¹⁵ In *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung: Juden, Deutsche, Israelis* Seligmann discusses philosemitism and explains what he feels are the four classical and four *metastasierende* motivations for philosemitism in Germany. The classical motivations are *Humanität, christliche Nächstenliebe, Aberglaube* and *Opportunismus*. The four *metastasierende* motivations are significant in Post-Shoah Germany: *schlechtes Gewissen, Angst, Einsicht gepaart mit Vorurteilen* and *Masochismus*. When he speaks of *Angst*, he is referring to the fear that success or property attained by exploiting the Jews during the Shoah may be taken away from the Germans. *Einsicht gepaart mit Vorurteilen* refers to the recognition of the part of the Germans of all the valuable contributions the German Jews have made to German culture and society. Although the philosemites feel they are being good friends to the Jews, Seligmann maintains that their philosemitism actually has an adverse effect on the German-Jews: "Sie [the Germans] machen sich nicht die Mühe zu erkennen, daß sie mit ihrer Phantomliebe ihre Lieblinge, die Juden, noch tiefer ins Ghetto der Angst, Abgeschiedenheit und Unmenschlichkeit stürzen. Denn als Irdischer sein [the Jews] Lebtage Güte, Verständnis, Berzeihung, kühn Engelsgleichheit heucheln zu müssen, um den Wunschvorstellungen, die die Philosemiten sich von einem machen, gerecht zu werden, während man tatsächlich vor Deutschenangst und -haß schlottert und bebt, übersteigt die Kräfte jedes psychisch Gesunden..." Rafael Seligmann, *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung: Juden, Deutsche, Israelis* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1991) 109-13.

¹⁶ Helene Schruoff, *Wechselwirkungen: Deutsch-Jüdische Identität in erzählender Prosa der 'Zweiten Generation'* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000) 99.

¹⁷ Ritchie Robertson, "Rafael Seligmann's Rubensteins Versteigerung: The German-Jewish Family Novel before and After the Holocaust," *Germanic Review* 75.3 (Summer 2000): 184-5. & Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 50.

¹⁸ Gertrud Koch, "Corporate Identities: Zur Prosa von Dische, Biller und Seligmann," *Babylon 7* (1990): 139-142.

¹⁹ Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 49-50.

²⁰ Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 51-3.

²¹ Seligmann's doctoral thesis, *Israelis Sicherheitspolitik*, was published in 1982.

²² Seligmann, "What Keeps the Jews in Germany Quiet?" 179.

²³ The first edition of *Rubensteins Versteigerung* was published in 1988 by Wander. (Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 48.) DTV republished this book in 1997.

²⁴ Henryk M. Broder, "Rubensteins Beschwerden. Das witzige Roman-Debut des Rafael Seligmann," *Die Zeit* 11 August 1989: 41. qtd. in: Robertson 184-5.

²⁵ Seligmann, *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung* 148.

²⁶ Aron Krochmalnik, "Das Bumsen hat nichts geändert," *Nudnik* 9 (1988): 39-40. qtd. in Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 51.

²⁷ Koch 139.

²⁸ Koch 139.

²⁹ Koch 139.

³⁰ Manya Gutman was the cultural secretary of the Jewish community Seligmann was residing in at the time *Rubensteins Versteigerung* was published. Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 49.

³¹ Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 49.

³² Manya Gutman qtd. in: Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 49-50.

³³ Seligmann, "What Keeps the Jews in Germany Quiet? 179.

³⁴ Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 52-3.

³⁵ The following articles contain discussions of Seligmann's similarities to Roth:

Anat Feinberg, "Abiding in a Haunted Land: The Issue of Heimat in Contemporary German-Jewish Writing," *New German Critique* 70 (1997): 161-81.

Sander Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

Ritchie Robertson, "Rafael Seligmann's *Rubensteins Versteigerung*: The German-Jewish Family Novel before and After the Holocaust," *Germanic Review* 75.3 (Summer 2000): 179-93.

Helene Schruoff, *Wechselwirkungen: Deutsch-Jüdische Identität in erzählender Prosa der 'Zweiten Generation'* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000).

³⁶ “Rothian” refers to renowned Jewish-American writer Philip Roth. Roth’s most famous work is *Portnoy’s Complaint*, published in 1967. Roth’s style represents a critical, no hold’s barred approach to talking about Jewish life that until *Rubenstein’s Versteigerung* was unheard of in Germany.

³⁷ Feinberg 169.

³⁸ Schruff, *Wechselwirkungen* 61.

³⁹ In *Portnoy’s Complaint* the reader relives Alexander Portnoy’s voyage from child to mature adult working through his fear of commitment and sexual angst. *Rubenstein’s Versteigerung* tells the tale of Jonathan Rubenstein’s final year of Gymnasium; leading the reader down a road of juvenile exploits, failed sexual encounters, self-reflection and finally Jonathan’s realization of who he is and his place in German and Jewish society. In *Die jiddische Mamme* Samuel Goldmann reflects on his sexual exploits and failed attempt to flee from his mother and a committed relationship, finally settling down and marrying a nice Jewish woman as his mother always wanted.

⁴⁰ According to Schruff, Portnoy, Samy and Jonathan are all “aufsässige Söhne herrschsüchtiger Mütter, die mit ihren (unbefriedigten) sexuellen Obsessionen zu kämpfen haben.” She also points out that both Samy and Portnoy seek advice from psychologists. Schruff, *Wechselwirkungen* 61-2.

⁴¹ “Bad” Jews are Jews that do not portray a positive image of Jews. They have sexual problems, exhibit poor judgment and have unattractive personality flaws. Gilman, *Jews in Today’s German Culture* 48.

⁴² Read Gertud Koch’s comparison of Maxim Biller to Phillip Roth in: Koch 141.

⁴³ Schruff, *Wechselwirkungen* 61-3.

⁴⁴ Gilman, *Jews in Today’s German Culture* 51.

⁴⁵ Gilman, *Jews in Today’s German Culture* 49.

⁴⁶ Such elements are neurotic behavior, low self-esteem, extreme sexuality, hypochondria, and overbearing mothers to name a few.

⁴⁷ Woody Allen has made his mark as a Jewish-American filmmaker with his sharp-witted films that combine humor, sexuality, absurd situations, mischievous behavior and neurotic characters.

⁴⁸ Richard Lewis is a Jewish-American stand-up comedian who has also had success as a star of television and film. In his act he monopolized on Jewish stereotypes regarding sexuality, hypochondria, strong family influence, and neurotic behavior.

⁴⁹ In *Portnoy's Complaint* Roth describes Alexander Portnoy's father's inability to go to the bathroom in great detail. In Seligmann's *Der Milchmann* the protagonist incessantly imagines he has life-threatening ailments. The theme of hypochondria is commonly a source of Jewish humor.

⁵⁰ "The Nanny" was a popular sitcom in the 1990s that centered around a Jewish nanny and her meddling mother who is always pushing her to meet a nice Jewish doctor and get married.

⁵¹ Seligmann, "What Keeps the Jews in Germany Quiet?" 174-5.

⁵² To read more about this phenomenon, consult: Jack Zipes, "The Contemporary German Fascination for Things Jewish: Toward a Jewish Minor Culture," *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature Since 1989*. eds. Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 15-45.

⁵³ Seligmann observes that it is sanctioned to hate some groups, like criminals or members of a different race, but not for a minority to hate the majority population. It is for this reason that the Jewish-Germans are ashamed of their hatred toward non-Jewish Germans. Seligmann, "What Keeps the Jews in Germany Quiet?" 175.

⁵⁴ Rafael Seligmann, "Die Juden Leben," *Der Spiegel* (47) 16 November 1992.

⁵⁵ Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 56.

⁵⁶ To date I have found no secondary literature about *Der Milchmann*.

⁵⁷ Sander Gilman is a noted American scholar in the areas of Jewish studies, History and Psychiatry. He is a cultural and literary historian who has written over 40 books. Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler, eds. *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature since 1989* (New York: New York University Press, 1994) x.

