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The Author's *derrière* and the Ludic Impulse: Oskar Panizza's "The Operated Jew" (1893) and Amy Levy's "Cohen of Trinity" (1889)

Axel Stähler

The German writer Oskar Panizza's literary grotesque "The Operated Jew" (1893) has been denounced as "the explosion of a furious antisemitism, its acerbity equaled only by the *Stürmer*."¹ While critical discourse on "The Operated Jew" has not always been as damning, this appraisal is nevertheless paradigmatic of the way in which the text has been received. Even Arnon Hampe's recent entry on the frequently maligned grotesque in the latest edition of the *Handbuch des Antisemitismus* (2015) – while acknowledging in a half-sentence its potential critical impetus – reverts without further hesitation to the predictable antisemitic reading: "To be sure, the text may also be understood as a criticism of the individual impositions of assimilation – yet by using virulently antisemitic imagery and by pejoratively applying contemporary discourses on 'race' and the pathology of the Jews, it attuned them to a readership with an antisemitic bias."²

The fact that "The Operated Jew" was reprinted in 1927 in a local (Bavarian) supplement to the *Völkischer Beobachter* may lend credibility to such an evaluation.³ After all, this was the main organ of the snowballing National Socialist movement. Yet it seems to me that the attempt of the otherwise media-savvy Nazis to appropriate the author's work was in fact a gaffe. Certainly, the text was discarded by the propaganda machine after this initial attempt, and my sense is that this is largely

¹ Fischer, "Deutschsprachige Phantastik," 1978, p. 102: "[die] Explosion eines wütenden Antisemitismus, wie er in dieser Drastik nur noch vom 'Stürmer' erreicht worden [ist]." If not otherwise indicated, all translations from the German are my own.

² Hampe, "Der operierte Jud" (Kurzgeschichte von Oskar Panizza, 1893), 2015, p. 375: "Zwar kann der Text auch als Kritik an den individuellen Zumutungen der Assimilation verstanden werden – indem der Autor sich aber einer virulent antisemitischen Bildersprache bediente und zeitgenössische Diskurse über 'Rasse' und Pathologie der Juden in pejorativer Weise aufgriff, machte er sie für eine antisemitisch gesinnte Leserschaft anschlussfähig.

³ Introduced by a short biography of the author in which an attempt was made to appropriate Panizza to the ideological agenda of the Nazis, see *Völkischer Beobachter* [Bavarian edition], November 8, 1927, 2, the text of the "novella" was published in six instalments in the *Münchener Beobachter* from November 10 to 16 (on p. 3) as a filler between instalments of Gustav Renner's novel *Der Schrei aus dem Osten* (1927) and Ludwig Tieck's novella *Dichterleben* (1825). As Michael Bauer has shown in *Oskar Panizza*, 1984, p. 24, the biographical note is riddled with factual errors, such as the date of Panizza's death (in 1921 and not in 1922), and misrepresentations which are calculated to portray the author as a persecuted exile yearning to return to his fatherland: "Der Dichter flüchtete ins Ausland, kehrte aber schließlich, von Heimweh gepackt, doch wieder nach Deutschland zurück," *Völkischer Beobachter* [Bavarian edition], November 8, 1927, 2.

due to the perhaps unexpected resistance of Panizza's grotesque to such demagogical arrogation – contrary to what Hampe suggests.

Panizza (1853–1921) undoubtedly was an unlikely candidate for Nazi exploitation. As one of the Munich Moderns, he associated with writers such as Frank Wedekind, Otto Julius Bierbaum and Max Halbe. Today, Panizza is probably best known for his provocative tragicomedy *The Love Council* (1894),⁴ a radically anti-Catholic and, once again, allegedly antisemitic play which suggests that syphilis was visited on the Renaissance court of the popes as punishment for its moral depravity.⁵ Though the text had been published in Switzerland, the writer was nevertheless accused of blasphemy on various counts in a spectacular trial in Munich. Sentenced to 12 months in prison, Panizza was styled by sympathetic contemporaries “the first martyr of modernism.”⁶

