

REVIEW ESSAY

Revealing Jews: Culture and Visibility in Modern Central Europe

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Gluck, Mary. *The Invisible Jewish Budapest: Metropolitan Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016.

Shapira, Elana. *Style and Seduction: Jewish Patrons, Architecture, and Design in Fin de Siècle Vienna*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2016.

Wallach, Kerry. *Passing Illusions: Jewish Visibility in Weimar Germany*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017.

ABSTRACT

This essay reviews three recent books from the disciplines of history, art history, and German studies that inject new meaning into age-old questions about why Jewish difference mattered in the creation of modern culture in Central Europe. Each foregrounds the centrality of the dynamic of visibility/invisibility that formed a crucial source of power and control for Jews living among populations that never completely accepted them in Budapest, Vienna, and the cities of Weimar Germany. By highlighting subtle and often unarticulated instances of engagement with Jewish difference that are usually dismissed or relegated to footnotes, these expertly contextualized studies illuminate the invisible circumscribed codes of behavior that shaped Jews' experiences. In doing so, they add a great deal of nuance to our understanding of the history of Jews in modern Central Europe. They show that, while Jewishness was often subtle and ephemeral, the influence of Jews on the culture they created persists.

Keywords: Jewishness, culture, visibility, antisemitism

On a memorable evening in November 1996, the eminent art historian and Viennese émigré Sir Ernst Gombrich (1909–2001) spoke at a gathering hosted by the Austrian Cultural Institute in London. Gombrich, who had left Austria for Britain sixty years earlier, had received dozens of honors for his foundational work in art history, including his pioneering *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, first published in 1960. But that night, Gombrich addressed a question on the minds of many: how did Jews influence the visual arts in fin-de-siècle Vienna? Given his own family’s classification as Jewish by the Nazis, even though his parents converted to Protestantism after they married, Gombrich was understandably emotional about the topic. Drawing upon the words of art dealer Serge Sabarsky, a fellow Viennese émigré whose clients had included many Jews, Gombrich passionately insisted that because these patrons did not think of themselves as Jewish, even raising the question was akin to the Nazis’ despicable project of identifying Jews.¹ Scholarly references to his talk have abounded since then, crystallizing the debate between those who seek to understand why it mattered that an undeniable overproportion of Jews were involved in shaping the culture of modern Central Europe, and those who deny that it did.

Given Gombrich’s status, some consider it difficult—or perhaps even immoral—to oppose his point of view. The fact that it is echoed by other eminent scholars who fled Nazi Germany, such as Eric Hobsbawm and Peter Gay, does not make it easier.² Yet, as Joan Scott reminds us, it is imperative for historians to maintain a critical distance from the testimony of eyewitnesses, especially when it comes to histories of difference. When we accept a person’s account of experience as “uncontestable evidence,” we take self-identification as self-evident and naturalize difference rather than expose the system that constructed it in the first place. Class, race, and gender are not natural subsets of society; in order to understand how they work, we must expose the “assumptions and practices” inherent in eyewitness testimony.³

The authors of these meticulously researched books from the disciplines of history, art history, and German studies thoughtfully and

skillfully push back on the viewpoints of these esteemed eyewitnesses. By critically analyzing and properly contextualizing a wide range of sources, including texts, images, and objects that don't show obvious markers of Jewishness, each book injects new meaning into age-old questions about why Jewish difference mattered in the creation of modern culture in Central Europe. Rather than searching in vain for suitable parameters within which to justify including a building, artwork, film, or theater production, the authors focus instead on how culture engaged the socially coded categories of the "Jewish" and "not-Jewish."

Each takes as a given that differences between Jews and non-Jews were often not clearly articulated, arguing that, with proper contextualization, such texts and images can nevertheless provide strong evidence for why it mattered that their creators or patrons were Jews. As Wallach puts it, "the social conditions and inner-Jewish discourses that influence the creation of these cultural products" are worth studying, since "Jewish cultural production originated under different circumstances."⁴ Shapira claims that the productive relationships between Jews and non-Jews show that modernism allowed Jews to convey aims of emancipation and cultural authority even if their presence was not obvious.⁵ And Gluck posits that this ambiguity and elusiveness serves as the hallmark of Jewish modernity: "Though largely created by Jews, Jewish Budapest was not restricted to Jews and lacked a specifically Jewish face."⁶

These books are evidence of a paradigm shift in modern European Jewish studies toward cultural history.⁷ For decades, "high culture," as well as the experiences of well-known individuals and leaders, dominated the field of Central European Jewish history.⁸ However, all three books contribute to more recent scholarship that includes low-brow literature, lesser-known authors, cabaret, operetta, and the like, showing through close readings of novels, art, film, literature that such forms of culture are important signifiers of historical change.⁹ They also focus on culture's symbolic substance and representation. Each foregrounds the centrality of the dynamic of visibility/invisibility that formed a crucial source of social power for Jews living among populations that never completely accepted them. Their titles refer directly to