⁵⁸ After four years of searching for a publisher Seligmann finally financed the publishing of this book himself. It wasn't until 1997 that the Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag published this book for Seligmann.

⁵⁹ Rafael Seligmann is only specifically discussed on pages 88 – 90. “Chapter 4: Representing Jewish Sexuality – The Damaged Body as the Image of the Damaged Soul.” 71 – 108.

⁶⁰ An excellent example is Ritchie Robertson’s article published in *Germanic Review*. Robertson does, however, examine the story and characters more closely than Gilman. Robertson gives his readers mini analyses of the Jewish family, German girlfriend, declaration by Jonathan “Ich bin ein deutscher Jude!”, and other aspects of the text. This article begins to turn its focus to the text itself instead of the history behind the text, but still lacks a clear focus and detailed analysis of any singular aspect of the text. Ritchie Robertson, “Rafael Seligmann’s *Rubensteins Versteigerung*: The German-Jewish Family Novel before and After the Holocaust,” *Germanic Review* 75.3 (Summer 2000): 179-93.

⁶¹ Published in book form in 2000 by Georg Olms Verlag. Helene Schruoff, *Wechselwirkungen: deutsch-jüdische Identität in erzählender Prosa der ‚Zweiten Generation‘* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000).

⁶² Her chapters focus on the following aspects of identity construction for the children of Holocaust survivors in Germany: parents, religion, the Shoah, anti-Semitism, the *goyim*, *Heimat* and Israel.

⁶³ Jonathan Rubenstein is the protagonist from *Rubensteins Versteigerung* and Samuel Goldmann is the protagonist for *Die jiddische Mamme*.

⁶⁴ To the best of my knowledge this is the only scholarly critique of *Schalom Meine Liebe*.

CHAPTER 3: SELECTED FICTIONAL WORKS BY RAFAEL SELIGMANN

My study is limited to three especially significant Seligmann texts. *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, his first novel, changed the face of post-Shoah German-Jewish literature. *Die jiddische Mamme* answers the question: Why do Jews choose to live in Germany in the shadow of Auschwitz. *Der Musterjude* reveals the dangers of allowing the German-Jewish negative symbiosis and others to define one's Jewish and non-Jewish identity in Germany. This chapter will give a brief summary of these three stories in order to facilitate the close discussion of the aspects of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis, the rift, and the German-Jewish negative symbiosis – Jewish German hybrid identity continuum in the next chapter.

Rubensteins Versteigerung

Rubensteins Versteigerung, as previously mentioned, was Seligmann's first published fictional work. It uses the format of a work of fiction to bring Jewish and non-Jewish Germans together to work out their problems. On the surface, this is the story of a 20-year-old Jewish man who is on a quest to lose his virginity, but one does not have to scratch too deeply to realize that this story has much more to offer. Seligmann uses the antics and belligerent behavior of his protagonist, Jonathan Rubenstein, to demonstrate the negative symbiotic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in modern-day Germany. To help readers better understand the complexity of the realities of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis, Seligmann focuses on a variety of themes. Some of the main themes in this text are Zionism, the Jewish family, German-Jewish identity, Jewish cultural life in Germany after the Holocaust, manifestations of an insurmountable

German guilt, feelings of Jewish helplessness and weakness, and the eternal Jewish victim. In integrating these aspects of Jewish identity and life in Germany, Seligmann shows how the German-Jewish negative symbiosis has affected life in Germany for both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans.

Jonathan Rubenstein is an underachiever, 20 years old and at risk of failing the *Abitur*¹ yet again. Jonathan's parents survived the Shoah because his father was able to move the family to Israel before European Jews started being shipped to the extermination camps. Jonathan's mother's family was, however, not so lucky; all of them died in the furnaces of Auschwitz. His parents make the difficult decision to move back to Germany when Jonathan is ten, where they hope to enjoy a more comfortable life. He is angry with his parents for bringing him back to the land of Nazis and murderers. This anger manifests itself in several ways: he calls his mother *Esel*,² or ass, spends his days trying to get laid instead of studying, disrespects his parents and the Jewish community, and dreams of moving to Israel to fight for the Zionist movement. Jonathan's angst about his German-Jewish identity is metaphorically represented in his quest to lose his virginity. During this quest he ends up falling in love with a German girl by the name of Susanne, who is, in fact, the daughter of an ex-Nazi. Eventually he sleeps with her, and they do truly seem to love each other, but not even this love is strong enough to withstand Susanne's guilty German conscience caused by the role her father and non-Jewish Germans played during the Holocaust. Jonathan, having grown to accept his role as a German-Jew over the course of the novel, is willing to overlook her father's past as an SS member, but Susanne argues that their relationship is doomed to fail: "Und die Vergangenheit ist auch in dir noch sehr lebendig. (...) Du kannst diese Vergangenheit

nicht über Bord schmeißen, nur weil du mich kennengelernt hast.”³ It is with these words from his beloved Susanne that Jonathan finally is forced to come to terms with his identity. In a dramatic emotional breakdown at the end of the story, Jonathan proclaims: “Ich bin ein deutscher Jude!”⁴

With these final words, “Ich bin ein deutscher Jude!”, Seligmann attempts to define a new relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in post-Shoah Germany. These five words carry with them the culmination of everything Jonathan has come to realize with such difficulty about himself during his coming-of-age process. For Jonathan, Israel was the promised land, and Zionism was a worthy cause in his eyes until he realizes through his friend Mottl that Zionists, too, take extreme measures and treat the Palestinians cruelly. Non-Jewish Germans were all Nazis and murderers in his eyes until he met Susanne and realized they can be kind, caring people too. Jonathan was a Jew who felt forced by his parents to live in Germany until he comes to accept in the course of the novel that he could not live in Israel and that growing up in Germany has shaped his personality. Essentially, where Jonathan once noticed only differences between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans and felt hate and fear, he notices by the end of the novel similarities between the two. However, as Helene Schruoff points out, it does not suffice that Jonathan declares himself a German-Jew; others must also recognize and accept this newfound identity before he can truly live as a German-Jew as opposed to a Jew living in Germany.⁵ Just as a president is powerless without his/her countrymen recognizing and respecting his/her authority, a German-Jew remains a Jew living in Germany until others accept that this hybrid identity is a possibility. It is a difficult process for Jonathan to come to terms with his German-Jewish identity in *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, and for the

reader to experience this process with him is eye opening and interesting. What Seligmann does not address, however, is how Jonathan's life changes after he accepts his German-Jewish identity. If Schruoff's observation is correct and one cannot make the transition from Jew living in Germany to German-Jew alone, Jonathan's struggle to be recognized as a German-Jew would have been interesting to investigate further.

Die jiddische Mamme

Much like *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, *Die jiddische Mamme* is a story that offers its readers a valuable look into one young man's Jewish German psyche. The majority of this story takes place in Israel instead of Germany, but it is exactly this glance at Israeli life that allows the reader to better understand why Seligmann's Jewish Germans protagonists choose to live in Germany over the Promised Land. According to Seligmann, he attempts to deal with a few different questions in this novel: why do Jewish men allow themselves to be controlled by their overbearing mothers and, by extension, how does this relationship influence their relationships with other Jewish women? What role does Israel play in the life of a second generation Jewish- German? What effect did the Arab-Israeli conflict had on the Israeli psyche in the late 1970s? How do different types of Jews⁶ view each other?⁷ The plot of this story is constructed around Seligmann's own experiences when he lived in Israel in 1978. Although he was officially there to conduct research for a year, he decided to take the trip to discover whether or not he wanted to live in Israel or Germany.⁸ Seligmann uses his protagonist, Samuel Goldmann, as a mouthpiece to express many ideas that he has expressed in his non-fiction articles, especially information about the state of Zionism in Israel. Seligmann

also strives to give his audience a gendered perspective in this novel. Instead of only using one first-person narrator, Samy the protagonist, he has made each of the women in Samy's life a first person narrator as well.⁹ Seligmann not only uses a variety of first person narrators, he also attempts to incorporate a non-linear progression of the story by using flashbacks. In addition to incorporating new literary aspects in this text, he also includes a glossary explaining Jewish vocabulary and rituals and describes various aspects of Jewish culture in significantly more detail than in his previous work. Helene Schruff equates these additions to an attempt to teach his non-Jewish readers about Jewish life.¹⁰

