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and to the unique aspects of visual media would have sharpened important distinctions between film and television and between visual and literary cultures.

Directed by God concludes with a brief reflection on popular media and events leading up to Israel's 2014 war in Gaza. This contemporary focus, bolstered by Peleg's expertise in Israeli culture from the past three decades, is one the book's strengths. With its lucid prose and keen readings of film and television, this book is a welcome contribution to scholarship on Israeli culture.

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Rachel Seelig. *Strangers in Berlin: Modern Jewish Literature between East and West, 1919–1933*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. xiv + 225 pp.
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The parameters of Rachel Seelig's outstanding new monograph on Jewish literatures in the Weimar era, *Strangers in Berlin*, were first defined by the *erev*–World War I periodical *Die Freistatt* (The sanctuary), which appeared between April 1913 and June 1914 under the editorship of Fritz Mordecai Kaufmann. Transcending Kaufmann's Zionist roots, the journal was dedicated to creating a "free space," a nonpartisan model for Jewish culture at odds with the Palestine-focused and Hebrew-dominated politics of Zionism. As Seelig writes, "Showcasing German poetry and essays alongside Yiddish and Hebrew poetry, *Die Freistatt* was the only publication of its kind to encourage German Jews not only to read East European Jewish texts but also to learn Jewish languages. By attributing equal cultural value to German, Hebrew, and Yiddish, Kaufmann aimed for nothing less than a 'radical revision and regeneration of west European Jewry's view of the Jewish present'" (57). Seelig follows this trilingual and inclusive approach in her own work, recognizing that the allure of Berlin resides in how aesthetic and ideological formations came into contact with one another via their serendipitous proximity in the metropolis.

Strangers in Berlin is a dense, elegant survey of four poets at work in Weimar-era Berlin. Seelig begins with the German- and Hebrew-language poet Ludwig Strauss, a son-in-law of Martin Buber and, after relocating to Palestine in 1935, a member of the dissident, largely German Jewish Zionist movement Brit Shalom that advocated Arab-Jewish coexistence in Palestine. The next chapter considers Moyshe Kulbak, a leading Yiddish modernist who repudiated his Berlin experiences when he relocated to Soviet Minsk at the end of the 1920s; the following chapter concerns Uri-Zvi Greenberg, who shed his iconoclastic Yiddish expressionism and adopted both the Hebrew language and an extreme version of Revisionist Zionism during his single year in Berlin, 1923. The book ends with Gertrud Kolmar, a Berlin native and, later, Holocaust victim, who wrote only in German. In her afterword, Seelig discusses the legacy of Weimar

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Germany for the significant Hebrew-speaking diaspora living in Berlin today. Seelig's study is thus both wide-ranging and focused, considering the social landscape of Berlin as a meeting ground for Jewish languages and literatures in transit, as well as the aesthetic and ideological characteristics of individual poets and their poetry.

In contrast to other global centers of Jewish literature, such as New York, Berlin never functioned as anything other than a way station among ideological options bringing Jews to America, Palestine, or (back to) the Soviet Union. Berlin nonetheless experienced a population explosion following the First World War, as more than a million new residents poured into the city, both German citizens and refugees from the East. Within German-language culture, moreover, Berlin experienced a new ascension with the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Vienna's decline as a cultural center. It was an awkward role for Berlin, which previously had been seen as a rough-and-tumble, provincial, and seedy city. The transition could only be achieved with a comparably tumultuous redefinition of German-language culture. Simultaneously, Jewish literature experienced a sea change brought about by the new cosmopolitanism of its readers, new contact among languages, and at-times perilous ideological struggles among Yiddish-language, Hebrew-language, and other national-language world views. Seelig's study navigates cogently among all of these tensions.

The chapters on Moyshe Kulbak and Uri-Zvi Greenberg are the highlights of Seelig's work. In opposing ways, both felt compelled to repudiate their Berlin experience. When he arrived in Germany, Kulbak was already one of the most accomplished lyric poets in east European Yiddish literature. By the time he left Berlin, four years later, the influence of German culture had inspired him to write an idiosyncratic epic poem, "Raysn," about Jewish farmers in Belorussia; a tragic drama about the messianic pretender Jacob Frank; and a sui generis prose phantasmagoria entitled *Meshiekh ben-'Efrayim* (The messiah of the house of Ephraim), which ranks among the most innovative experiments in Yiddish narrative. Making his way to Soviet Minsk at the end of the 1920s, however, Kulbak savaged the rootlessness and aestheticized nihilism of Weimar culture in his poetic reminiscence of the period, "Dizner Childe Harold" (modeled on Lord Byron's mock epic). Seelig's meticulous reading of this later poem demonstrates that Kulbak articulated his self-criticism out of more than just political expediency: the "shock of the new" that motivated his literary experiments signified a disorienting estrangement of the poet from his cultural moorings and his sense of self. To find shelter in the Soviet system was at the time a means of reclaiming the cultural purpose as well as the social imperative for his writing.

