Introduction

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The cultural exchange and cooperation between Germany and Israel, between the German and the Hebrew language sphere has always been shaped by crisis and difficult political and societal moments, such as the surge of right-wing violence in the 1990s or the second intifada in the early 2000s. Not always was the impact on culture and literature and the discourse thereof a negative one. Indeed, the translation of Hebrew literature into German reached a peak during the politically challenging times in the aforementioned decades. During the past year, spanning from October 2023 to October 2024, this well-established relationship was shaken to the core. The shock, pain, and empathy following the massacre of Hamas against Israeli civilians in Kibbutzim, towns, and at the Nova festival on October 7 went hand in hand with the cancellation of events, out of respect and as a sign of shared mourning. While many institutions picked up on their work again at a certain point, still functioning under the shadow of sadness, but also increasing concern about the situation of the civilian population in Gaza, the exchange was also interrupted by a growing roughness in tone and behavior. Rather quickly the grey tones of the complex situation seemed to vanish in the perceptions of many. What was left was either white or black.

In their letters, published in 2024 under the title *Gleichzeit [Same-Time],* Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Ofer Waldman reflect on these developments. Salzmann recalls her experiences in Vienna and Berlin, while Waldman describes the daily life with his family in Israel. They share their concerns about the civilian population in Gaza, their sorrow about the suffering on October 7 and beyond in Israel, their thoughts about the terrifying state of the Israeli government and a crumbling Israeli civil society, as well as their anger of an increasingly polarized debate. Both, Ofer Waldman and Sasha Marianna Salzmann are exposed to feelings strongly connected to Jewish diasporic history: On October 22, 2023, Waldman writes to Salzmann that "[…] *das Israelische droht von mir abzublättern, wie aufgeplatzte Farbe, die das Jüdische unter sich preisgibt, mit Gedanken an Pässe und Sprachen* [the Israeli threatens to peel away from me, like chipped paint revealing the Jewish

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beneath, with thoughts about passports and languages]."[1] And Salzmann recalls the taunting questions raised by people in Germany suggesting that political gestures should be support enough: "*Warum fühlt ihr euch so allein?, höre ich jetzt oft. Es gibt doch all diese Solidaritätsbekundungen, der Bundespräsident, der Kanzler, Alle haben gesagt, was zu sagen war. Reicht das nicht? Reicht euch das nicht?* [Why do you feel so alone, I often hear now. After all, there are all these expressions of solidarity, the Federal President, the Chancellor, everyone has said what needs to be said. Isn't that enough? Isn't that enough for you?]"[2]

While Waldman and Salzmann share their individual opinions they also express the hope that there will be a wide range of narratives shared about these difficult times to allow a kaleidoscope of voices to be heard against the backdrop of polarisation.[3] They also exchange cultural experiences, possible due to their shared language that is neither German nor Hebrew, but friendship.[4] Indeed, many of the cultural encounters discussed in this special issue rely not necessarily on official or even state-supported organizations – although they do play an impressive role – but on the personal interconnections of individuals to both languages, of friendship and collegial collaborations. Sasha Marianna Salzmann's novel *Außer sich [Beside Myself]* has been translated into Hebrew, one example of a cultural encounter, which provokes more, as Ofer Waldman goes out to find a bookstore navigating through Haifa as the GPS has been once again disrupted to get *לא רחוק מעצמך [Beside Myself]* for his family and friends to read.[5]

The vibrant history of reading, writing, and publishing between continents, countries and languages is full of cultural transfer happening in odd situations. The contributions in this special issue testify to this long history, and to its challenges. The articles attest to the estrangements that occurred in the past including the impact of the Holocaust on a personal level, but also of the possibilities of cultural collaboration more broadly.

Some of the contributions in this special issue do touch on these questions of cultural collaboration, as will become apparent in the following. In general, the goal is to demonstrate the various exchanges happening, in particular in literature, between German and Hebrew. Beyond cultural projects, these exchanges come into being through an individual's work and self-translation, or traces of the other language in an author's text, the promotion of literary texts in the respective other cultural realm as well as accounts from the other country for the home market. Questions of translation,

1 Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Ofer Waldman, *Gleichzeit. Briefe zwischen Israel und Europa* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2024), 18.
2 Ibid. 20.
3 Ibid. 137.
4 Ibid. 119.
5 Ibid. 110.

language, the literary market, and the respective audience are addressed, and aspects of differences and common grounds discussed. Consequently, the articles range from close readings scrutinizing poems and prose, to analytical insights into the policies of reception, to much broader attempts to foster the understanding of contemporary developments in the literary market of cultural exchange between Germany and Israel. In the following, I give a brief overview of the articles in this special issue.