Die jiddische Mamme is vaguely reminiscent of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*. Like *Portnoy's Complaint*, the story is revealed through a series of flashbacks as the protagonist, forty-three year old Samuel Goldmann, meets with his therapist, whose presence is only revealed to the reader a couple of times over the course of the story. The subject of these meetings is the events during the year leading up to his marriage to Sara, his ex-wife. Through a seemingly uninterrupted string of girlfriends, some even simultaneously,¹¹ the story of Samuel's stay in Israel and his subsequent decision to return to Germany and marry Sara are revealed. Through Samy's interactions with each girlfriend, the reader learns about different aspects of life for the thirty-something Samy who still lives with his parents, is still a student, still does not have a job, and refuses to commit to marry a nice Jewish girl despite the immense pressure his mother puts on him.¹²

The women that tell the story of Samy's life are Bella, Karin, Rebecca, Sara, Verena, and Margalith. He loves each one, but has a tendency to quickly grow weary of

them and sometimes take extreme, irrational measures¹³ to escape them. Bella is his overbearing mother who attempts to control every aspect of his life. As much as she angers him, he loves her very deeply and prefers not to upset her when possible. Karin, *die Schikse*, is his German girlfriend of eight years who applies significant pressure on Samy to marry her. He refuses her relentless requests, claiming that his mother would never accept the marriage. Karin is a presence in his life until Sara finally traps him into marrying her. When Karin and Samy are in Germany together their relationship is considered unacceptable, but in Israel, Samy's friends accept it whole-heartedly. Rebecca, his aunt in Israel, was unable to have her own children because of her husband's impotence.¹⁴ She is so jealous of her sister for having Samy that she tries to convince him to live in Israel with her. Her desperation for the affection shared by mother and child manifests itself as a long-standing incestuous relationship with her nephew. Sara, *die Schwarze*, is a Sephardic Jew from a modest family in Israel. She loves Samy because he is a Diaspora Jew instead of a macho Israeli Zionist. She is attracted to his fear of fighting and death and his need for affection. When he begins dating her, he learns that the Sephardic Jews are the black sheep of the Jewish peoples. Verena, the German-Jew, has a Jewish mother but German father. She comes from a wealthy family and uses her money to gain acceptance by Munich's Jewish community. Even though she is ethnically Jewish, she is considered a *Schickse*, so no Jew will marry her and she is not interested in marrying a German. Margalith, the pioneer, lives on a Kibbuz and does whatever is best for the Kibbuz and the Jewish state. When Samy is with her, the reader learns of the political situation in Israel and the pressure put on Israeli men to be fearless fighters. Each woman adds a new dimension to the reader's comprehension of Jewish life

in both Germany and Israel, and each woman is strong in her own way. In the end, though, Samy realizes that he may be able to resist his mother and Sara's pressures to marry separately, but together they overpower him. After a heart-to-heart with his father about Jewish women, he decides to embrace his future with an overbearing Jewish woman controlling his life, just like his mother. He returns to Germany with his new wife after living in Israel, the Promised Land, for only six months because he could not bear living in fear of the threat of constant war. He also did not agree with the Israeli policy towards the Palestinians.

Der Musterjude

Der Musterjude explores many of the same issues as *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, but also addresses the instrumental role of Jews in lightening the burden of German guilt. Unlike Rubenstein, who spends more time with other Jews than Germans, Moische Bernstein¹⁵ spends most of his time among Germans and is almost the perfect Jewish cliché. This novel emphasizes that in modern day Germany the Shoah has created an environment in which non-Jewish Germans risk being labeled a Nazi or anti-Semite for openly discussing anything that reflects negatively on their Jewish minority. The novel demonstrates how hypersensitivity surrounding the Jewish-non-Jewish German relationship has made it taboo for non-Jewish Germans to speak negatively about Israel and Zionism, to express a desire to no longer live in the shadow of the Holocaust, to criticize their fellow Jewish countrymen for inappropriate behavior or to point out to their Jewish coworkers when their tactics are unethical or their work of poor quality. The novel reflects that Jews living in post-war Germany have been placed on a pedestal as the perfect victims who can do no wrong. Consequently, there is pressure on the German-

Jews to play the part of the perfect Jew. Moische becomes an important force in the German media because only Jews are allowed to criticize publicly both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in Germany. He fulfills his role as the model Jew perfectly. His declarations that the Jews are ready to forgive the Germans¹⁶ or his praises of Hitler's accomplishments and expression of gratitude for Hitler's role in the founding of the Jewish state¹⁷ demonstrate that Moische is indeed a German puppet. He is a puppet because he aspires to be successful and will break any taboo and write anything to gain fame and fortune.

This novel centers around three main characters: Moische Bernstein, who is a model Jew, Hanna Bernstein, the typical Jewish mother and Auschwitz survivor, and Heiner Keller, the stereotypical philosemite.¹⁸ Moische Bernstein is a forty-year-old failure in the eyes of his mother and fellow Jews. He lives at home with his controlling mother and works at the family Jeans boutique for a menial wage. After completing high school Moische first went to Israel to fight for Zionism before moving to New York in an attempt to be a journalist. When his father dies his mother shames him into returning to Germany to help run the family business. His mother, a strong, traditional Jewish woman, is overbearing and tries to control every aspect of Moische's life. She succeeds until he convinces Heiner, a German friend who works for *Logo!* magazine, to let him write a column. It is with this column that Moische transforms himself into the perfect mouthpiece for the non-Jewish German press when he writes: "Seien wir ehrlich! Sprechen wir lieber von gegenseitigem Respekt. Wir Juden sind zur Aussöhnung bereit. Nicht mehr und nicht weniger."¹⁹ Although Moische himself hates the non-Jewish

Germans as much as any other Jew, he knows that non-Jewish Germans want to be forgiven for the crimes of the Shoah and uses this to launch his career.

The success of Moische's first article is amazing and leads Moische and editor-in-chief of *Logo!* magazine, Knut Reydt, to more success than they ever dreamed of. They become power hungry and as their success grows they will do or say anything to get even more. Moische will write anything to sell magazines and breaks every taboo imaginable. He even names Hitler man of the century in one of his pieces, ironically noting that the Shoah motivated the Jews to build an Israeli state. He systematically double-crosses everyone who helps him in his quest for success and eventually becomes editor-in-chief of *German Today*. Nothing could get in the way of Moische's success except his own greed and his past. His outrageous political commentaries are so controversial that they, at the same time, sell magazines and upset the German-Jews. In his quest for success, Moische neglects his mother, who feels distraught and alone. She confides in Heiner that unbeknownst to Moische, her late husband was impotent and Moische's father was probably a non-Jewish German. This is a secret she had kept to herself for years. Heiner exposes Moische as a fraud, whose success then comes to a screeching halt. In the end Moische must return to his mother in Munich and the family jeans boutique with nothing to show of his recent successes.

Seligmann uses the characters of Jonathan, Samy, and Moische as a mouthpiece to justify why he himself has chosen an existence in Germany. Through Jonathan's interactions with Mottl we learn that Mottl feels freer to express his true opinions in Germany and that he wishes to be more than a soldier killing like a "Nazi".²⁰ Samy's experiences show us that many Jewish Germans are disillusioned about what life is like

in the Promised Land. They go there expecting to live a happy Jewish existence without the tensions of living as a Jewish German in Germany and discover that life in Germany is much easier. And poor Moische's experiences as a young man living on a Kibbuz demonstrate the superior social benefits offered by the German state, allowing everyone to have a good quality of life. When faced with the choice of living with fanatics and hard work in Israel versus preferential treatment and a superior social network in Germany; Seligmann's protagonists choose the latter of the two despite the fact that they must interact with non-Jewish Germans. Zionism, according to Seligmann, is not the perfect solution to escaping the horrors of the Shoah.

