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

It is some years now since I finished writing "Prague Territories", a study of German-speaking Jewish Prague writers of Kafka's generation.[1] When asked to contribute a piece of writing on the Prague Jewish translators of works from Czech to German, a subject dealt with in the final chapter of that book, I decided to use this as an opportunity to reflect on some of my earlier thoughts on national identity and what I called "the translation project." This referred to the whole range of Czech-to-German translation efforts by Prague Jews in the period from the turn of the nineteenth century through to the First World War – a remarkable collective contribution in a period when those around them did not engage in such efforts. In the course of preparing for and attending the 2003 conference at the University of Munich (originally scheduled for Haifa University) and in its aftermath, however, my reflection on these issues did become a genuine "rethinking" in particular ways which will become apparent in the course of my discussion.

One principal way in which the Munich meeting drove these reflections was programmatic, if perhaps not deliberately so: my contribution at that time was scheduled on a panel including in its title the term "cultural hybridity." This intrigued me, not because "cultural hybridity" aptly characterizes something I described in my translation chapter, but did not have the insight or foresight to name. In fact, I had cited Homi Bhabha in my book (Homi Bhabha is the theorist I most closely associate with the term cultural hybridity), but in a slightly different context. In my conclusion, I noted Bhabha's insight that positions which in particular historical contexts might be described as "marginal" are, in their closeness to borders, extremes, or limits (in the language of centers and peripheries), necessarily those the best placed to be "in between cultural spaces," and hence to have a mediary function.[2] This is one of the ways that cultural studies theorists have sought to valorize positions that have previously been identified with oppression, persecution, or (again) "marginalization."

Another way, linked but not identical, is suggested by the term "cultural hybridity." This is a term that has been applied by theorists of colonialism to describe the ambivalent effects of the identities produced by the colonial processes. This complex ambivalence is spelled out in Bhabha's essays in "The Location of Culture", and it is fair to say that the intervention has been misinterpreted by those who understand it as an acceptance of a genus or category of the "hybrid" that is then celebrated for

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[1] *Spector*, Scott: Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle. Berkeley, Los Angeles 2000.
[2] *Ibid.* 237.

subverting the original, pure, colonizing species.[3] In an analysis informed by psychoanalytic sources, Bhabha usually avoids denoting a type ("the hybrid") who acts in certain ways under colonial conditions, but instead refers to hybridity as either a "process" or a "sign" of processes of domination and resistance.[4] It is specifically not "a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures," a description in which we more than faintly recognize the image many have painted of the Prague Jews in the period of nationalist conflict.

Here are some problems with these models for our cultural context. First of all, it needs to be established immediately and without confusion that the identification of Prague Jews in this period as culturally marginal is inadequate. While we might adjust the demographic figures one way or the other to accommodate different boundaries of the city, or to identify Jews as Czech rather than German, and so on, it is clear that, in the heyday of German-liberal cultural hegemony of the latter nineteenth century, the Jewish minority of Prague was unlike that of any other European city of its time as it represented fully half of the culturally German population (that is, the ruling minority). Thus, Hans Tramer's influential diagnosis of the "three-fold ghetto" of Prague German-speaking Jews has needed to be revised.[5] The Jewish Prague translators emerged from the generation after that of what we might call "high German-liberalism." Members of that previous generation had access to an affiliation with German culture that was less problematic than it would be for their children – they remained powerfully identified as Jews (very few would ever be baptized, for example, in comparison with the Viennese or Berliners), but their understanding of themselves as Germans, and hence part of the rightly ruling minority, was not troubled in the way it would be for those born in the 1880s. Hillel Kieval has shown that far from all of the Prague Jews were German-identified, and those who were did understand themselves, as I said above, as Jews.[6] Yet they were comfortable with what Mendes-Flohr calls the German-Jewish "dual identity," more so perhaps than any of the German Jews.[7] Once the challenges to German-liberalism – namely the Czech national movement and the *völkisch* German one – reached a certain pitch in Prague, this situation changed radically. Franz Kafka's generation inherited both an attachment to German culture and a consciousness of social position at the same time as they sensed the unstable, tenuous, peripheral state of their condition. They were in fact already a threatened Jewish minority, but one that remained nonetheless a slight majority of the traditionally dominant German population of the city; this was a population whose position in the turn was threatened by rising

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[3] *Bhabha,* Homi K.: The Location of Culture. London, New York 1994.