the essence of this dialectic of representation: from Gluck's "invisible" yet present Jewish Budapest, to Wallach's illusory Jewish "visibility" in Weimar Germany, to Shapira's stylish and "seductive" Viennese Jews. As Shapira notes, Jews' "flirtations" with Jewishness "mirrored their experience of not wanting to—or their bitter acknowledgment that they would never—be fully accepted in Viennese society; their authorial creative license is symbolized in this posture of appearing in public half turned away championing their Otherness."¹⁰ All three studies underscore that the flightiness of Jewish visibility was actually its strength, as determining their level of visibility gave Jews a measure of power and control that they lacked in other contexts. Jews undertook fleeting acts and subtly understood practices, positioned designs on buildings to signal their Jewishness to a certain audience, or performed expressions of Jewishness in lowbrow theater that they would not dare do in more mainstream venues. Notably, the authors also pay close attention to how class and gender inflected Jews' actions and behaviors. As Wallach notes, "Jewish visibility and its gendered dimensions provide an essential and previously overlooked model for understanding the complex reasons behind hiding, covering, and displaying controversial aspects of identity."¹¹

All three books introduce original elements usually not included in narratives of Jewish history in Central Europe.¹² They show, for instance, how provocation, flirtation, and seduction were powerful coping strategies for coming to terms with everyday tensions Jews faced in their lives. Using the tools of cultural studies, these books highlight ephemeral sources, including moments, instances, and anecdotes that are usually dismissed or relegated to footnotes, showing us how they illuminate the invisible circumscribed codes of behavior that shaped Jews' actions in public and private. This focus adds much nuance to our understanding of the dialectic of assimilation in Central Europe, whereby, according to traditional scholarship, Jews either aimed to become wholly "invisible" as Jews in public in an effort to acculturate to mainstream bourgeois culture, or to fully "dissimilate" by proudly bearing Jewish symbols or engaging publicly in debates and traditions.¹³ Yet, the authors also

show that Jews' desire for acceptance from non-Jews actually ebbed and flowed according to circumstance. Jews often "flirted" with the possibility of appearing Jewish or not Jewish depending on the situation, and doing so was a crucial strategy of coexistence.

In highlighting the implicit codes that were central to modern Central European Jews' experiences, these books put to rest the notion that evidence of Jews' contributions to the creation of culture must be both explicit and visible, or must advance a collective, Jewish agenda.¹⁴ They show how the ability to pass or not pass, to cover one's Jewishness or to allow oneself to be "outed" as a Jew, were powerful tools Jews used to navigate their environments. Jews incorporated these acts into the texts they wrote, the films they produced, the paintings and buildings they commissioned, the clothes they wore, and the rooms they designed. By illuminating and contextualizing these acts, the authors successfully pinpoint the existence of the invisible contours of Jewishness that proved to be central to the shaping of culture in modern Central Europe.

To be sure, many scholars have by now done away with earlier notions that Jewish assimilation can be characterized as a zero-sum game of a firmly bounded minority group "dissolving" into the majority.¹⁵ Drawing on multicultural and postcolonial studies in particular, many have recognized that assimilation involves interactions of Jews and non-Jews who shape fluid cultural norms that can shift over time. The approach of writing historical narratives "from the margins," as well as the argument that Jews as a minority culture among other cultures in modern Europe are a paradigm-setting example, accounts for its popularity.¹⁶ Recently, scholars have begun approaching the study of Jews in modern culture by paying attention to their subtle social practices, tastes, and collaborative efforts. Yet, even this approach has not entirely quelled many scholars' determination to pinpoint and label exactly what was "Jewish" about these practices, tastes, and efforts.¹⁷

By foregrounding often ephemeral acts, these three books illustrate how Jewish assimilation did not necessarily entail breaking all links to religion, tradition, and culture. In some cases, Jews adopted these negative prejudices as part of intra-Jewish competition and to distinguish

themselves. Other times, they co-opted prejudices against Jews as a means of exposing and challenging them. Indeed, one great revelation of these books is not that Central European Jews often needed to hide their Jewishness. It is rather that Jews' critiques of other Jews' efforts to do so, whether through satirical newspapers, music hall, film, architecture, or design, served as a way to acknowledge the challenges of assimilation while simultaneously remaining critical of the social structures that created them.

Historian George Mosse, who left Nazi Germany in 1933, highlighted culture as a crucial agent of historical change and the importance of symbols. His seminal *German Jews beyond Judaism*, first published in 1985, focused on Jews' desire to be both German and Jewish. According to Mosse and others, *Bildung*—the formation of character by way of education—replaced religion for the German Jewish bourgeoisie. Since then, Sander Gilman in particular has helped us view *Bildung* as part of a broader narrative of Jewish self-fashioning, building the foundation for studies that take seriously the symbolic substance and representation of everyday occurrences, popular activities, and informal practices. He and other scholars have helped us identify *Bildung* as only one of many Jewish and non-Jewish symbols, themes, and ideas that Jews used to weave their experiences into Central European culture.¹⁸

One undeniable aspect of examining Jews and the creation of culture in Central Europe is Jews' willingness to draw upon antisemitic stereotypes. In her seminal article on antisemitism, Shulamit Volkov argued that in the nineteenth century, the abstraction of "Semitism" allowed non-Jewish Germans to use "antisemitism" symbolically as a way to express a range of other fears based upon modernity and difference, or, as she termed it, as a "cultural code" that did not necessarily indicate a hatred of actual Jews or tolerance of violence against them.¹⁹ As helpful as her revelations are, they don't differentiate between the full adoption of antisemitic views and the engagement of those views in a more critical, ironic, or even playful and momentary way as a means of asserting social power. Negative stereotypes about Jews were not only the purview of so-called "antisemites" but also some Jews themselves,

who recognized that by using them they could subtly capitalize on Jews' disadvantaged situation *and* combat it at the same time.