Notes for Chapter 3

¹ An exam that German high school students must pass to successfully complete high school.

² Jonathan's girlfriend Mara asks him why he calls his mother *Esel*. He tells her it is a term of endearment because he had wanted a donkey as a child living in Israel. It seems like this response is merely a ploy to impress her, because his unspoken response to her questions is: "Weil sie ein verdammtes Grauhaar ist, und eine blöde Nuß!" Rafael Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* (München: DTV, 1997) 44.

³ Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 185-6.

⁴ Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 189.

⁵ Schruff, *Wechselwirkungen* 222-3.

⁶ Specifically, he focuses his attention on Diaspora, Sephardic, and Ashkenazic Jews.

⁷ Seligmann, *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung* 155-158.

⁸ Seligmann, *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung* 157.

⁹ He discusses this "experiment" in *Mit beschränkter Hoffnungen*. "Ich selbst habe die Wonnen und Leiden einer jüdischer Mutter erlebt – allein darüber konnte und wollte ich klagen, sie preisen und über sie berichten. Mochte sich jeder Mann und jede Frau damit identifizieren oder nicht. Wie beim »Rubenstein« in einen Antisemiten wollte ich mich nun – man verzeihe den Vergleich – in die Frau(en) versetzen. Ich ging noch einen Schritt weiter als zuvor und schilderte den Geschlechterstreit abwechselnd aus der Sicht beider Kontrahenten. Bemerkenswert an diesem Experiment: Als ich die Rohfassung des Manuskripts mehreren Freundinnen zu lesen gab, lautete die Kritik unisono: »Du hast naive, idealisierende Vorstellungen von uns Frauen. Wir Weiber denken viel klarer, pragmatischer, konsequenter und auch härter.«" ⁹ Seligmann, *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung* 155-6.

¹⁰ See discussion of the pedagogical aspect of Seligmann's texts in previous chapter.

¹¹ While in Israel Samy simultaneously dates Sara and Margalith. At one point in the story Karin insists on visiting Samy in Israel while Verena is actually visiting Samy in Israel. He asks Verena to move into a hotel until she can get a flight back to Germany. Simultaneously Samy juggles Verena, in a nearby hotel, Karin, in his apartment, and Sara, with whom he is attempting to rekindle a relationship.

¹² In *Portnoy's Complaint* the protagonist is also in his thirties and refuses to settle down and start a family despite the pressures of his overbearing mother. He does, however, have a prestigious job working for the City of New York and lives on his own.

¹³ When Sara follows him to Germany, Samy takes the next flight to Germany to escape the pressure from her and his mother to marry. When his plane arrives in Israel he realizes the only possible place for him to stay is with Sara's parents. Sara, of course, flies back to Israel with Samy's mother and he is married a week later. Rafael Seligmann, *Die jiddische Mamme* (München: DTV, 1990) 174-245.

¹⁴ His impotence was caused by the suffering he endured in the concentration camps during the Holocaust.

¹⁵ Moische Bernstein is referred to by many different names throughout the course of the novel. Initially, he calls himself the more non-Jewish German name Manfred Bern, Manni for short, to sound less Jewish. Later, he takes on the name Moische Israel Bernstein to sound more Jewish – therewith boosting his success as a journalist.

¹⁶ Rafael Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* (München: DTV, 1999) 73.

¹⁷ Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 124-5.

¹⁸ Rita Bradshaw, "Comic Vision and 'Negative Symbiosis'," *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000*, eds. Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 270-1.

¹⁹ Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 73.

²⁰ Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 86-87.

CHAPTER 4: THE GERMAN-JEWISH NEGATIVE SYMBIOSIS IN RAFAEL SELIGMANN'S WORKS

The characters of Jonathan, the German-Jew; Moische, the model Jew; and Samuel, the Diaspora Jew, all play their roles in bringing to light the negative German-Jewish symbiosis in modern day Germany. It is through their failures and success, their words and feelings that Seligmann expresses this problematic relationship. Jonathan and Moische suffer from low self-esteem because of their Jewish identities, which manifests itself in inappropriate behavior, such as drinking too much and being disrespectful of women and their families. It is only after the male Jewish characters lose those things that they cherish most, Jonathan loses his girlfriend and Moische his career, that they are able to come to terms with their German-Jewish identity. Samy's experience of *Aliyah*¹ proves without a doubt that an existence in Israel is not an option for him and that life in Germany is much more agreeable. Seligmann does not allow the reader the opportunity to see if his characters' new understanding of their position in German society solves their identity crises. Whether or not this new understanding of a hybrid German-Jewish identity helps alleviate some of the tensions created by the negative symbiosis, which both binds and creates feelings of animosity between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, remains unanswered in these three works.

Through the actions, reactions, sentiments, and words of Jonathan, Moische, and Samuel the reader is offered a clearer picture of the manifestations of the negative German-Jewish symbiosis, which, as Hannah Arendt and Dan Diner argue, has existed

since Auschwitz. In *Rubensteins Versteigerung* Herr Frankfurter could almost be quoting Hannah Arendt when he tells Jonathan:

Wie gesagt, wenn es sich nicht umgehen läßt. Das heißt, wenn Leute verurteilt werden sollen, nur damit die deutsche Justiz ihre angebliche Bereitschaft und Fähigkeit unter Beweis stellen kann, die Verbrechen der Nazis zu verfolgen." [...] "Sehen Sie, Herr Rubenstein, was damals passiert ist, war so furchtbar, daß es nicht gesühnt würde, selbst wenn Sie jeden Verantwortlichen hundertmal erschießen würden. Dadurch würde kein Toter wieder lebendig."²

Herr Frankfurter claims that even though the Germans are willing to try Nazis for their crimes, these sentences imposed upon the Nazis by the German legal system will not bring back those who already died. Similarly, Hannah Arendt argues that the legal means of the justice system will never be adequate punishment to erase the German guilt.³

While Seligmann fails to offer a solution to this dilemma, it is clear that the way to find that solution is an open dialogue between both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, so they can both come to terms with the ghosts of Auschwitz that haunt them.

Seligmann critiques how the non-Jewish Germans attempt to come to terms with their guilt in many ways in these three books. In *Der Musterjude* Heiner attempts to be a friend to all Jews, even when they mishandle and insult him. He frequents Jewish hangouts, respects Jewish traditions and remains polite even when Moische tries to anger him. Excessive philosemitism among non-Jewish Germans is, however, something Seligmann feels hinders the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. The

following quote from *Der Musterjude* demonstrates that even though Heiner wears a philosemitic mask, an underlying anti-Semitism is nonetheless observable.

Heiner unterdrückte seinen Ärger. Konnte man es diesen Hebräern nie recht machen? Erst peinigten sie einen bis aufs Blut, und wenn man darüber die Geduld verlor, war man für sie gleich ein Nazi. Aber er hatte keine Lust auf diese endlose deutsch-jüdische Debatte, bei der er als Deutscher von vornherein auf verlorenem Posten stand – zumal in diesem Judenlokal.⁴

Heiner wants to yell at Moische and tell him to stop his attacks, but he cannot because that would be the reaction that Moische hopes for. If Heiner were to react to Moische's prodding, he would give Moische an excuse to validate his feelings of anger and hate towards the non-Jewish Germans. Instead, Heiner calmly listens to Moische's drunken ranting and raving and stands by his Jewish friend on his birthday. He even offers Moische the chance to achieve his dream of becoming a writer. Heiner's ability to hold back his agitation with Moische demonstrates that he understands the limitations of acceptable treatment of Jews in Germany, but his thoughts still reveal an underlying anti-Semitism.⁵ Instead of reflecting on his anger towards Moische and the situation, he generalizes about the "Hebrews", a racial and derogatory term. In this quote the reader even gains insight into the source of Heiner's repressed anti-Semitic feelings: a sense of hopelessness at ever escaping the tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in post-Shoah Germany. Heiner's attempts to repress and mask his underlying anti-Semitic feelings with overtly philosemitic behavior are problematic because a person cannot indefinitely hold in his/her anger. As the following paragraph will show, Seligmann again

expresses his concerns about excessively philosemitic behavior on the part of non-Jewish Germans through Samuel in *Die jiddische Mamme*.