[4] *Ibid.* See esp. 112-115.

[5] See *Tramer,* Hans: Die Dreivölkerstadt Prag. In: Robert Weltsch zum 70. Geburtstag von seinen Freunden. Tel Aviv 1961, 138-203. – Translated into English under the title "Prague – City of Three Peoples". In: Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook 9 (1964) 305-339.

[6] See *Kieval,* Hillel Joseph: The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918. New York, Oxford 1988. – Cf. *idem:* Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands. Berkeley, Los Angeles 2000, see esp. 114-180.

[7] See *Mendes-Flohr,* Paul: German Jews: A Dual Identity. New Haven/Conn. 1999.

illiberal ideologies, even as it also represented a language group privileged in the monarchy at large. These layers of identity trapped the young Prague German-speaking Jews between identities inside and outside of the power structure, so that an analysis of their literary products as representations of "minority culture" is itself problematic.

This structurally complex picture of the "place" of German-speaking Prague Jews in the central European landscape lends itself to languages of center and periphery, to images of "liminality" and cultural transmission. There is clearly something valuable in this way of looking at things, although one wants to do so with close attention to the historical specificity of this particular case. Now, it is clearly more than a coincidence that the practice of translation is of special interest to theorists of this complex process of "cultural hybridity" and also the special province of Jewish writers in the context of the Czech-German conflict in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Taking off from Franz Fanon, Bhabha offers the rich image of liberatory people in times of struggle as "bearers of a hybrid identity [...]. They are caught in the discontinuous time of translation and negotiation ...".[8] These metaphors resonate evocatively with my own in "Prague Territories", but also with those of the Prague translators themselves in the particular time I am now discussing. Part of my purpose in my longer discussion of the Prague translators was to recuperate this rhetoric through an intensive reading of the peculiarity of the act of translation and its self-conception in its own particular moment – this is what I understand to constitute genuine historicization.[9] The cliché I thought worthy of avoiding in this case – one that I felt was truly "deceptive" in the sense of representing historical figures in a way directly contradicted by their self-understanding in their own time – was the image of a population of liberal humanist Jews seeking to reconcile two illiberal communities. Of course, the translation efforts in which they engaged did have powerfully humane, universalist, and selfless effects. But the translators were at the same time creating a world of their own in a way that we can too easily lose sight of. In that spirit, let me revisit two of early twentieth-century Prague's idiosyncratic translators.

Rudolf Fuchs (1890-1942) is in some ways an idiosyncratic case, but one that is perhaps for this very reason particularly telling – in fact my presentation of him in "Prague Territories" was organized around this tension. Unlike the core "Prague circle" group, he was born in Czech Bohemia, in Poděbrady, rather than Prague, and Czech had been his first language. Like the Hussite King Jiří of the same Poděbrady,

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[8] *Bhabha:* Location of Culture 38 (cf. fn. 3).

[9] This I add because of a recent comment by Hillel Kieval at a keynote speech on Prague Jews and translation in which he flatteringly cited my chapter, but suggested that it was "deceptive" not to further "historicize" and "contextualize" within a longer and broader tradition of Jewish translation activities. Certainly the (temporally) longer and (geographically) broader tradition of translation by East Central European Jews is a relevant context for the profusion of such activity in Prague in this period; "historicization" however primarily consists in fleshing out the historical specificity of the particular moment under study. "Translation" was not precisely the same act, I argued and maintain, in this particular context as it had been in others, or would later be.