As such, Kulbak's critique of expressionism offers a dialectical representation of his Berlin years: simultaneously aesthetically modernist and ideologically antimodernist. As different as their ideological orientations were to become, one can understand the development of Uri-Zvi Greenberg's poetics in a similar sense; Seelig suggests that when these poets reacted to the aesthetic freedom of Berlin by seeking bondage to ideological extremes, they were in fact replicating the larger dynamic of Weimar-era modernism. When Greenberg left Berlin, he abandoned not only the stylistic eclecticism of modernist poetry but also the

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Yiddish language. As Seelig argues, Berlin is the key to Greenberg's modernistically antimodernist embrace of Zionism and Hebrew, through which he "saw himself as a fugitive, an illegal interloper who could only find refuge by escaping Europe and resettling in his ancestral homeland, the Land of Israel" (102). Although Kulbak and Greenberg had a diametrically inverse experience of Berlin—the former opening up in the city, the latter shutting himself off—the aftermath of this experience saw each searching for radically different kinds of homeland.

This, indeed, is the lesson of Weimar modernism for all its participants; however exhilarating the dynamism of the cosmopolis is, it becomes a site of disorientation and exhaustion over time, precariously so for people lacking a stable sense of citizenship or community. The dialectic of "Germanness" and "worldliness" that is essential to the character of German Jewish modernism becomes apparent in Seelig's treatment of the two German-born writers, Strauss and Kolmar. One can contend, in fact, that Seelig's attentive reading of Strauss's German-language poetry is better than the verse itself, and this characterization applies more forcefully to Kolmar. Seelig's critical virtuosity with German-language poetry in particular illustrates a necessary fact regarding modern Jewish literature, as well as the secret strength of her book: beneath the orientalist whimsy of Strauss's verse, for example, lies a profound, fundamental engagement with German poetic tradition, specifically Goethe and Hölderlin. Without a sense of how Jewish writers respond to the aesthetic conventions of their chosen languages—if a language can in fact be chosen—and only secondarily to the ideological dictates of their addressees, the study of literature remains stranded between taxonomy and propaganda. There is nothing hermetic or doctrinaire in Seelig's approach. She is as open a reader as the writers themselves are to the world that surrounds and precedes them.

If there is a single critique to be offered for this extraordinary work, it is merely organizational: the chapter on Strauss should be the fifth rather than the second. Strauss's messianic belief in the coexistence of Arabs and Jews, which as Seelig specifies is inextricable from the entwinement of German with Hebrew in his poetry, is too tragically pertinent to the present moment to be relegated to a prelude to the subsequent three poets in her discussion. It is the inversion and companion to the conclusion of her study, which considers the growing phenomenon of contemporary Israelis finding a paradoxical new home in postreconciliation Berlin. Strauss's movement, Brit Shalom, was condemned for its radicalism and quixotic faith in coexistence as both a practical and a moral value. It nonetheless foresaw better than any competing ideology of the time the pitfalls that Zionism was creating for itself, making it the most "realist" Zionist movement, and it is the romanticism of its rivals that caused its message to be ignored.

If Americans now see their own political landscape through the cautionary prism of late Weimar culture, Seelig recognizes in Berlin today what had been utopian about Berlin in its brief and fragile Weimar heyday. Berlin for Seelig and her writers is and has been a place of multiple nationalities and languages—as well as new sexual politics and an aesthetic commitment to various

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modalities of the “new” and the “now”—in which the past of tribalism and warfare was never forgotten, but could be, however briefly, overcome. Her readers need this Berlin as a model for the future, and by this reckoning her readers should be a category that encompasses everyone.

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Ellie R. Schainker. *Confessions of the Shtetl: Converts from Judaism in Imperial Russia, 1817–1906*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017. 339 pp.
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Ellie Schainker’s study aims to change conventional opinion on converted Jews in imperial Russia. The traditional view is embodied in Sholem Aleichem’s novel *Tevye the Milkman*, in which Tevye and his wife Golda sit shiva (mourn) for their daughter, who has converted in order to marry the Ukrainian Fedka. Schainker explains, “By asking how converts functioned in Jewish society, I hope to sidestep the emotional, literary rendering of apostates as dead to their Jewish kin, and account for the overwhelming archival evidence of ongoing social, religious, and economic ties between converts and Jews in imperial Russia. In this vein, my work on converts is as much about a minority of radical boundary crossers as it is about the majority of their former, traditionalist coreligionists who tried to defend cultural and communal boundaries in the face of conversion” (10).

Schainker describes unusual individuals who crossed the religious Rubicon. Using rare materials from archives in Russia and the United States, she depicts converts from among the lower classes and rural population. The focus differs from the kind of converts who were the subject of Saul Ginsburg’s famous book, *Meshumodim in Russland* (Converted Jews in Russia), published in 1946. In contrast to the social elite—medical doctors, government censors, and professors—Schainker depicts minor missionaries who peddled Christianity, marginal Jews who fell in love with a Christian neighbor or a servant, and the poor who saw distinct financial advantage in conversion, such as access to educational institutions or a permit to live in Russia’s capital cities. Schainker also includes “simple” Jews who fell in love with the Christian religion. After converting, she notes, many Jews did not move far from their homes, and some resided close to their parents and family.

Here are some of the protagonists of the book: “In 1855 the Jewish teenager Faiba Nakhim from the village of Smorgona in Vilna Province applied for conversion after having begun preparations himself by learning prayers and articles of faith from Christians with whom he had ‘occasional contact.’ Malka Kuks, the daughter of a mill leaseholder, ascribed her 1864 conversion to her exposure to Orthodoxy and her acclimation to Orthodox life in her village. Roshka Shmulovna

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