Heiner's philosemitic tendencies demonstrate one way the individual attempts to make better the wrongs of Hitler's Germany, which Moische turns into a tragically comic episode as he intentionally pushes every proverbial philosemitic button in an attempt to make Heiner lose face. Another equally absurd practice is the exaggerated importance on the part of non-Jewish Germans to frequent *Gedenkstätte*, which Samuel takes issue with in *Die jiddische Mamme* in a conversation with Wolfgang, a non-Jewish German friend on holidays in Tel Aviv.

»In München ist noch Winter«, klagte Wolf. »Am liebsten würde ich hierbleiben, aber heute nachmittag müssen wir weiter nach Jerusalem. Als erstes geht's nach Yad Vashem, der Holocaustgedenkstätte, danach in die Altstadt zum Einkaufen.«

[Samuel] »Israel-Cocktail: Schuld, und Sühne plus shopping?«

»Wie meinst du das, Samuel?«

»Ich meine, daß es zynisch und dumm ist, jeden Politdeppen, Fußballer, Pfaffen und Globetrotter dort hinzuzerren – damit er Trauer und Betroffenheit heuchelt. Gefühle lassen sich nicht vorschreiben.«

Wolf war sichtlich verwirrt. [Wolfgang] »Aber das ist doch eure nationale Gedenkstätte. Das kann man doch nicht kritisieren.«

[Samuel] »Man kann! Wir sind hier nicht in Deutschland.

Majestätsbeleidigung ist in Israel nicht strafbar. Außerdem habe ich nichts

gegen die Gedenkstätte, sondern gegen die Praxis, sie als Gewissensmühle gegen alle Ausländer einzusetzen, vor allem gegen die Deutschen.«⁶

Samuel, a Jewish German, finds the non-Jewish German fascination with visiting Holocaust memorials both absurd and dangerous. His trivializing analogy of German vacations to Israel as *Israel-Cocktails* demonstrates that he does not appreciate these philosemitic measures as redemption for the crimes of the past. Furthermore, as Inga-Marie Kühl points out, an underlying anxiety is apparent in Samuel's tone that he feels such practices contribute to "Antisemitismus wegen Auschwitz", a term used by Dan Diner to describe German rebellion against constant pressure to accept and feel guilt for Germany's role in the Holocaust.⁷ Both Wolfgang's desire to visit Israel and Samuel's apprehensiveness about Wolfgang's motives for visiting Israel are logical in light of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis: Wolfgang wants to show that he is repentant for the sins of his father's generation, and Samuel would prefer that Wolfgang, as a non-Jewish German, not come into contact with excessive allegations of German guilt, for Samuel perceives the risk that open discussion of the feelings Jews harbor concerning the Holocaust might upset non-Jewish Germans enough to make them angry at the Jews again.

While non-Jewish German men must hold their tongues in the face of inappropriate Jewish-German behavior and flock to Holocaust Memorials, German women have other means of compensating for the collective German guilt in Seligmann's novels. In *Rubensteins Versteigerung* Susanne feels that if she befriends a Jew she will better understand them, which might give her peace of mind and erase the guilt bestowed upon her by extension of her father's, a Nazi, actions during the Holocaust. Cordula's

affair with Moische in *Der Musterjude* is not that different. She reflects that “[M]it Moische zu schlafen, verschaffte Cordula erstmals Befriedigung. Denn Moische war Jude. Sein Volk, seine Angehörigen waren von Deutschen gemartert und getötet worden. Indem sie mit Moische schlief, baute sie die deutsche Schuld an den Juden ab.”⁸ This quote illustrates that Cordula feels a momentary relief from her German guilt when she is in Moische’s arms. She needs him to feel better about herself and her people. Where Susanne fails to find the peace of mind she seeks in her relationship with Jonathan, Cordula succeeds with Moische. One factor that differentiates these two romances is the presence of family. Susanne and Jonathan are younger and both live with their parents, thus their family has a greater influence on their lives. Susi and Jonathan’s relationship is perfect until Jonathan explains that his mother’s entire family was killed in the Holocaust. The situation only gets worse after Esel and Susi meet. Despite Susi’s best efforts to make a good impression, Esel takes offense at her presence and dismisses her as a Nazi. Susi is convinced that even though she loves Jonathan, their relationship will never withstand the pressure their families will put on it.⁹ Cordula and Moische are significantly older than Susi and Jonathan. They live neither with nor even in the same town as their families, enabling them to freely express their love for each other without the meddling of overbearing Jewish mothers.¹⁰

Essentially, the love that Cordula and Susanne feel for Seligmann’s protagonists is an expression of the same philosemitism that Heiner represents. Heiner uses friendship and observation of Jewish customs to communicate his philosemitic sentiments; Cordula and Susanne use sex and love. They all experience varying degrees of satisfaction from their efforts. Susi ends her relationship with Jonathan when she realizes that loving a Jew

has done little to make her feel better about the fact that her father was in the SS.

Metaphorically speaking, one could observe that this break-up represents an abrupt end to her philosemitic attempts to reconcile herself with her father's SS past. Heiner appears to be relatively satisfied with himself and his relationship with the Jewish German community, although he occasionally inwardly expresses anger towards Moische's actions and words. Cordula, however, as the quote above shows, has discovered liberation from Germany's past in Moische's arms. Is it possible for someone to be absolved from this guilt through an effort to learn about Jewish German life and a few kind gestures? Jonathan mentions that any German with a conscience will suffer from this guilt,¹¹ so how do Heiner's and Cordula's ability to feel absolved of their guilt reflect on their characters?

Heiner, Cordula and Susi serve as examples of individual attempts to alleviate the collective German guilt bestowed upon them, but how does a village that once had a flourishing Jewish population deal with the fact that their entire Jewish population has been exterminated or forced to flee? In *Rubensteins Versteigerung* Jonathan visits his father's childhood home of Ichenhausen, where his father, and by extension he as well, are treated like kings by the locals. But it is unclear if this special treatment gives the villagers the peace of mind they seek. Jonathan reflects that: "Wenn Fred sich mit den Eingeborenen hier unterhält, wird sofort schlechtes Gewissen spürbar. Natürlich, jeder von ihnen hat soviel und so oft er nur konnte Juden geholfen – ebenso im übrigen Deutschland."¹² It is apparent that Jonathan does not believe that the villagers did everything in their power to help the Jews of Ichenhausen, but he accepts their royal treatment all the same. If indeed the

villagers felt that they had done everything they could to help their Jews, would they feel the guilt that Jonathan senses? It seems that their exceptionally generous treatment of their Jewish visitors is a failed attempt to erase their share of the collective German guilt. In fact, in treating Jonathan and Fred, his father, like royalty, they are sending a signal that they are only guests. A true member of the community would never receive such a royal reception.