who remained an anomaly of Bohemian history even as his language and his religion were the ones native to Bohemia, Fuchs forever remained an outsider in the only place and time that could have yielded such a person. As a Czech speaker joining the German-Jewish Praguers at the *Nikolanderschule* at the age of seven, Fuchs's identity was already "liminal" among his own cohort – this according to his own retrospective narrative of his childhood, at any rate. Others remember him as a fierce combatant for Czech culture before people like Fuchs as adults would bring such appreciation into fashion. This feeling of homelessness when one is at home – a condition Franz Werfel immortalized in some of his richest early poetry, which catapulted him to fame – was not a condition created by language alone. Fuchs developed a devoted and even fanatical embrace of differing group-based ideologies: throughout his life he maintained a close identification with the spiritual and historical base of Judaism, his tireless attachment to Czech culture and a Bohemian culture which included the Germans, and his ultimate commitment to socialism. The consistency of these fervent attachments with one another seems to have remained Fuchs's personal secret – just as the failure of others to perceive and accept that personal vision as a political solution was his tragedy. This, I think, makes him unique among and at the same time paradigmatic of the Prague Jews at the turn of the century.

Like the other great Prague translator, Otto Pick, Fuchs was also a poet in his own right. We have record of his poetic ambitions from as early as 1909, when the teenager sent his work to be critiqued by none other than the "Concordia" hero Hugo Salus (who predictably tried to steer the young artist away from modern *Stimmungskunst*).[10] In the following year, Fuchs appeared in one of the texts that have come to define the "Prague Circle," the "Herder-Blätter". By the time his poetry was published in a substantive way, Fuchs was considered to stand squarely in the expressionist camp, as his two anthologies show no less than do his ongoing contributions to such journals as the "Saturn", "Aktion", and the "Weiße Blätter".[11] But Fuchs also published in the Zionist journal "Selbstwehr",[12] he contributed "Feuerfugen vor dem Volke Israel" to the Prague Zionist collection "Das jüdische Prag", and Judaism was often the focus of his poetry.[13] Clearly, as in the in some ways quite similar case of Paul Kornfeld, Jewish history and symbolism were Fuchs's personal keys to a more universalist spiritualism. The tensions among Fuchs's manifold identifications were to become more problematic during the war, as he began to see them as bases for a politically revolutionary program.

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[10] Hugo Salus to Rudolf Fuchs, October 12, 1909. In: Památník Národního Písemnictví, Literární Archiv [Memorial for National Literature, Literary Archive] Praha-Strahov. Fond Rudolf Fuchs.

[11] The two volumes were "Der Meteor" (Heidelberg, 1913), published by the press of the expressionist journal "Saturn", and "Karawane" (Leipzig, 1919), published by the friend of Prague expressionists Kurt Wolff.

[12] Including, as late as 1917, the printing of Fuchs's spiritual poem "Abend" in an issue stressing Jewish support of the monarchy. In: Selbstwehr 11, no. 1, January 5, 1917.

[13] Willy Haas was understandably most moved by Fuchs's three-part poem "Juden" in "Karawane". Willy Haas to Rudolf Fuchs, n.d. [1924]. In: Památník Národního Písemnictví, Literární Archiv. Fond Fuchs.

The most important of Fuchs's works, the one to receive the most attention in its own time and in remembrances of his career, was the controversial translation of, "Slezské písně" (Schlesische Lieder, Silesian Songs).[14] The poet sang of the oppression of the Czech rural poor in the Austrian part of Silesia – a native *Volk* suffering under the national hierarchy of the Habsburg crown. The first of these translations had appeared way back in the "Herder-Blätter", but the volume was ready to appear in the middle of World War I, when Bezruč had been declared a traitor and his work had been banned in the monarchy. After arrest, military investigation, seizure of translation manuscripts, and conscription in the military, Fuchs continued to work on the publication of the translations, which had to be slipped by the censors on their way to Kurt Wolff in Leipzig. Wolff published them in 1916.