Denying that one looked, felt, or acted Jewish—often labeled “Jewish self-hatred”—was indeed a major aspect of assimilation.²⁰ But Gluck, Shapira, and Wallach apply the concept of the “playful” and other uses of these stereotypes to a much broader range of individuals, including women, anonymous writers, art patrons, and even fictional characters, showing how they used typical antisemitic stereotypes to call attention to the power structure that generated them. They did so by mocking, criticizing, and even at times turning them into attractive or seductive advantages as part of an essential assimilation strategy. We learn from these authors that moments of provocation, humor, and playfulness occurred alongside anxious ones. Trying to pass as a non-Jew, or subtly indicating to some—but not others—that one was, indeed, a Jew, was one way to engage these stereotypes. Other Jews sometimes reappropriated these negative stereotypes as a way to acknowledge the futility of rejecting them. Their critics—often Jews themselves—in turn satirized Jews' attempts either to use or to circumvent these qualities. Jews' inclusive participation in culture, underscored by a sense of outsidership, was predicated on their understanding the power of choosing to make their Jewishness visible or invisible.

Despite their similarities in approach, these books also contain important distinctions that the next section of this essay will elaborate upon in detail. For example, Gluck's book, the first monograph to focus on Jews and the creation of culture in *fin-de-siècle* Hungary, highlights the flux and anxiety surrounding Jews' visibility in Budapest, which accounted for the unarticulated presence of Jewishness in guidebooks, etiquette guides, and parliamentary debates, contrasted with its unabashed appearance in lowbrow culture, such as music hall and humor magazines. Shapira focuses on Jews' roles in creating and designing Vienna's built environment, but highlights the collaborative networks of Jews and non-Jews that reflected and shaped how Jews negotiated the terms of their visibility in the city. Wallach's book is less about Jews' role in the development of the urban scene and more about how Jews

navigated their way through Germany's modern cities on a daily basis, calibrating their visibility according to time, place, and audience. And yet, all of their evidence indicates that for Central European Jews, knowing what the boundaries were between the Jewish and the non-Jewish, even if those boundaries were imaginary and elusive, was critical to their survival and their success in shaping modern culture.

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Carl E. Schorske set the stage for the study of urban cultural history in Central Europe and beyond with the 1979 publication of *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*.²¹ Since then, scholars have thoroughly critiqued his arguments regarding the emergence of art and culture from political and social crisis. Yet, Schorske's book, along with Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin's interdisciplinary study *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, set up a lasting foundation with which many still understand and critique the era's major cultural figures.²² However, these books also laid the groundwork for cultural historians to downplay Jewishness in the creation of literature, music, and intellectual life in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Unless there is a direct, visible link between what they created and their sense of Jewish self-identification, unless evidence exists that they were directly affected by antisemitism, these authors assume that Jewishness didn't matter. At best, some reference Jews' disadvantaged position as "outsiders," and their efforts toward inclusion are explained as attempts to become "insiders."²³

Thus, Shapira breaks new ground by providing ample evidence that assimilated Jews in turn-of-the-century Vienna did not seek a total erasure of the Jewish from their lives and works, but instead used its illusory qualities to their advantage in order to fashion their own innovative forms of self-identification. Since Vienna's major artists and architects from the period were not Jews, architecture and design are not typically covered in studies of Jews and culture, except in the case of public buildings such as synagogues.²⁴ Yet, her book convincingly argues that Jews helped shape the form, direction, and intensity of a broad array of Viennese architectural and design projects. Collaborative efforts between non-Jewish artists, architects, and designers and their Jewish

patrons' and customers' relationships wove the narrative of Jewish experiences into Viennese, Austrian, and European history. Concerns about integration as well as pride in their Jewish heritage influenced the patterns, decor, and even the height and placement of accoutrements to building design and interior style.

The book begins with Jewish patrons of the 1860s–1870s who collaborated with well-known non-Jewish architects to shape grand palaces on Vienna's Ringstrasse in the Historicist style. Given that Jews had only been allowed to own land and build houses on the Ring since 1860, their residences represented a new form of visibility. Since antisemites were well-aware of Jews' purchases of these houses—one song set to the tune of “The Blue Danube” snidely referred to the Ring as a “New Jerusalem”—it is understandable that most Jewish patrons chose architects who would create inconspicuous buildings. But Shapira's research shows that some actually went against the grain and chose to distinguish themselves as Jews by choosing more ostentatious facades that would subtly highlight their Jewish cultural distinction. And they did so in order to set their houses apart from those of other nearby Jewish residents, including their relatives. For example, they adopted elements of the Hellenistic style not merely because of its more general veneration in Western culture, but specifically because Jews in antiquity had also embraced Hellenistic culture. Thus, Shapira argues, Jews and their architects created a brilliant “shared cultural platform” through which they could simultaneously include themselves in non-Jewish culture and distinguish themselves as Jews.²⁵ For example, banker Eduard von Todesco made sure that one of the twenty-six female caryatids (stone carvings of draped female figures) on his façade was identifiable as the Jewish Queen Esther by placing a Jewish star prominently in her tiara. However, he rejected the idea of placing such an identifiably Jewish subject in the dining room out of consideration for his non-Jewish guests, indicating that he carefully calibrated the visibility of his Jewishness to suit different levels of exposure to passers-by and more intimate guests.