Not every non-Jewish German is a philosemite; those who are not, however, are aware of certain expectations and limitations imposed upon them because of the Shoah. At least this is the picture painted by Seligmann. He goes even further to suggest that Jewish Germans will take advantage of this tense environment caused by the German-Jewish negative symbiosis to have things go in their favor; often recounting stories of their families' experiences in concentration camps.¹³

Jonathan was a bad student on all accounts. He was the oldest student in his class and on his way to failing again. He preferred chasing after women to studying. When faced with failing French he plots to use his instructor's guilty conscience concerning the Holocaust to receive a passing grade. He requests that his mother schedule a conference with the instructor to find out his grade. If the grade is passing she should say thank you and leave, if, however, it is failing she is to remind the instructor that most of her family was killed in Auschwitz. At first Esel reacts with anger at this proposition:

Aber willst du meine ermordeten Schwestern und meinen Bruder für deine Zwecke mißbrauchen. – Esel/ Nein! Ich will nur mit allen Mitteln verhindern, daß ich durchsaue. Das einzige, was in diesem Fall zu wirken

scheint, ist das schlechte Gewissen der Deutschen. Wer weiß, was die Schneeberger oder ihre Familie damals angerichtet haben?¹⁴

After a heated argument, Esel agrees to meet with his instructor. Jonathan is conscious of the absurdity of his request, but plays on his mother's emotions to use her misfortune to his advantage all the same. In fact, he reflects that: "Esel und die Deutschen werden mir gewiß eines Tages die Rechnung präsentieren."¹⁵ It seems as though this example is a clear demonstration of Seligmann's support for Finkelstein's argument that the Jews are profiting from the Holocaust.

Regarding Seligmann's representation of Finkelstein's argument that Jews are profiting from the Holocaust to gain a certain advantage over non-Jewish Germans, it is noteworthy that not all abuses of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis on the part of Jewish Germans are undertaken in the hopes of material gain. In fact, sometimes it seems that Seligmann's protagonists are merely trying to see how uncomfortable they can make their non-Jewish German counterparts for their own amusement. In *Der Musterjude*, Seligmann portrays a discussion between Manfred and Heiner in which Moische clearly enjoys watching Heiner squirm at his allegations that some Jews possess Nazi-like traits. Heiner realizes that any remark he might make to support Moische's allegations or any comment on Moische's inappropriate behavior would permit Moische to accuse him of being a Nazi or anti-Semite.

Moische zog an seiner Zigarette. »Es gibt auch schlechte Juden. Die Kerle im Kibbuz beispielsweise. Das war Fronarbeit wie im KZ.«

»Niemand hat dich gezwungen, im Kibbuz zu arbeiten. Du hättest ja aufhören können. Außerdem bist du nicht umgebracht worden!«

Manfred genöß Heiners politisch korrekte Empörung. »Zum Umbringen haben sie doch die Araber.«

»Wenn ich die Juden... pardon, die Israelis mit Nazis vergleiche, regst du dich auf...«

»Zu Recht!«

»Aber du darfst es? Du selbst beschimpfst die Israelis als Araberkiller.«

»Nicht jeder Killer ist ein Nazi – auch wenn ihr Deutschen es gern so hättet.«

Dieser Jude war wie ein Aal. Moisches süffisantes Grinsen brachte Heiner in Rage.

Der Jeansverkäufer genöß eine Weile die erregte Hilflosigkeit seines Gegenübers. Dann hatte er ein Einsehen und lenkte das Gespräch wieder auf unverfänglichere Geleise. »Nicht einmal die furchtbare Wirklichkeit des Kibbuz hat damals meinen zionistischen Aberglauben erschüttern können. Also habe ich nach meiner Flucht aus dem Lager...« Moische beobachtete zufrieden, wie Heiner bei diesem Wort wieder zusammenzuckte. »... ich meine, aus dem Kibbuz, sofort einen hebräischen Sprachkurs belegt.«¹⁶

In this passage Moische is clearly in control. Heiner initially attempts to dismiss Moische's analogy by stating that in a Kibbuz Jews are not killed and are free to leave at will, but Moische's next comparison of the Arabs to the Jews during the Shoah confuses Heiner. Heiner is aware of the unwritten rules of how he is supposed to behave in Jewish company and the thoughts he is not permitted to verbalize because of his people's actions

during the Shoah, which is contrary to Moische's utterances. When he attempts to verify if these rules have changed, Moische's response ensures him that they have not, but he then makes reference to the Germans as killers to add insult to injury. A furious Heiner can do nothing more than accept Moische's insults as Moische blissfully continues to provoke him. It is important to note here that Moische and Heiner are friends, and were it not for their Jewish and non-Jewish German heritage and the effects of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis on post-war society, it would be unthinkable for two friends to interact with each other in this manner and remain friends. In fact, where most people might politely listen to Moische, but at the first possible moment excuse themselves to escape the uncomfortable situation, Heiner spends the whole evening with Moische and even offers him work as a writer. It is apparent that Heiner's philosemitic tendencies and both of their comprehensions of the social rules in response to the German-Jewish negative symbiosis are the forces that make Moische's otherwise inappropriate behavior acceptable. It is equally apparent in this exchange between these two friends that Moische is abusing his position as the Jewish victim. Under normal circumstances a victim would be considered the weaker party, but response to the atrocities of the Shoah has given him power over non-Jewish Germans in post-war Germany.

It was Hannah Arendt who first described post-Shoah Jews as "the perfect victim"¹⁷, a concept that Seligmann satirizes in *Der Musterjude* when he describes them as the *Lieblingsopfer* of the Germans.¹⁸ Essentially, Seligmann portrays a Germany, where anyone who dares attack, verbally or physically, a Jew loses credibility in German society. Heiner was aware that society would not permit him to speak negatively to or about Moische, but Seligmann shows that no one who is not Jewish has room to speak

negatively about Jews on German soil. Fatima Örsel-Obermayr inadvertently gives Moische his biggest break as a journalist and simultaneously ruins her own career¹⁹ when her vicious verbal attacks on the television program *Kultur intellektuell* reduce Moische to tears.²⁰

»Jüdische Friedhöfe!« unterbrach ihn [Moische] Fatima Örsel-Obermayr.

»Sie jammern darüber, daß Kinder oder Betrunkene Grabsteine umstoßen!

Das ist unschön, gewiß. Aber geradezu unappetitlich ist, wie Sie und Ihre Glaubensgenossen seit über einem halben Jahrhundert nur im eifernen Leid

schwelgen. Auch ich lehne die Untaten der Nazis ab. Aber tun Sie doch

bitte nicht so, als ob die Juden die einzigen Opfer von Gewalt und

Rassismus in diesem Jahrhundert gewesen waren!«²¹

»Herr Bernstein, versuchen Sie nicht, unsere Zuschauer für dumm zu

verkaufen! Verbiegen Sie nicht die Tatsachen. Sie wissen genau, daß es

gegenwärtig nur einen Völkermord gibt. Er ereignet sich seit einem halben

Jahrhundert in Palästina. Seine Opfer sind unschuldige arabische Frauen,

Kinder, Griese und Männer. Die Täter sind Juden. Juden wie Sie!«²²

As these quotes demonstrate, not only does she accuse Jews of exaggerating their suffering, but she also implicates them as mass murderers of the Palestinian people.

Fatima is a renowned advocate for the rights of foreigners in Germany who is exempt from any accountability for the events of the Shoah, but is nonetheless ostracized for her unacceptable comments about Jews in a German forum on German soil.²³ As Seligmann points out, shame about the Shoah and oversensitivity to anti-Semitism have become part of German identity in post-war Germany. “Fatima Örsel-Obermayr hatte, ohne es zu

ahnen, ein deutsches Tabu gebrochen. Sie hatte die Deutschen ihrer Lieblingsopfer beraubt. Was blieb den Deutschen, wenn man ihnen den wertvollsten Teil ihrer Seele nahm, das schlechte Gewissen gegenüber den Juden?“²⁴ Much like Seligmann’s fictionally portrayed Germany that is outraged at Fatima’s allegations about the Jews, contemporary German society was equally outraged by the portrayal of Jews in Seligmann’s *Rubensteins Versteigerung*. I maintain that the connection between the reaction to Fatima and the real life reaction to *Rubensteins Versteigerung* both stem from the same need caused by the German-Jewish negative symbiosis to not openly discuss the Shoah. Seligmann writes through Moische that the heart of non-Jewish German identity is their guilty conscience, taking away anything that has become familiar is always cause for an outcry of anger from the general public.