The songs made clear the spectrum of nationalities involved in the oppression of the mountain people: Bezruč directed his attack less against an imperial government than against German-speaking landowners and teachers, Polish clergy, and (perhaps most important of all, in any European attack on foreign power) Jewish merchants.[15] Coming from a Czech country town most certainly did not qualify Fuchs as an insider in any sense; his correspondence with Bezruč and other Czech writers was in German, as was the case for the other translators.[16] It is not enough to heroize Fuchs for his efforts in spite of the poet's "open antisemitism and chauvinism;"[17] such a judgment overlooks the fact of frank identification, and not mere sympathy, with the project which put Fuchs's career and person at greatest risk. Fuchs saw his activity as expressly political – the "knowing soldier" was fighting, however, for an army that did not understand where he belonged.[18]

Franz Werfel introduced the Fuchs translations of the "Silesian Songs" with the quotable phrase, "Our heart feels co-national with all the oppressed of all peoples." The songs do not protest against nationalist oppression of the people with any universalist resistance, but with a populist nationalism of the most powerful mark, a "self-willed being" (eigenwilliges Dasein) in Fuchs's words; a latent, territorialized

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[14] *Bezruč*, Petr: Slezské písně [Silesian Songs]. With a preface by Franz Werfel. Ed. Wolff, Kurt. Leipzig 1916.

[15] This judgment is only lightly veiled in the Communist F. C. Weiskopf's summary, written in 1938: "Das nationale und soziale Elend der Beskidenbauern und Bergleute wird laut in diesen volksliedhaften Liedern: der Trotz und Haß gegen fremde Grubenherren, habsburgische Erzherzöge, germanisierende Lehrer, polonisierende Pfarrer, brutale Herrschaftsförster, raffgierige [suddenly no national adjective] Händler [...]." See *Weiskopf*, F. C.: Petr Bezruč auf deutsch. In: Gesammelte Werke von F. C. Weiskopf. Vol. 8. Eds. *Weiskopf*, Grete/*Hermlin*, Stephan. Berlin 1960, 277.

[16] Thus the irony of the poet's 1927 dedication of a photograph to Fuchs, "Rudolf Fuchs in brüderlicher Liebe!", printed in *Serke*, Jürgen: Böhmische Dörfer. Wanderungen durch eine verlassene literarische Landschaft. Wien, Hamburg 1987, 250. – See also the postcard from Josef Čapek, in German, where he justifies Czech antipathy toward "German" writers like Fuchs, reprinted in: *Fuchs*, Rudolf: Die Prager Aposteluhr. Gedichte, Prosa, Briefe. Ed. *Seehase*, Ilse. Halle, Leipzig 1985. 334.

[17] *Haas*, Willy: Otto Pick. Ein Blatt des Gedenkens. In: Stifter-Jahrbuch 3 (1953) 67-71, here 68.

[18] Immediately after his death, the volume "Ein wissender Soldat", London 1942, was published.

power living beneath the visible surface of Central Europe.[19] It is difficult to recon-struct the way that subterranean *völkisch* power merged in Fuchs's mind with rab-binic Judaism, expressionist revolt, and finally spilled out into a unique sort of Marxism. Jürgen Serke strikes an interesting chord, at any rate, when he introduces Ernst Bloch into his text beside Rudolf Fuchs, where a deeply religious and Jewish spirit lies at the heart of a different socialism.[20]

It was a socialism with which Fuchs's fellow socialists were not quite comfortable, nor certainly were the Stalinists who were to have the task of placing him, or some version of him, delicately into the canon. Yet it was socialist and certainly revolu-tionary enough to alienate others after the war. One should not be surprised to read Max Brod's version of the story, which presents a case of political conversion from an "Israel-orientation" to communism.[21] Fuchs's view of political polemics must have been completely foreign to the author of "Streitbares Leben" – so that the fact that the first translations of the social revolutionary Bezruč appeared in Brod's own "Herder-Blätter" was as easy for Brod to overlook as was Fuchs's poem "Moses", published in the Prague "Jüdischer Almanach" decades after his entrance into the Communist party.