The Jewish patrons examined in the next chapter specifically rejected such attempts at assimilation. Most describe the Secession,

founded in May 1897, as a rejection of the fin-de-siècle Viennese art world's conservatism and commercialism. But Shapira asks us to rethink its aims by pointing to the specific ways its Jewish patrons used it to access their own sense of Jewish self-identification. In rejecting the taste for Historicism of earlier Jewish Ringstrasse patrons in favor of a modern, Orientalist style, Jews helped create a shared cultural platform with room for both Jews and non-Jews to maintain their cultural distinctiveness. Jewish funders and supporters also turned to the modernist Secession as a way to turn negative qualities associated with Jews—such as the ugly, wealth-obsessed, eroticized, or feminized Jew—into powerful provocations. By playing social games and encouraging flirtatious dramas that used the dialectic of exposure and concealment of their “Jewishness,” they became “dandies” (men about town) who used fashion and style “as an integration strategy, joining exclusive clubs where they could transform the supposed crime of their ‘Jewishness’ into an attractive vice.”²⁶

On the surface, Secession art contains no direct references to overtly Jewish topics or themes. But the widespread belief that the movement's Oriental style represented an attack on the Western tradition was not only the purview of antisemites. Jews who supported the movement actually welcomed a style critical of earlier Jewish assimilation projects that conformed too readily to European tradition. For example, Karl Wittgenstein, who funded two-thirds of the cost of the Secession building, saw it as an opportunity not only to critique the projects of other Jews, but also to provoke non-Jews who condemned Jews' wealth. Thus, the Secession house featured an opulent, golden cupola that both echoes a Moorish synagogue and also challenges the Catholic authority of the nearby Baroque Karlskirche.

Another chapter, on the Modernists, illustrates how Jewish visibility influenced a wide range of design choices, from newspaper offices to private music rooms, pointing to patrons' diverse experiences. Journalists Isidor Singer and Heinrich Kanner, for example, hired architect Otto Wagner to design the office of their new newspaper *Die Zeit* in order to increase their visibility as modern competitors with other,

Jewish-owned newspapers. But in doing so, they also aimed to cover their Eastern European Jewish origins. Patron Fritz Wärndorfer's support for the modern design movement Wiener Werkstätte served as a method of rebellion against the Historicist tradition. He deliberately showed his Jewishness and provoked antisemitic stereotypes by including in his music room a painting of the seven princesses by Margaret Macdonald, which referred to the princess of the Sabbath. Yet another modernist, Richard Beer-Hofmann, sought to transform the stigma of Jewishness into an elevated and shared artistic experience. Here, Shapira links Beer-Hofmann's designs for his house to what other scholars have argued about his engagement with Jewish difference in literature.²⁷ Beer-Hofmann's villa reflected his public persona as a Jewish dandy by featuring a Star of David in a window above the entrance. But rather than simply reappropriating Jewish culture, his aesthetic choices, including how he dressed, suggest a much more nuanced engagement in a dialogue among Jewish, Western, and Eastern cultures.

Adolf Loos is one of Vienna's best known architects, but Shapira explains in detail in her final chapter on the Avant-Gardists the understudied significance of Loos's relationships to his Jewish clients. Loos believed a sleek, understated style in dress as well as architecture would better serve Jews who wished to counter negative stereotypes without completely covering their Jewishness. Loos translated his identification of proper dress suits with professional and artistic authority onto his design for Leopold Goldman's fine tailoring store, the Goldman & Salatsch House. Shapira's astute reading shows that Loos "dressed" the bottom half of the building with green marble, just as Goldman dressed his clients in sophisticated suits, while the upper part of the building, a plain white facade, caused a two-year-long scandal for its plain, or "undressed," appearance. In this case, the provocative exposure of Goldman's Jewishness served as a form of power and resistance, as well as a new source of cultural authority. And Loos deliberately designed his American Bar to be uncanny rather than *gemütlich* (comfortable) by including a prominent caricature portrait of Jewish poet Peter Altenberg that played with negative stereotypes about his Jewish looks in the bar's

otherwise luxurious, gentleman's club atmosphere. The juxtaposition of posh marble and wood against Altenburg's bohemian, unkempt looks, argues Shapira, transformed prejudices against him into a "triumphant expression of Viennese decadence."²⁸

Shapira's work takes us deep into the heart of some of the city's most well-known cultural movements to show how inextricably intertwined they were with the experiences of Viennese Jews. While Ringstrasse architecture, the Secession House, and the designs of the Wiener Werkstätte may not have been products of "Jewish" movements, contextualizing their development in terms of the experiences of the Jews who fostered and supported them reveals a great deal about the role of art and architecture in the history of Jewish assimilation in Central Europe. Jewish self-identification and Jews' desire to be seen at certain times and to remain unseen at others drove their development of creative strategies that helped push fin-de-siècle art movements forward, with lasting contributions to Viennese and Jewish traditions.