After closely examining Seligmann’s novels and the sentiments expressed by his protagonists it appears that in many ways the Jewish German role as the *Lieblingsopfer* of their non-Jewish German counterparts has created an atmosphere in Germany that facilitates a comfortable existence for them. Seligmann presents a post-Shoah Germany in his novels where Jewish-Germans reap the benefits of a modern welfare state where they are not in danger of being persecuted and are also not held accountable for their actions. He paints a picture of a Germany where there is an underlying anti-Semitism, but most non-Jewish Germans dare not openly voice these sentiments. In effect, the German-Jewish negative symbiosis actually shelters Seligmann’s protagonists from the difficulties in life that others have to work hard to avoid. Initially, when Samuel arrives in Israel he is still basking in his idealized image of the Promised Land and the serenity it will offer him: “Hier gab es keine Antisemiten, keine herrschsüchtigen Mammes und keine

heiratswütigen Schicksen. Israel macht mich frei. Erstmals in meinem Leben.”²⁵ As time passes and he experiences the reality of life in Israel more and more and slowly comes to the conclusion that the reality is nothing similar to his expectations. He begins to appreciate his easy existence in Germany more and more. One day he takes a trip to a Kibbuz with Sara, where he finally definitively realizes that he is too weak to face the daily pressures and dangers of life in Israel: “[...] seit meiner Patrouillenfahrt mit Motti wußte ich, daß ich nicht in Israel bleiben würde. Denn ich hatte weder Lust, Menschen umzubringen, noch getötet oder zum Krüppel geschossen zu werden.”²⁶ Effectively, his *Alyiah* that was supposed to reinforce his connection to Israel and his people was the most efficient means of convincing him that he must stop harboring his anti-German/anti-Germany sentiments and attempt to find a way to alleviate some of the tensions caused by the German-Jewish negative symbiosis in order to foster a better life in Germany for himself.

Samuel’s decision to live in Germany symbolizes that life is easier for him there than Israel, but it does not imply that life in Germany is simple for Jewish Germans. Of the relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans portrayed in these three novels, none illustrate Katja Behren’s rift better than Jonathan and Susanne’s relationship. They love each other and enjoy being in each other’s company immensely, but at first mention of the Shoah a wall goes up between them. Jonathan invites Susanne to accompany him to visit his mother, who is at a spa recuperating from the stress of her husband’s recent heart attack. Although he realizes that his mother will be infuriated he is with a *Schickse*, he sees this retreat as an excuse to spend the night with Susanne and finally lose his virginity. Initially, Susanne is cheerful and looks forward to meeting

Jonathan's mother. Jonathan, however, warns her that his mother may not be happy to meet her:

Meine Mutter ist wirklich ein wenig kompliziert. Sie hat im Krieg fast alle Familienangehörigen verloren. Sie wurden von den Nazis ausgerottet. Und deshalb ist ihr Verhältnis zu den Deutschen ein wenig zwiespältig.

Solange ihr die Leute fremd sind, reagiert sie ablehnend. Erst wenn sie die Menschen näher kennenlernt [...] kann sie ganz charmant sein.²⁷

Immediately, Susanne becomes visibly upset by this information and rejects all of Jonathan's attempts to console her. Instead she goes for a walk alone in a field to collect her thoughts. She returns to Jonathan with a renewed cheerful and optimistic disposition: "»Hallo. Da bin ich wieder. [...] Und außerdem habe ich einen Strauß Feldblumen gepflückt – für deine Mutter. Meinst du, daß sie sich darüber freut? [...] Deine Mutter wird mir richtig sympathisch.«"²⁸ Just as Behren's rift suggests, the dynamic between Jonathan and Susanne quickly changes at the mention of the Holocaust. Suddenly, the distance between them grows and they can no longer comfortably communicate with each other. Only a short time later, however, they are as close as ever to each other. The rift yawned open for a brief time and then shrunk again. Seligmann also depicts a similar relationship between Moische and Heiner in *Der Musterjude*. Throughout the course of the novel their relationship is ever-changing. They are both good friends and bitter enemies. They simultaneously help each other succeed and cause each others' professional downfalls.²⁹ As Behren's explanation of the rift suggests, every time the rift opens wider in a Seligmann novel, it can be traced back to a specific moment, an unwelcome comment or misinterpreted action. While the rift may bring uncomfortable

moments to friendships between Jewish and non-Jewish German relationships, it still allows for periods of happiness, a phenomenon I feel is apparent in these novels.

Conclusions

Rafael Seligmann, the *Nestbeschmutzer*, is a rebel among the second generation German-Jewish writers in post-Shoah Germany. His fictional interpretations of life in post-Shoah Germany are innovative because they are equally offensive to both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. They can be studied as glimpses into various aspects of the problematic relationship between these two juxtaposed groups that are rarely honestly and openly discussed, such as philosemitism, interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, and how non-Jewish Germans profit from their victim status in post-Shoah Germany. Seligmann intends to provoke his readers into breaking the silence on these issues in hopes that the strained post-Shoah relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans may one day improve.

Fiction is a costume that Seligmann has chosen to dress up the reality of life in post-war Germany for its Jewish and non-Jewish German citizens. He describes this reality without providing any solutions, so that his readers might begin to question the status quo and search for a solution to the tensions caused by the German-Jewish negative symbiosis in modern Germany. Fiction is a useful format because people are often more defensive when something is packaged as fact. The use of fictional characters and events that reflect reality allows the reader to enjoy the story while still being able to relate to it and absorb its moral. Much as Aesop leaves his readers with a one sentence moral at the end of his fables, Seligmann leaves his reader with a short moral that he has built up to in the previous 200 to 400 pages. The morals of Seligmann's stories are like a moment of

clarity for his protagonists. In *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, Jonathan realizes “Ich bin ein deutscher Jude!”³⁰, a declaration that, in my opinion, indicates that Seligmann wants Jewish and non-Jewish Germans to reconsider the possibility of a hybrid German-Jewish existence in post-Shoah Germany. In *Der Musterjude*, Moische finally admits that while he thought he controlled his life and decisions, that he is exactly the person that the non-Jewish Germans made him to be: “Ihr! Ihr macht mich zum Juden. Zu eurem Musterjuden!”³¹ In this case, I feel that Seligmann is using his protagonist, Moische, as a vehicle to encourage Jewish and non-Jewish Germans to reevaluate how the problematic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in post-Shoah Germany negatively influences their identity construction. In both the case of Moische’s and Jonathan’s final words, I posit that Seligmann has taken advantage of the fictional genre to make strong statements about unpleasant aspects of life in post-Shoah Germany.

In the previous section of this chapter many manifestations of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis in Rafael Seligmann’s fictional works *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, *Die jiddische Mamme* and *Der Musterjude* are presented. The philosemitic behavior on the part of the non-Jewish Germans and abuses on the part of Jewish Germans of a society that has grown from this excessive love for things Jewish are the fictional interpretations of Seligmann’s observations of life in Germany for Jews. Throughout the body of all three novels he makes a convincing case for the existence of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis, Katja Behren’s rift, and a hybrid German-Jewish identity. To declare that all three constructs can be used to describe the relationships between Seligmann’s Jewish and non-Jewish German characters is, in my opinion, not a contradiction in terms. I, however, posit that my construct of a German-Jewish negative symbiosis – German-

Jewish hybrid identity continuum is a more accurate representation of the image Seligmann portrays of life in post-Shoah Germany because it is less restrictive than the three previous constructs. My continuum recognizes that people are individuals who, although they live in the same post-Shoah Germany, deal with the tensions of the problematic Jewish – non-Jewish German relationship in different manners. Some residents in post-Shoah Germany, such as Jonathan at the beginning of *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, experience the full effects of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis because they have not been able to come to terms with the past.³² Others, such as Moische in *Der Musterjude*, coexist well with their Jewish German or non-Jewish German countrymen most of the time, but this amicable coexistence occasionally breaks down.³³ For these Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, Behren's rift would accurately describe how they experience life in post-Shoah Germany. Finally, the character of Jonathan at the end of *Rubensteins Versteigerung* represents a German-Jewish hybridity.³⁴ He begins to recognize his non-Jewish German countrymen as individuals instead of dismissing them all as Nazis and recognizes that his life in Germany has played an import role in his identity construction. My German-Jewish negative symbiosis – German-Jewish hybrid identity continuum symbolizes all three of these possible Jewish – non-Jewish German relationships.