The career of Rudolf Fuchs had its ups and downs, but it seems safe to say that he was never appreciated for his total vision, but rather segments of his aesthetic iden-tity were selectively accepted: the translator would publish another anthology of Czech verse, the art critic would contribute to the "Prager Presse" under Otto Pick, a biblical essay would be published in a Jewish almanac, an old poem would be included in a collection of German Bohemian writing, the socialist would be recovered by East German scholarship. It is one of those cases that exceed irony by such a distance that it suddenly seems logical that the first and only readers to see a relation between Fuchs's Jewishness, cultural Czechophilism, and Marxism were the Nazis. Giving Fuchs's work more attention than did his supporters, they campaigned against him before 1938 and thereafter drove him to death in exile.

Fuchs forged and fanatically defended a territory that no other shared, or else which those that could have shared did not grasp. He was a man without a country in the only country that could have born him, just as he was an anachronism in the precise and only moment in which such a person could exist. He entitled a poem from the 1932 collection, which no publisher would find appropriate, "Unzeit" (Out of Season), but the word resonates with an otherworldly sense of being outside of time. This sense of the word is stressed in his opening line, where he describes his "untimely" birth – "zur Unzeit" – as though it were a place, his hometown. Who could say what Fuchs was thinking – if he dwelt upon his Jewish, Czech, or Prague German identity, or his special ideology, or upon the world war he had survived or the one well on the way – when he wrote these lines?

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[19] See *Fuchs*, Rudolf: Ein Erntekranz aus hundert Jahren tschechischer Dichtung. München 1926, 5.
[20] *Serke:* Böhmische Dörfer 248 passim (cf. fn. 16).
[21] *Brod*, Max: Der Prager Kreis. Stuttgart et al. 1966, 230.

Zur Unzeit ward ich geboren.
Mich gebar das Volk
Und verlor mich auf der Wanderung ...[22]

Fuchs was for me, then, not so much a unique and incomparable case as the extreme, perhaps even paradigmatic example of the Prague Jewish translator. But even this formulation makes me uncomfortable – it feels as though I am defining an inherited "type" when I mean to speak of what we call a "positionality," a way in which one structures oneself within a world in order to achieve particular, and in this case extraordinary, effects. With these finest of translators, Rudolf Fuchs and Otto Pick, there is less a sense of adjacency or empathy with the "other" they are translating than there is a kind of transformation. The translation becomes more than a copy in which one can hear, as Benjamin says, an "echo" of the original whose own authenticity has eroded;[23] the transformation is so complete that it seems the echo we hear is that of the self.

Perhaps this will be clearer after looking at another example. Otto Pick's own career as a poet was placed second to his role as translator and mediator – not only by his audience and publishers, but most importantly by himself. The bulk of his work testifies to this, as does the majority of his correspondence with potential publishers and others in the literary world. His efforts toward bringing the work of Czech writers to the German public led to the introduction to Western Europe of the now well-known Karel Čapek, as well as the important figures Otokar Březina and Fráňa Šrámek. While he is most remembered for his mediation of Czech work to German audiences, Pick was no less active in securing a place for German (particularly Prague German) literature in Czech cultural life.

The result of this activity is that Pick's work – his translations as well as his poetry – was soon identified as a futile attempt to defer the crisis in which Central Europe was to find itself before the end of Pick's life.[24] Indeed, it would be cynical to depreciate the humanistic contribution that this life and work represents. Yet, the way that contribution was designed and actually operated is lost in the romantic reconstructions of his supporters. Willy Haas, for example, identified Pick as the spiritual *Doppelgänger* of Adalbert Stifter, a latter reincarnation of a type long-since extinct, who could claim "he knew no 'Germans' and 'Czechs,' but only 'Bohemians' and 'the [Bohemian] Fatherland'."[25] This parallel interestingly displaces Pick from the milieu of national conflict which is exactly and unambiguously the impetus of his work; it finds Pick at home rather in the myth of a pre-1848 "Bohemism" which rejected national identification altogether. There is certainly some flavor of

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[22] *Fuchs:* Die Prager Aposteluhr 29 (cf. fn. 16).