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As capital cities of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, Vienna and Budapest shared much in the way of culture, including antisemitism. So it comes as little surprise that Viennese antisemites coined the term "Judapest" in recognition of the city's relatively high proportion of Jews, which in 1900 stood around 23 percent. By attributing all that they detested and feared about the city to a "degenerate and rapacious Jewish modernity that despoiled Hungarian national culture,"²⁹ fin-de-siècle antisemites made it difficult for Budapest Jews to feel comfortable, leaving them constantly anxious and uncertain about fashioning themselves as both Jewish and Hungarian. Thus, according to Gluck, Jews' substantial contributions to shaping the city as it developed into a major metropolis remained stigmatized and largely below the surface and unarticulated. Though "Jewish Budapest" remains a nostalgic, romanticized notion, Gluck argues that the phenomenon was indeed palpable, even if it remained unarticulated and encompassed non-Jews.³⁰ To grasp its contours, however, we need to move beyond the confines of the city's identifiably Jewish neighborhoods and look beyond cultural projects

explicitly marked as Jewish to consider texts and individuals who are rarely incorporated into the history of Hungarian Jews.

Since Hungarian national self-identification took on an explicitly anti-urban tone in the late nineteenth century, Budapest's Jews filled the void with a dedication to making the city their own, which included new modes of visibility such as building houses along the city's newly constructed Andrassy Avenue, much as their counterparts in Vienna had done. But Gluck's focus is less on the Jews who built those houses, and more on what Budapest's buildings, streets, and urban life represented to the Jews who wrote about them. Thus, visions of the emerging city in the minds of Jewish journalist-writers of the late 1800s to early 1900s form the core of the first chapter. Hungarian Jews were linked together with urban culture both literally and symbolically, as the rebuilding of Budapest in 1873 closely overlapped with their emancipation in 1867. To plumb the depths of that connection, Gluck focuses on how journalists transformed themselves into more "heroic," yet still behind-the-scenes, men by becoming flaneurs, the figure who, in Walter Benjamin's critique of urban modernity, served as its "privileged observer and interpreter."³¹ Though some wrote straightforward social analyses praising the culture of the city, Adolf Ágai used his new platform to critique bourgeois Jews' efforts to fashion themselves as part of the Hungarian elite. His 1908 *Voyage from Pest to Budapest* mocked the "Jewish parvenu" via a narrator whose Jewishness remained implicit, thus lending an authoritative voice to the "invisible" Jew. Ágai continued this theme in *Borszem Jankó*, the humor magazine he later helped found.

Such visions of the city, argues Gluck, helped shaped Jews' belief that their Budapest-based self-identifications were truly representative of Hungarian national identity. Jews became even more self-conscious due to the Tiszaeszlár blood libel trial of 1882–1883 and the influx of Jewish refugees from Galicia in pogroms of 1881–1882, whose links to the formation of separate narratives of Hungarian national identity for Jews and non-Jews form the basis of the second chapter. These events catalyzed antisemitic sentiments and fostered the success of xenophobic, populist nationalists in parliament, who linked Jewish refugees to ritual

murder accusations. Mór Wahrmann, the first Jewish member of parliament, failed in his quest to reframe the issue as one of pure immigration by downplaying the fact that the refugees were Jews. Populist nationalists refused these attempts to render Jews invisible, illustrating how, despite Jews' best efforts, the Jewish question remained central to the establishment of Hungarian nationalism. Gluck deftly traces how these attitudes manifested themselves in grassroots publications like pamphlets, articles, and booklets. The more sympathetic, liberal publications did not call for revoking Jewish emancipation. Instead, they claimed that Jews had not successfully assimilated into Hungarian society. Jewish visibility meant they had not been properly Magyarized; consequently, "the Jewish question became the dark underside of Hungarian liberalism, its disreputable other, which could neither be fully acknowledged nor completely rejected."³²

The next chapter focuses on Wahrmann, who was best known for his wit, humor, and efforts to foster the belief that Jews were true Hungarians. However, as Gluck makes clear, Jews were rarely accepted as indistinguishable from other Hungarians. Expressions of Hungarian Jews' legendary excessive patriotism were kept largely below the surface in respectable society, along with public discussions of the "Jewish question." Invisible rules governed the representation of Jews and Jewish topics in "respectable" public life, whereas satiric representations of them abounded in entertainment, popular culture, and jokes that were often used by Jews as coping strategies. According to Gluck, popular culture and commercial entertainment were the only areas in which Jews and others could engage openly and creatively with issues that seemed impossible to solve in the realm of politics. "Within this world, Jews alternately played the roles of insiders and outsiders, natives and foreigners, depending on the context they found themselves in. Their dual status may not have been formally acknowledged in politics or the legal system, but it was imprinted within the informal cultural codes of society."³³ It is no accident that one of the most convincing examples of how humor illuminated that double standard is a caricature that appeared in *Borszem Jankó* called Börceviczy, who mocked Wahrmann by making

explicit what he sought to keep implicit and private: the invisible rules according to which Jews suppressed their Jewishness.³⁴ Humor, parody, and irony may not have provided stability and solutions, but at least they illuminated Jews' problems and offered a release for the tensions and anxieties they caused.

