

Cultural Encounters: Contemporary German and Israeli Literature

Reception, Translation and World Literature (Workshop)

Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1-2 July, 2021

Description and aims:

This two-day workshop is intended for postdoctoral and junior researchers in the fields of literary studies, comparative literature, Jewish studies, Israel studies, etc. We also welcome German-Hebrew translators.

Our aim is to develop a forum for colleagues that will provide scholarly exchange and intellectual collaborations between the participants. Hence, we hope this workshop will be the first in a series of ongoing events.

Please note that if the Covid-19 restrictions will not allow a safe physical meeting, the workshop will be held virtually.

This workshop examines the cultural encounters between contemporary German and Israeli literature, with a specific focus on reception, translation and these literatures' relation to World Literature.

We find special interest in the period following Germany's reunification, in which hundreds of Israeli literary works have been translated to German. This suggested time frame is based on the changes that Germany has undergone after its reunification, both politically and culturally. These changes stem from the "memory boom" in German historiography – first in academic discourse and later in the general public sphere – which had shaped Germany's renewed national identity, and from a motivation to cope with the past ("Vergangenheitsbewältigung") rather than hiding or denying it. Germany's reckoning with its past affected, in turn, its cultural arena, and specifically its field of publishing: Until the end of the 1980's, approximately five Israeli titles were translated to German and published each year; the number of publications began to increase dramatically following Germany's reunification and throughout the 1990's, and reached an average of 27 titles per year by the end of that decade, a rate maintained to date. This upsurge in Israeli-German translations could be viewed as a prefiguration of the current restoration and

flourishing of the close cultural and artistic links between Germany and the Jewish/Israeli culture – a process that has materialized in the past decade, and which Eshel and Rokem term “a productive horizon of creativity” in Israeli literature.

Israeli society and culture have also undergone frequent and dramatic changes during this time, with the dominant ideological shift following Prime Minister Rabin’s assassination in the mid-1990’s and the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, which has subsequently impacted Israeli literature. This literary shift is represented in form (from romantic or “escapist” short prose to longer, more realist novels) and in changes in themes and attitudes. It has also affected the traditional role of the Israeli author as prophet or critic. Moreover, already from the mid-1980’s and throughout the 1990’s, Israeli literature underwent a process of pluralization, which introduced more voices that transcend the long-dominating white, male and Ashkenazi Zionist narrative.

Equally noteworthy is the facilitation and support that literary exchanges between Germany and Israel receive through institutional means, with instruments such as the “Deutsch-Hebräischer Übersetzerpreis”, and forums like the “Deutsch-israelische Literaturtage” that aim at direct encounters between contemporary writers from both countries as well as their readers. The “Literaturtage” are co-organized by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung and the Goethe Institute, which plays a major role when it comes to Hebrew translations of German literature which are published in Israel today. A closer look at these contexts, reveals a continued interest in non-fiction writings about the Second World War and the Holocaust, and German texts by Jewish writers and intellectuals who lived in Europe in the interwar years and before the Second World War, and contemporary German writing that cannot be considered as Jewish literature; it is particularly the latter that ignites our inquiry on the extent to which young Jewish writers from Germany are nevertheless read and discussed in Israel.

Taking into consideration these characteristics and developments in both societies, it is all the more interesting to ask to what extent do the German and Israeli literary polysystems interrelate through translation and critical discourse. Correspondingly, we find much interest in analyzing the literary representation of the intricate relations between Germany and its Jews, and the evolution of these relations after the establishment of the state of Israel and throughout the second half of the 20th century.

Suggested topics:

- a comparatist interest – examining two cultures/literatures and the relations thereof.
- translatability and the widely discussed perspective of world literature, which in itself asks questions regarding the very possibility of translation (what “remains” in the transformation from one language and one culture to a different one?).
- a historical contextualization of this cross-cultural dialogue.
- the diversity of the reception of Israeli literature in German language.
- the critical analysis of cultural stereotypes through the theoretical framework of imagology.
- an examination of specific reappearing themes, such as the Holocaust and its impact on second- and third-generation Israelis and Germans; the Jewish-Palestinian conflict; terrorism; militarism, etc.
- the translation of national narratives into global language.
- canon and canon-formation.

Here are a few options for those interested in participating:

- A brief presentation of your own research project and/or practical example (approximately 15 min.), followed by a discussion.
- A close reading of a theoretical text or a literary translation.
- A close reading of source and translation.
- A discussion about a shared topic between two participants.

Nonetheless, we are happy to consider alternative formats as well.

Proposal submission:

We look forward to short proposals (max. 150 words in English) and registrations from interested researchers at doctoral and postdoc level. Please send your proposal no later than March 31st 2021 by email to: jud.mueller@unibas.ch and tomke@post.bgu.ac.il.

Your participation will be confirmed by the end of April.

We have a limited budget; if your institution cannot cover travel costs and accommodation, please contact us in advance. For participants from abroad, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg will likely provide a few travel allowances.

Dr. Tom Kellner is a postdoc researcher at the department for Comparative Studies, MLU Halle-Wittenberg. Her research project examines German translations of contemporary Israeli prose written in the years 1989-2019. This comparative project engages with the theoretical framework of world literature, postcolonial theory and the notion of translatability, and offers a pioneering comprehensive examination of contemporary Israeli-German translations through a historical perspective.

Judith Müller is teaching Hebrew and Jewish literature at the Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Basel. As a PhD candidate at the University of Basel and the Ben Gurion University of the Negev she examines the perception of Europe in Hebrew literature (1890-1938) thereby touching on questions of translation and cultural transfer. She has, moreover, worked on the European realm and “culture” within Israeli literature, as well as the impact of the German-speaking environment on Aharon Appelfeld’s writing.

Literature for further reading:

Assmann, Aleida. *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*. München: Beck, 2006.

Böhmer, Lydia. ‘Schlulit: Eine Pfütze. Wie ich in die Zauberwelt des Übersetzens gefallen bin’. *Jalta. Positionen zur jüdischen Gegenwart*, 2019, 37–40.

Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Damrosch, David. “World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age”. *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Haun Saussy, 43-53. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

Eshel, Amir and Na’ama Rokem. “German and Hebrew: Histories of a Conversation”. *Prooftexts* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 1-8.

Even-Zohar, Itamar. “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem”. *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990): 45–51.

Feinberg, Anat. ‘Die besten Seiten’. *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 12 March 2018, sec. Literatur.
<https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/die-besten-seiten/>.

Levy, Lital and Allison Schachter. “Jewish Literature/ World Literature: Between the Local and the Transnational”. *PMLA* 31, no. 1 (2015): 92-109.

Mintz, Alan L. (ed.). *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1997.

Oz-Salzberger, Fania. ‘Israelis in Berlin. Ein neues Bücherregal’. In *Rück-Blick auf Deutschland. Ansichten hebräischsprachiger Autoren*, edited by Anat Feinberg, translated by H. Jochen

Bussmann, 2:151–70. Schriften der Gesellschaft für europäisch-jüdische Literaturstudien. München: edition text+kritik, 2009.

Peleg, Yaron. *Israeli Culture between the Two Intifadas: A Brief Romance*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2010.

Schirmeister, Sebastian. *Begegnung auf fremder Erde. Verschränkungen deutsch-und hebräischsprachiger Literatur in Palästina/Israel nach 1933*. Exil-Kulturen 1. Berlin: J.B. Metzler, 2019.