When reading Seligmann's novels, it is important to realize that the Germany that Seligmann is describing in his works is one in which my German-Jewish negative symbiosis – German-Jewish hybrid identity continuum dictates the lives of his protagonists as Jews living in Germany. The situation is so complex that there cannot be a simple answer to the question of their identities. While they themselves come to realize

the importance their German heritage has played in the development of their identities, others still identify them with their otherness, as Jews. The simultaneous nature of their hybrid identity and otherness stems from the healing process involved in coming to terms with the atrocities of the Shoah. Both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans need to heal in their own ways and at their own speeds, so while one party may be willing to accept the possibility of a hybrid German-Jewish existence other parties s/he may come into contact with may still be stuck in a black and white – Jewish or German – world. Wherever any two parties find themselves on this German-Jewish negative symbiosis – German-Jewish hybrid identity continuum will dictate how they interact with each other.³⁵ Only this patience and understanding will lead to the resolution of the tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans.

In these novels the “victim” status of Seligmann’s Jewish German protagonists plays a key role in their identity construction. It seems that the Jewish Germans are well rooted in their role of the perfect victim in these novels. Seligmann demonstrates in *Rubensteins Versteigerung*, *Die jiddische Mamme* and *Der Musterjude* that because of their victim status, they are no longer held accountable for their misdeeds. Seligmann’s non-Jewish Germans characters on the other hand, with their guilt that cannot be punished by the mere laws of men, have not yet been able to move beyond this guilt or criticize the Jews in any way. Are non-Jewish Germans comfortable with their guilt? Do German-Jews accept their victim role? It appears that each knows their part in this dance all too well, and Seligmann masterfully brings this to light. While he suggests no easy solution to this German-Jewish negative symbiosis his message is clear. The German-Jews must accept their hybrid identity. Additionally, the Jewish and non-Jewish Germans

need to break the silence, as Seligmann attempts to do, and share all their fears, hate and pain in an open and honest dialogue. Only when these two changes come about will the negative symbiosis begin to vanish.

Notes for Chapter 4

¹ *Aliyah* means “going to Israel”; and is used in regards to returning to Israel from the Diaspora.

This concept is highly regarded, unlike *Yeridah*, or leaving Israel to go into Diaspora. Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 5.

² Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 164.

³ Qtd in Diner 9.

⁴ Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 18.

⁵ As Moische continues to complain about his life, Heiner questions his own feelings towards Jews: “Das Selbstmitleid des Juden bekam ihm noch schlechter als der fette, verzuckerte Karpfen [gefüllte Fisch]. Er erschrak über seine Empfindungen: Hatte Dieser Trivialpolitologe Daniel Goldhagen recht, den Deutschen vorzuwerfen, alle Antisemiten zu sein? Bin auch ich ein Judenhasser?” Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 19.

⁶ Seligmann, *Die jiddische Mamme* 137.

⁷ Kühl 171.

⁸ Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 207.

⁹ Susanna discusses the impact their parents have on their relationship specifically. To read more about this conversation consult: Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 184-5.

¹⁰ Their break up eventually occurs because Moische is jealous of Cordula's relationship with an ex-lover, not because she is a German *schickse* and he is Jewish.

¹¹ Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 95.

¹² Seligmann *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 95.

¹³ Art Spiegelmann equally portrays the same situation in his famed comic books, *Maus I and II*. The father, a Holocaust survivor, tells a supermarket manager about his experiences during the Holocaust after they refuse to let him return some opened groceries. After hearing his story, he is given a full refund.

¹⁴ Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 91.

¹⁵ Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 92.

¹⁶ Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 19-20.

¹⁷ In her correspondence with Karl Jaspers. Her contributions to the study of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis are discussed in chapter one.

¹⁸ Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 87.

¹⁹ Fatima's attack on Moische is front page news that causes German citizens to bombard the TV station and newspapers with telephone calls. Her actions are condemned by everyone but the *Deutsche Reichs-Zeitung* and she is fired from her job. She is also exposed as a fraud; her true name is Frauke Obermayr and she had a short marriage with a Turk before abandoning him and their daughter.

²⁰ Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 83-90.

²¹ Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 84.

²² Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 85.

²³ Seligmann takes an opportunity here to briefly comment on the multicultural situation in Germany today, a topic that is discussed at more length by Zafer Şenocak a German-Turkish-Jew. "Wann immer den Deutschen der Sinn danach stand, hatten sie die Hebräer verfolgt, beraubt, mißhandelt und erschlagen. Gefürchtet hatten sie die Juden nie. Die Ausländer hingegen, die sie nach dem Krieg als preiswerte Arbeitskräfte ins Land holten, hatten sich nie vollständig zu Sklaven ihrer Furcht vor den Deutschen machen lassen. Sie entzogen sich der vollständigen Kontrolle. Das machte den Deutschen angst." (Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 87.) While there are many minorities present in Germany today, the dynamic between Germans, Turks and Jews is especially important. The Jews are a small but powerful minority because of the German-Jewish negative symbiosis and their financial success. They are perceived as a minority, but not as foreigners. Instead, they are seen as productive German citizens who belong in Germany by their non-Jewish German countrymen. The Turks are the largest minority in Germany today and have been given few opportunities to improve their position in German society. The Turks are valuable to the workforce, but they are expected to work for a while and then return to Turkey. It is difficult for them to obtain long-term visas or obtain visas for their families. Until recently, even third generation Turkish-Jews were not granted German citizenship even though they had lived their entire lives in Germany. The difference between the level of integration in German society for these two groups is facilitated by their physical characteristics; the dark complexion of the Turkish-German is more obvious than the Jewish nose.

²⁴ Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 87.

²⁵ Seligmann, *Die jiddische Mamme* 28.

²⁶ Seligmann, *Die jiddische Mamme* 104.

²⁷ Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 154.

²⁸ Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 154-5.

²⁹ Heiner gets Moische his first job in journalism and helps him when the Knut Reydt falsifies his story; he is also the person who reveals Moische's father was not a Jew. Moische insists that Heiner be given a job at *Germany Today* but later demotes then fires him. Seligmann, *Der Musterjude*.

³⁰ Seligmann, *Rubensteins Versteigerung* 189.

³¹ Seligmann, *Der Musterjude* 390.

³² Jonathan has little contact with non-Jewish Germans outside of school at the beginning of *Rubensteins Versteigerung*. He is angry at his parents for forcing him to live among "murderers". He suffers from an inferiority complex, feeling that his non-Jewish German countrymen are stronger, braver, and more potent than he is. He dreams of moving to Israel.

³³ Moische has more contact with non-Jewish Germans than Jewish-Germans. He frequently complains about post-Shoah Germany, but he is equally critical of Israel and Zionism. He chooses to live in Germany and only occasionally has major breakdowns of communication with his non-Jewish German colleagues. Moische becomes a prominent figure in the German media by exploiting his position as a Jewish German.

³⁴ At the end of *Rubensteins Versteigerung* Jonathan is able to accept that not all non-Jewish Germans are Nazis. He recognizes that living in Germany has shaped his identity, making him a German-Jew and not a Jew living in Germany. He no longer aspires to emigrate to Israel.

³⁵ Sander Gilman reminds us that Seligmann's pedigree is important when considering his role in German society, for the fact that Seligmann spent the first ten years of his life living in Israel is an important piece of the puzzle that is his identity: "Seligmann's secular Jewish/Israeli identity, forged in the early years of the state of Israel, and his feeling of displacement in the world of Germany have forged an openly expressed need to identify with it and, at the same time, an awareness of the costs of that identification." Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 60-1.

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