Humor forms the core of the next chapter, specifically the role of the *Judenwitz* (Jewish joke) used to subvert authority and the social order, and the significance of the magazine *Borszem Jankó*, whose signature illustration mocked Jews who played up their patriotism by wearing traditional Hungarian costumes, or who sought acceptance in high society with the emperor. In the face of increasingly exclusionary Hungarian ethnonationalism, humor was a cultural platform upon which Jews found inclusion as well as cultural authority. Their jokes eased oppressive social realities by using negative stereotypes about Jews to expose the constructed categories that created them. Gluck is careful to separate this kind of creative use from that of antisemites, who did so in order to cause real offense. Using irony allowed Jewish entertainers to transcend binaries and to critique antisemitism and liberalism alike. Here, Gluck might have further engaged with the work of other scholars who have explored similar uses of humor and irony by Jews in other Central European metropolises to discredit stereotypes. Reflections on the results of other scholars' studies of the deep connection between modern Jews and acting, mimicry, performance, and theater, the subject of her next chapter, would also have enriched these discussions.³⁵

According to Gluck, Budapest was distinctive for its highly charged and dynamic lowbrow commercial life and nightlife, including "edgy music halls, opulent Orpheums, and titillating all-night coffee houses."³⁶ In keeping with the social stigma attached to discussion of Jewish issues in public, the mainly middle-class Jewish audiences (and performers) publicly condemned but privately patronized crude, sexually explicit, and lower-class music hall performances that made Jewish themes explicit. These performances "successfully appropriated the ironic discourse of difference pioneered by Jewish humorists and music hall entrepreneurs, who challenged anti-Jewish stereotypes through exaggeration

and satire.”³⁷ Their intentionally oblique social criticisms gave audiences in on the joke a sense of cultural authority, allowing them to laugh at their anxieties about assimilation. Musical hall performances signaled a new, modern mode of Jewish self-fashioning that elevated, rather than stigmatized, the outsider.

In her last chapter, Gluck reminds us that Hungarian Jews faced the unique challenge of developing a model for bourgeois life based on a Hungarian middle class that had yet to develop. It is for this reason that concerns about Jewish home life and behavior—both traditionally women’s domain—became the focus of those who aspired to bourgeois respectability, and they did so by modeling themselves on how they imagined the aristocracy and nobility would behave. Popular etiquette books, conduct guides, and advice manuals written in the 1880s emphasized good manners and social graces. Two salon hosts, sisters Janka and Stephanie Wohl, produced some of the genre’s most successful, advising moderation, self-restraint, and avoiding conspicuous behavior, and also addressing topics such as marriage and sexuality. In frowning upon a preoccupation with fashion and dress, they cloaked their attempts to advise readers to downplay Jewishness as directives for how to be respectable, bourgeois Hungarians. These directives may have had little impact on their intended audience, but as Gluck aptly shows, they indicate just how pervasive the “invisible” Jewish Budapest was.



Jews’ decisions about where, when, and how to reveal one’s Jewishness in Weimar Germany follows similar patterns of fin-de-siècle Jews in Vienna and Budapest. But the stakes were even higher in Berlin and other German cities, where the proportionally smaller Jewish population in the Weimar era faced postwar political, social, and economic challenges. After World War I, new modes of self-identification and intensified antisemitism spread more quickly to broader audiences via advances in technology for mass media. It is in this context that Wallach explores the dialectic of visibility/invisibility as a reflection of Jews’ seemingly contradictory impulses to be both visibly Jewish in some cases and invisible in others. She does so through astute readings of literature,

newspaper articles, advertisements, performances, contests, and films. In chapters arranged thematically, Wallach show how Weimar Jews took advantage of the power of “dual legibility”—codes of dress and behavior that subtly revealed Jewishness only to some—for status, comfort, and security. As such, it was an integral part of Jewish self-fashioning. “Parallel to the pressure to evade antisemitism by being inconspicuous was the desire to overcome such pressures by displaying Jewishness, a right that many Weimar Jews proudly exercised.”³⁸ The originality of her argument lies in her willingness to examine Jews’ behavior on a granular level, such as their choice of newspapers or the way they dressed on a daily basis. In doing so, we see that the power of dual legibility lay in its changeability: a skullcap could be covered, a newspaper put away, a wig exchanged, a symbol hidden, or a book cover papered over. The belief that one could appear as openly Jewish, subtly Jewish, or not Jewish at all at any given moment shows that Jews did not merely cope: they strategized.

Examining the daily behaviors of ordinary Germans allows Wallach to analyze women’s experiences, which still have not received adequate attention from scholars of German Jewish history despite the emergence of recent studies dedicated to them.³⁹ Wallach’s examinations show that we cannot fully understand the terms of Jewish visibility without considering gender. German women’s emergence into the public sphere in greater numbers occurred only in the Weimar era. The belief of some that Jewish women were in general less visible as Jews than were men contributed to these gender differences, as Jewish women sometimes used strategies for being barely visible, or subtly visible, as a critical and powerful method of countering the “invisibility” of women’s Jewishness in particular.