1 Hebrew Literature in Europe

Emerging in Europe in the 19th century, Hebrew literature has been shaped by cultural and thereby literary and linguistic encounters from its conception. Two of its literary centers in the first decades of the 20th century were Vienna and Berlin. This led to a strong entanglement between German and Hebrew as many writers consumed German literary texts as readers, and witnessed the crucial moments of the formation of modernist German-language culture. In his contribution focusing on the poetry of Avraham Ben-Yitzhak, **Yarden Ben-Zur** examines the notion of *hester panim* and its surfacing in the poet's texts. *Hester panim* is the concept of God concealing his presence from the human realm. Ben-Zur introduces readers to the concept throughout the history of Jewish thought, from rabbinic texts to modern philosophy. The examination than focuses on the years after World War One and the search of Ben-Yitzhak for revelation while feeling the losses of the War and its aftermath. Ben-Zur discusses these dialectics against the backdrop of those in *hester panim* in his examination of Ben-Yitzhak's poetry. While the focus is on the poet's texts in Hebrew, Ben-Zur also examines a rather newly discovered poem in German that he translated. By incorporating his own work as a translator into the paper, the discourse on the cultural encounters turns at this point to the crucial aspect of acts of translation as a precondition beyond the merely theoretical analysis of the impact and meaning of translations for cultural exchange. Translation is one of the keys to dialogue and exchange in collaboration between the Hebrew and the German literary spheres as will become apparent in several contributions to the volume.

Fictional texts set in a realm that is not dominated by the narrator's language also deal, to a certain extent, with aspects of translation as they navigate between a space's ascribed language and the one of the text. In **Noam Krohn-Borojovich**'s analysis of Lea Goldberg's *Avedot* and Haim Beer's *Lifney HaMakom* the German language surfaces in the Hebrew texts first and foremost through the names of streets and places in Berlin. She traces significant localities in the novels written decades apart by mapping the urban space that the characters contribute to creating through their movement and inhabitation. Krohn-Borojovich addresses the meaning of Berlin for German Jews as well as for the commemoration of their lives and

the Holocaust. Thus, her examination of the cityscape offers an insight into the dialectics between a potential symbiosis on the one hand and the mass of symbols of commemoration on the other.

In her reading of Lea Goldberg's novels, **Yaara Keren** focuses on the writer's processing of the departure and expulsion from Germany in the texts. Keren relies on the concept of modern hermeneutics relating it, again, back to Germany where it emerged. Consequently, she juxtaposes the rootedness of thinking in the German philosophical cosmos with the hostility forcing Jewish writers and thinkers to leave Germany. To illustrate this complexity Keren traces different stages of adoration, home, and homelessness as well as the "break-up" and rejection in *Avedot*, *Mikhtavim Minesi'a Meduma*, and *VeHu HaOr*.

2 New Beginnings?

The publication of Hebrew and Israeli literature in German translation after 1945 and 1948 respectively blossomed rather late, with increasing interest from the 1960s onwards and a first peak in the 1990s. **Na'ama Rokem** presents an interesting exception: the Swiss literary journal *Hortulus*. In 1959 the editor Hans Rudolf Hilty, who had travelled to Israel as Rokem describes, dedicated issue Nr. 37 of the journal to "*Neue Dichtung aus Israel* [New Poetry from Israel]." Rokem discusses the potential of a publication in neutral Switzerland, and traces the translation between German and Hebrew after the Holocaust, both in the publication process of the *Hortulus* issue as well as in the work of the poets: With Dan Pagis, Yehuda Amichai, and Natan Zach the issue featured in particular poets with a background in the German language who also acted as translators and self-translators.