[23] *Benjamin,* Walter: Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers. In: *Idem:* Gesammelte Schriften IV/1. Werkausgabe. Vol. 10. Eds. *Rexroth,* Tillman/*Tiedemann,* Rolf/*Schweppenhäuser,* Hermann/*Adorno,* Theodor W. Frankfurt/M. 1980, 9-21.

[24] See e. g. *Werfel,* Franz: Die Brücke-Most IV, May 21, 1937, 21. – Werfel followed Pick's career closely and often lauded him. The two served together at the front during World War I and remained in contact with one another.

[25] *Haas:* Otto Pick 67 (cf. fn. 17).

Bohemian *Landespatriotismus* to be found in Pick's life and work, as might as well be identified in the life and work of Egon Erwin Kisch. But in his concentration on strongly nationalist Czech poets, as well as on German Bohemians who were fierce-ly cosmopolitan and primarily Jewish, it cannot be accurate to represent the territo-ry inscribed in his work as a multinational and nationless "Bohemia" (and it is for this reason that he was fiercely attacked by Egon Erwin Kisch's German-nationalist brother, Paul).

At the age of 25, Pick published his first two books: the first, "Freundliches Erleben", was a volume of his own expressionist poetry; the second, "Flammen", was a translation of novellas by Fráňa Šrámek. With a technical education and no university background, his command of Czech was central to his entry in the liter-ary world. The role he had created for himself was two-fold: his contributions to journals in Austria and the German Empire often focused on Czech literature, while he was also able to publish in Czech journals on German-language literary manifes-tations, mostly by Prague Jews.

The layers of Pick's journalistic activities and his own ambitions are densely inter-twined. Pick called the attention of his future publisher Axel Juncker with his reviews in Czech journals of Brod's "Jüdinnen" and other works published in the Juncker house.[26] Juncker was as we have seen instrumental in the early publications of Prague Circle writers; Pick had an interest not only in having his own poetry pub-lished by Juncker, but in promoting attention to the young Jewish writers in Prague through these reviews, and he encouraged Juncker to consider other works by yet unpublished Prague Circle writers. In nearly the same period, we find remnants of Pick's efforts to have Oskar Baum's first novel ("Das Leben im Dunkeln", a novel about the life of the blind which has mediation as a central theme) published in the crucial (and extremely Czech-nationalist) journal "Národní listy".[27] Such sugges-tions were sometimes made in the same letter in which Pick offered to translate *and* critique Czech work for German publications.[28] The recommendation of Baum's book in fact had the support of a positive review in the Czech journal "Přehled", composed of course by Pick. Baum in turn was sending the publisher Martin Buber Otto Pick's translations of the Czech-speaking Prague Jew František Langer.[29] It is most interesting that the expressionist poet Pick used his influence at Central Europe's most cutting-edge journals to publish translations of Czech work, culmi-nating in a special "Saturn" issue of his translations of Šrámek.[30]

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[26] See Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Nachlass A. Juncker, Nos. 152 (June 20, 1911), 153 (November 21, 1911), and 154 (January 24, 1912).

[27] Otto Pick to Otokar Theer, August 6, 1912. In: Památník Národního Písemnictví, Literární Archiv. Fond O. Theer.

[28] Otto Pick to Otokar Theer, August 9, 1912. In: *Ibid.*

[29] Jewish National and University Library (Jerusalem), Martin Buber Archives [MS Var 350] file 80, 80.15 (April 8, 1913). The volume was a collection of translations which had been published in part in "Simplizissimus" and Kraus' "Die Fackel".

[30] Saturn 3 (June 1913).

The correspondence between Pick and his Czech and German publishers, Czech writers he translated, and his German-Jewish friends is dominated by this network of mutual promotion, in a manner that goes beyond the everyday politics of German literati in this period. Through this intense mediation of Czech literature to Germans, Prague German-Jewish literature to Czechs, and the latter to a broader German public, Pick was creating and expanding a domain which had not been recognized before. Prague German literature was no longer a peripheral branch of German culture, and neither was Czech literature a marginal European manifestation of mainly anthropological interest.[31] One must consider Pick's substantial role in a surging awareness in Berlin as well as Paris: something was going on in Prague.