In her first chapter, Wallach examines how body shape, facial features, dark hair and eye color, clothing, and other adornments supplied codes of Jewish visibility. Those who did not fear repercussion or who were staunch Zionists chose to wear openly Jewish symbols such as the Star of David. But Wallach makes it clear that “embodied racialized Jewish coding” was often a cause of anxiety.⁴⁰ For both men and

women, Jewish visibility hinged on dark or “Oriental” coloring, curly hair, and displays of wealth. Still, efforts to blend in with their non-Jewish neighbors didn’t necessarily mean that Jews abandoned every last marker of Jewishness. Some women changed hair color or texture either to cover or hint at their Jewishness, depending on the situation. To obey the religious requirement that Jewish women cover their heads in public, some Orthodox women wore wigs instead of more traditional head coverings. Doing so was a clever way to appear both modern and not conspicuously Jewish, especially if they sported a trendy bob haircut, or *Bubikopf*. However, since other orthodox Jews would likely be able to recognize that it was a wig, these women maintained some degree of Jewish legibility. It is these instances of almost, but not quite “invisible” Jewishness that best describe the power of “dual legibility.”⁴¹

Although Jews certainly resented being pigeonholed because of their looks, what bothered them more was being identified as Jews against their will. Thus, Wallach explores how some Jews relished flirting with stereotypes in order to pass or not pass, suggesting that doing so was a powerful strategy for regaining control in an increasingly anti-semitic environment. In 1930, instead of denying that Jews looked any different from other Germans, the *Israelitisches Familienblatt* held a contest in which readers submitted photos and voted for the most “Beautiful Jewish Child” as a way to counter antisemitic accusations that Jews were an “ugly” race. Wallach astutely notes, however, that judging children to be both beautiful *and* Jewish suggests that Jews believed that the children’s Jewishness was indeed visible. This contradictory rejection of stereotypes about how Jews looked on one hand, and support for Jews’ distinctiveness on the other, was also apparent from German Jews’ prejudices about Eastern European Jews’ looks. Regardless of whether they venerated so-called *Ostjuden* for their supposed authenticity, Jews from the East were still coded negatively.⁴²

The next chapter turns to decisions to “come out” as Jewish, terminology Wallach adopts to her advantage in order to underscore the parallels with other minority populations with reasons to stay hidden, such as LGBT communities. Her examinations of newspapers, theater

performances, and literature show that coming out as Jewish also entailed risks. Yet Jews still did so in both openly calibrated acts, such as when the Jewish community asked for shows of solidarity, as well as in more subtle gestures, such as an individual's decision to read a Jewish newspaper in public. On the whole, however, "Jews were more likely to reveal Jewishness in safe spaces occupied by other Jews—in the presence of what scholars such as Michael Warner have termed a 'counterpublic.'"⁴³ As Gluck indicated for Budapest, one such "safe" space was the intimate world of lowbrow cabaret, where Jewish actors and entertainers felt comfortable enough to tell Jewish jokes and be as theatrical—a Jewish-coded trait—as possible. Jewish actors were compelled to show restraint, however, in mainstream theater and film, which reached broader audiences. Thus actor Irene Triesch, for example, was revered for her ability to come across as non-Jewish; critics and audiences lauded characters whose "Jewish" traits "were so inconspicuous that they were nearly invisible."⁴⁴ Not many films explicitly addressed Jewish topics, and those that did typically only subtly displayed Jewishness. Yet, Wallach also provides a plethora of examples of Jewish female characters in films whose Jewishness was just visible enough to subtly code them as Jews so that audiences might approve. That these films were received so positively suggests that the subtle portrayal of Jewishness—rather than its complete erasure—was both gendered as well as a crucial part of Jewish self-fashioning.

Chapter 3 focuses on instances when Jews didn't want to be seen as Jewish out of fears of repercussions and judgment in potentially unsafe or embarrassing situations. Since simply looking wealthy could be seen as a marker of Jewishness, downplaying opulence was one strategy. While the fact that Jewish groups attempted to regulate their members' appearances is not new, Wallach marshals convincing evidence from newspapers and other sources to show that doing so was a much more central part of Jews' experiences than typically recognized. Her original readings of works of fiction by well-known authors Max Brod and Arthur Schnitzler, for example, pinpoint new insights, such as the power Jews had in outing others as Jews.

Though much of the book concerns Jews' successes in passing as non-Jews and covering Jewishness, Chapter 4 highlights cases of mistaken identification and nonrecognition, which often resulted in mild embarrassment, distress, anger, or worse. The popularity of the topic in Weimar cinema and literature suggests it was of great interest for Jews because it reflected the complicated web of codes in which Jews engaged on a daily basis. Jakob Loewenberg's drama *Der gelbe Fleck* (1924), for example, showed how wearing a yellow badge could make Jews visible, but also—when removed—help Jews pass. It also points to the irony of Jewish visibility in Weimar Germany: Jews were not forced to wear markers of Jewishness, but this lack of regulation also fostered spurious racial characterizations. Names that sounded or did not sound Jewish were also a form of public visibility. "In some instances, as in the film *Mensch ohne Namen*, the presence of a highly visible Jewish figure made it possible for others to pass by remaining invisible or by taking a new name, and with it a new identity."⁴⁵

In the final chapter, Wallach makes her case for examining Jewish experiences of passing in Europe along with other models involving race and gender, particularly in the United States. As she notes, the consequences of not passing in the 1920s and early 1930s were not as dangerous for German Jews as they were for African Americans, who risked being lynched, blackmailed, or imprisoned. But the similarities they shared in having to strategize about passing make it a helpful comparison. Queerness, too, adds to the discussion since it is identified through visual and behavioral codes. Like Shapira and Gluck, Wallach also emphasizes that what was considered Jewish was often illusory and unstable, making the identification of Jews—and passing as non-Jews—a constant challenge. The theoretical language that has been developed in studies of other minority cultures serves Wallach well in her study of Weimar Jews' experiences, and suggests that Jewish studies in general would benefit from embracing similar theoretical approaches in the future.