The poet Dan Pagis and his work is at the centre of **Jan Kühne**'s contribution. Kühne discusses the repression of the German language in Israel after the Holocaust and introduces the concept of interlingual homophony to trace German in Pagis's Hebrew poem. By meticulously analyzing the poem "Written with Pencil in a Sealed Railcar" he is able to decipher the homolingual underpinnings and by focusing on the surfacing names of Kain and Adam raises ethical questions concerning a particular person's attribute of being human – or not.

Paul Celan, like Dan Pagis, addressed in his poems the Holocaust as well as the aftermath on a personal but also broader spectrum. The two poets also share their activity in translating poetry and this activity is at the center of **Federico Dal Bo**'s article. However, by analyzing Celan's translation of poems by the medieval Hebrew poet Yehuda HaLevi and comparing them with the translation by Franz Rosenzweig, Dal Bo also offers insights into how the translation activity is linked to Celan's poetic language. Consequently, after stating that the date of the translation is unsure,

but might have happened between 1945 and 1947, Dal Bo dives into Rosenzweig's philosophy of translation and his version of Yehuda HaLevi's poems in German before than offering sensitive comparisons between the Hebrew and both translations.

3 The Following Generations of Readers and Writers

Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld survived the Nazi atrocities in Europe as a child and came to Palestine as an adolescent. His first language was German, but he solely wrote in Hebrew, the language he adopted after his arrival. **Judith Müller** discusses the relation of both languages, German and Hebrew within Appelfeld's life, and traces the German underpinnings in Appelfeld's novel *All whom I have loved*, set in Central Europe before the Second World War. **Tom Kellner** focuses on Yoram Kaniuk and the reception of *The Last Berliner* in Germany and compares it to how the novel was perceived in Israel. She addresses in particular the two different audiences and therefore compares covers and blurbs. The novel has been published under particular conditions as it first appeared in German in 2002, and only two years later in Hebrew. This circumstance among others provokes Kellner's introductory discussion of the concept of the implied reader and its impact on the literature market.

Reading, especially of Hebrew literature in German translation and of German literature in Hebrew translation, is fundamentally shaped by history and in particular the commemoration of the Holocaust. **Michal Ben-Horin** reflects on the traumatic encounter between Germans and Jews by tracing the representation of traumatic histories in novels by Ruth Almog and Jenny Erpenbeck. Ben-Horin juxtaposes the Israeli arrival from exile to home and the pluralization of society and literature in the 1980s, on the one hand, with the memory boom and the German reunification to trace aspects of memory and home on the other, in the respective novels.

Dani Kranz presents her reading of German authors' writing about Israel/Palestine and examines the publications from an anthropological point of view. Kranz focuses in particular on texts by journalists and scholars, but also briefly mentions novelists such as Mirna Funk, and their reflections on Israel against the backdrop of them being aware that they are writing for a German audience. As many of the authors are Jewish, they often consider their personal entanglement with Israel as well as experiences of Antisemitism in Germany. Kranz also briefly discusses the impact of October 7.

The journey we embarked on when first discussing the topics of these articles started long before October 7. However, as the processing of the articles, writing, editing, rewriting, and reviewing them continued until the summer of 2024, the

journey has been also shaped by the attack and the subsequent war. They thus demonstrate a continued exchange against the backdrop of an increasingly strained atmosphere in academia. The contributions do therefore encourage us to continue, to study the past, the present and the future of cultural encounters between the German and the Hebrew literary spheres.

The articles in this special issue are, moreover, the result of a fruitful cooperation that started out as an attempt to foster academic exchange at a time of limited possibilities due to the Corona pandemic. Dr. Tom Kellner realized a workshop in Halle in the summer of 2021, and asked me to collaborate in its implementation. Due to travel restrictions, we shared papers and lively discussions with a mostly Germany-based group of academics. From this wonderful intimate and productive format, we embarked onto a journey towards an international conference that took place in Basel in summer 2022. The present issue collects those contributions to the conference that have been worked into longer articles. I, thus, like to take this opportunity to thank the Swiss National Fonds, the Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft Basel, the Faculty of Theology and the Doktoratsprogramm Literaturwissenschaft at the University of Basel for the support and thereby enabling us to realize the conference. Thank you to the contributors and to all the anonymous reviewers who invested their valuable time into constructive feedback on the articles. My warmest thank you goes to Dr. Tom Kellner for the dialogue, the collaboration and for establishing the connection with Naharaim.

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