As the decade continued, Pick's activities centered ever more on translations from Czech into German and the mediation of their publication. In 1917 Pick's translation of Šrámek's play "Léto" (Summer) was accepted for production in Vienna, and he pushed tirelessly to have a modern Czech drama taken on by Max Reinhardt in Berlin.[32] He laid particular hopes on the work of Stanislav Lom, with whom he was in steady correspondence from his field post in 1917. He translated the play "Vůdce" (Leader), and when Reinhardt showed no interest, attempted various other theaters, and even magazines and book publishers.[33]

I focus on this moment of Pick's ongoing activity because, due to Pick's distance from Prague, a correspondence remains between the translator and the artist. It becomes clear not only to what extent Pick championed the work of little-known Czech writers, but also the eagerness with which he took on new projects – in each letter requesting another prose piece or poem which he might turn out and send to a German magazine. For a writer such as Lom, Pick's interest was of course a windfall. The resulting relationship is one in which the "artist," flattered for his astonishing brilliance by the "translator," is completely at the latter's mercy. He waits for the translator to express interest in some piece or other, and sends it off. Pick then turned out the product immediately and sent it where he chose – Lom was never consulted on this, nor asked permission, nor did he review translations as a rule, despite his excellent German. It is also curious (and significantly consistent among the Prague translators) that Pick wrote to the Czech writers and even Czech publishers in German. Ordinarily one would assume that the bilingual abilities of the translator

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[31] Paul Reimann [Pavel Reiman], in a somewhat contrived Marxist essay, makes the valuable point that literary innovation in late 19th-century Europe comes increasingly from the previously (and geographically?) "peripheral" countries, and that a decisive moment occurs when these are translated into the major West European languages. Reimann explicitly recognizes the role of the Prague translators in bringing the "periphery" to the center. *Reimann, Paul:* Die Prager deutsche Literatur im Kampf um einen neuen Humanismus. In: *Goldstücker,* Eduard (ed.): Weltfreunde. Konferenz über die Prager deutsche Literatur. Prag 1967, 11-12.

[32] Pick to Reinhardt, February 9, 1917. In: Památník Národního Písemnictví, Literární Archiv. Fond Stanislav Lom.

[33] Including the Insel-Verlag in Leipzig, the Austrian journal "Donauland", and the Wiener Burgtheater. March 11 and June 26, 1917. In: Památník Národního Písemnictví, Literární Archiv. Fond Stanislav Lom.

are greater than those of the writers; whatever his reasons, we must recognize in the correspondence a silent concession to the fact which the translation project as a whole was seeking to overcome: that is, the recognition that German was the *Kultursprache* of the Bohemian lands.

Thus a paternalistic tone is apparent in the correspondence, and it is a tone one recognizes as well in the letters between Fuchs or Brod and "their" artists. One is reminded here of Werfel's anger at the audacity of a Czech Renaissance that sought to exclude German culture (whose "child" it could only be)[34] – the series of German-liberal assumptions that remained somehow in the consciousnesses of those that sought to break from them. Yet, there is in the correspondences also the sense of the inferior position of the translator before the greater genius of the artist. One senses that the "sweet work" of translation is for Pick ultimately secondary (less immediate?) to the creation of "works".[35]

Pick's own "work", however – that is, his original poetry – is another sort of translation, rather than grounded folk culture such as that of the Czech writers and the German-Bohemian neo-romantics. The mysticism behind his expressionist work becomes more familiar when seen alongside the Czech mystic, translated and revered by Pick, Otokar Březina. Searching for a native root of that provocative mysticism within himself, Pick turned to the obscure Judaism of previous generations in the poem "Wenn der Vater betet".[36] But this experience, too, is a foreign and mediated one, with the father's manner of loving "marvelously transformed" on "certain days of the year," he seems possessed by some distant historical and religious moment. The presence of Březina's national-religious mysticism, reaching directly into humanity, is lacking in Pick's poem, and the effort to translate that lost experience seems contrived. Pick speaks of Březina's nationalism as Brod speaks of Judaism, but Březina's is more authentic from Pick's point of view, the one closer him:

Fruchtbarer, schöpferischer Nationalismus, wie der Dichter ihn begreift, hat nichts gemeinsam mit jenem anderen, der Kasernen baut und darauf aus ist, die Menschen zu uniformieren. Der echte Nationalismus baut auf und verbindet die Völker.[37]

Franz Werfel, too, implies that this "great mystic of our time" is both universalist (his "mystic humanism," each of his poems a "congregation" or "brotherhood") and nationalist (the humanism "of the Taborite Republic," the "heart-felt melody of Smetana's music"). The poet represents "the pure manifestation of the creative substance of the Czech people."[38] Werfel himself collaborated with a translation of two

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[34] See the discussion of Werfel's "Glosse zu einer Wedekind-Feier" in: *Spector:* Prague Territories 115-117 (cf. fn. 1).

[35] "diese süße Arbeit". February 19, 1917. In: Památník Národního, Písemnictví Literární Archiv. Fond Stanislav Lom.

[36] *Pick,* Otto: Wenn der Vater betet. In: Selbstwehr No. 48 (December 7, 1917) 2.

[37] *Idem:* Stunden mit Otokar Březina: In Memoriam (Eindrücke von e. Besuch bei Otokar Březina; Zu d. Dichters Gedächtnis). Prag 1929, 14. This rather arcane edition is reprinted from the "Prager Presse", February 17, 1924.

[38] Ein großer Mystiker in unserer Zeit: Otokar Březina. In: Die literarische Welt. October 12, 1928, 1.

of his works (which, considering Werfel's command of Czech, were probably mainly poetic revisions of the translation of Emil Saudek). Werfel's description of the spirituality of the poetry and its gesture toward mystical communion sounds self-referential; Pick on the other hand knew no direct source for that experience. He had only indirect (mittelbar) access to it, and so he let it pass through his hands, to mediate (vermitteln) it to others.

My play with the words "Mitte/Mittel/mittelbar/vermitteln/Vermittlung" here and in the title of this contribution is obviously closely linked to the questions at hand. Stated frankly: were the Jews in Prague a "third people" that was naturally positioned "between" the hostile Czech and German nations? Were these translations acts of national reconciliation, humanistic interventions, "tikkun olam" (repair of the world)? It is a delicate question, to which the answer must be both yes and no. The humanistic interpretation of the translators as lone voices of intercultural understanding in a period in which intolerant nationalisms were driving the region and, soon, the continent toward unprecedented disaster is compelling, but also clearly teleological – worst of all, it does not quite capture the pattern we observe in at least these two writers. "Mutual understanding among the nationalities" is a construction that leaves intact the system of identity, ideology, and representation that is systematically undermined in the lives and works of these people. I did claim, somewhat provocatively, that the rules of the nationalist game guaranteed a relationship between a literature, a culture, and a nation, so that, in establishing the "translation project" the Prague Jews were grounding a new sort of nation, of which they proclaimed themselves to be its national poets. To the degree this can be said to be true, it is important to recall that such a literature was not a "Jewish literature," and that such a nation – "Middle Nation" – was not Zion. It functioned, so my argument goes, as an alternative – and, yes, a subversive one – to the ideological complex binding essential peoples to eternal literatures and sovereign territories.

And in this lies the distinction between a view of the translators as a "middle nation" and a view of them as representatives of "cultural hybridity." While the hybrid is introduced as something potentially subversive, it is perhaps only so within the terms – in this case, the explicitly racialist terms – of the system it is supposed to resist. Clearly, there can be no "hybrid" without the "pure" – that the Jewish example was a model for Bhabha is less encouraging to me than the appropriation of this sort of discourse is unsettling.

My conclusion remains, therefore, that these translations and translators can be understood not as pluralistic attempts to render closed cultural spheres more open to one another, nor as creatively hybridized products of cultural interaction, but as the very tension between identity and otherness itself. They occupied the space we call "mediation."