CHOOSING TO BRIDGE: REVISITING THE PHENOMENON OF JEWISH CULTURAL MEDIATION

Hillel J. Kieval

Taking as its starting point Simmel's contrasting images of "bridges" and "doors," this article revisits the issue of the role of Bohemian Jewish writers and artists in the mediation of Czech and German culture in the early twentieth century. The author points out that the linked projects of appropriation, translation, and transmission were not directed at Czech culture alone, but also at German, and that the mediators were frequently Czech-speaking Jews. The article turns finally to the writings of the Prague Zionist circle around the First World War, in particular to the anthology "Das jüdische Prag" (1917), whose purpose seems to have been to reimagine the city and its culture as somehow intrinsic to Jewish experience. The author argues that, in assembling the anthology, the editorial board of "Selbstwehr" demonstrated an explicit preference for Czech poetry (on Jewish themes) and German prose (written by Bohemian Jews). The project reveals the extent to which the opening to Czech culture was accompanied by a simultaneous closing to certain bodies of German writing. It was an exercise in the reclaiming of a piece of the diaspora as "Jewish" space, which purposefully violated the assumptions of liberal German hegemony in the Czech lands; self-serving, to be sure, but also courageous.

MITTEL-EUROPA? SOME AFTERTHOUGHTS ON PRAGUE JEWS, "HYBRIDITY," AND TRANSLATION

Scott Spector

It is well known that primarily German-speaking Jewish Prague writers of Franz Kafka's generation took on the translation of the key works of Czech modernism and their mediation to a broader European public. This group included Max Brod, Franz Werfel, Rudolf Fuchs, and Otto Pick, among others. Earlier study has explored how this extraordinary cultural contribution could be seen within the context of other exceptional literary production of this generation, as well as the context of ethnic cultural politics in Bohemia in the early twentieth century. This piece seeks to reframe those explorations within the theoretical frame suggested by the term "hybridity," specifically as it has been used by post-colonial literary theorists. Turning then to specific examples of Prague Jewish translators, the focus will be on the specificity of the cultural meanings of translation at this particular historical moment.