The books reviewed here exemplify the insight that studies of Jews and culture in a single city or country can yield into the processes

according to which Central European Jews negotiated their experiences. Whether in Vienna, Budapest, or the cities of Weimar Germany, Jews dealt with deep anxieties about majority cultures that would never fully accept them, no matter how assimilated, patriotic, or wealthy they were, or how non-Jewish they looked or behaved. Their strategies for coping depended on time, place, and audience, requiring Jews to maintain a constant vigilance about where they were and who was watching them. But this didn't keep them from participating deeply, significantly, and often playfully in the creation of modern European culture. By focusing on how Jews constructed their own narratives of the past in order to make meaning in the present and to point toward the future, these cultural histories help us see what was previously unseen. While Jewishness in Central Europe may have been ephemeral, the influence of Jews on Central European culture endures.

NOTES

1. Gombrich, *Visual Arts*, 11.
2. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 10-11; Gay, *Freud, Jews, and Other Germans*, 99.
3. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," 777.
4. Wallach, *Passing Illusions*, 13.
5. Shapira, *Style and Seduction*, 2.
6. Gluck, *Invisible Jewish Budapest*, 4.
7. For discussions of the impact of cultural history on Jewish history, see "Jewish Studies Meets Cultural Studies: New Approaches to the German-Jewish past," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 8, no. 1 (2009): 41-120 and "Forum: Cultural History and the Holocaust," *German History* 31, no. 1 (2013): 61-85.
8. For examples on Austria, see Oxaal et al., *Jews, Antisemitism, and Culture*; Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna*. On Germany see Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture*; Gay, *Freud, Jews*. On Hungary see McCagg, *History of Habsburg Jews*; Patai, *The Jews of Hungary*.
9. For examples on Austria, see Beller, *Vienna and the Jews*; Bunzl, *Symptoms of Modernity*; Silverman, *Becoming Austrians*. On Germany see Hess, *Middlebrow*

- Literature*; Lerner, *The Consuming Temple*; Otte, *Jewish Identities*. On Hungary see Frojimovics et al., *Jewish Budapest*; Manchin, “Cabaret Comedy”; Vörös, “How Jewish Is Jewish Budapest?”
10. Shapira, *Style and Seduction*, 9–10.
 11. Wallach, *Passing Illusions*, 25.
 12. For examples on Austria, see Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna*; Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna*. On Germany see Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life*; Meyer, *German-Jewish History*. On Hungary see Richers, *Jüdisches Budapest*; Patai, *The Jews of Hungary*.
 13. Sorkin, “The Invisible Community”; Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry*; Volkov, “The Dynamics of Dissimilation.”
 14. Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture*; Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon*. Scholars who have previously taken exception to this approach include Beller, *Vienna and the Jews*; Buerkle, *Nothing Happened*; Gilman, *Inscribing the Other*; Gillman, *Viennese Jewish Modernism*; and Silverman, *Becoming Austrians*.
 15. For a thorough discussion of the historiography see van Rahden, “Treason, Fate, or Blessing,” 349–53.
 16. Biale et al., *Insider/Outsider*, 8.
 17. Auslander, “The Boundaries of Jewishness,” 49.
 18. See, for example, Gilman, *Inscribing the Other*; Gilman, *The Jew’s Body*; Lässig, *Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum*.
 19. Volkov, “Antisemitism as a Cultural Code,” 38–39.
 20. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*; Reitter, *On the Origins of Jewish Self-Hatred*.
 21. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna*.
 22. Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*. For critiques see Beller, *Rethinking Vienna 1900*.
 23. Hall, *Cities in Civilization*, 4.
 24. Snyder, *Building a Public Judaism*.
 25. Shapira, *Style and Seduction*, 25.
 26. *Ibid.*, 60.
 27. Gillman, *Viennese Jewish Modernism*, 158.
 28. Shapira, *Style and Seduction*, 193.
 29. Gluck, *Invisible Jewish Budapest*, 4.
 30. *Ibid.*, 4.

31. Ibid., 19.
32. Ibid., 59.
33. Ibid., 84.
34. Ibid., 93.
35. Reitter, *The Anti-Journalist*; Otte, *Jewish Identities*; Jelavich, “How ‘Jewish.’”
36. Gluck, *Invisible Jewish Budapest*, 141.
37. Ibid., 172.
38. Wallach, *Passing Illusions*, 4.
39. For examples see Buerkle, *Nothing Happened*; Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class*; Hertz, *Jewish High Society*; Hirsch, *From the Shtetl*; Freidenreich, *Female, Jewish, Educated*.
40. Wallach, *Passing Illusions*, 34.
41. See Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*.
42. Ibid., 57–58.
43. Ibid., 62–63.
44. Ibid., 78.
45. Ibid., 158.

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