In his expert testimony to the court, the writer Michael Georg Conrad emphasized Panizza's recourse to what he describes as “the baroque, the tasteless, the bawdily grotesque”;⁷ yet he insisted nevertheless in conclusion that *The Love Council* was a work of art and that to understand it as tendentious blasphemy was to demean it.⁸ In a similar vein, in a literary portrait of Panizza predating his trial, the writer and critic Otto Julius Bierbaum characterized his friend's two collections of literary grotesques as “spookily intricate books, hell-breughellings of a madly burlesque imagination – each a series of grotesque roly-polies which mostly exhibit the esteemed author's *quatre lettres*.”⁹ If couched in the politely distancing French translation of a German euphemism for the posterior, the graphic description nevertheless aptly captures the playful and frequently irreverent nature of Panizza's artistic and artful contortions.

In fact, Panizza's ludic impulse as it was perceptively described by Bierbaum and as it emerges from his writings, not least from his controversial “The Operated Jew,” corresponds compellingly to the categories of mimicry and ilinx suggested by Roger Caillois in his influential study on the ludic, *Les jeux et les hommes* (1958). Mimicry as an element of role play is understood by the sociologist as the play of “incessant invention,” as an evasion of all rules in order to create an unchallenged illusion.¹⁰ While the context envisaged by Caillois obviously is a different one, narrative in general exhibits an affinity with the inventive and illusionary, i.e. effec-

⁴ See Panizza, *Das Liebeskonzil*, 1895.

⁵ For the latter reading, see Sander L. Gilman, “Salome, Syphilis, Sarah Bernhardt,” 199–203.

⁶ See Dobijanka-Witzakowa, “Auf dem Weg zur Moderne: Der Auftakt in München,” 2002, p. 19: “[d]er erste Märtyrer der Moderne.”

⁷ Panizza, *Psychopatia criminalis*, 2015, p. 21: “... das Barocke, Geschmacklose, Derb-Groteske.”

⁸ Ibid., p. 24: “Panizzas ‘Liebeskonzil’ ist ein Kunstwerk, und es wäre eine Herabwürdigung, in ihm eine tendenziöse Lästerschrift erblicken zu wollen.”

⁹ Bierbaum, “Oskar Panizza,” 1893, 984: “gruselig verzwickte Bücher, Höllenbreughelleien von einer toll-burlesken Phantastik, – jedes eine Reihe von grotesken Purzelbäumen, bei denen man zumeist die *quatre lettres* des verehrten Herrn Verfassers zu sehen bekommt.”

¹⁰ Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, [1961] 2001, p. 23.

tively poietic, potential ascribed by him to mimicry. Yet the “hyperbolization” employed by Panizza in “The Operated Jew” pushes the boundaries of what may remain “unchallenged.” It in fact builds up and then capsizes the creative force of mimicry into its virtual inversion, *ilinx*, which represents the unsettling and potentially destructive impetus of the ludic. In Caillois’s system, *ilinx* signifies the attempt “to destroy the stability of perception” in the “pursuit of vertigo.”¹¹ This, to me, seems to encapsulate the writer’s practice perfectly.

Intriguingly, the relevance of *ilinx* for the appreciation of Panizza’s oeuvre was anticipated by Bierbaum long before the ludic category was defined by Caillois. The critic identifies as Panizza’s preferred satirical method the adoption of an unusual and bizarre perspective from which the whole world appears in monstrous foreshortening.¹² It is crucial, as observed once again very astutely by Bierbaum, that the perception of the world as a whole is distorted through this kaleidoscopic shift and that, in order to make sense of the writer’s grotesques, the reader must be intellectually nimble enough, and willing, to follow him to the same vantage point.¹³

For Bierbaum “The Operated Jew” accordingly was a “virtuoso piece of the art to describe what is most extraordinary”; it is, moreover, in the critic’s words, “the only antisemitic work of art known to me,” and he maintained that its “eminent art makes one forget the brutality of its tendentiousness.”¹⁴ The intrinsically ludic character of Panizza’s oeuvre emphasized by Bierbaum, no less than the controversial and contrary character of the writer as it similarly emerges from Conrad’s testimony, are, I think, crucial also to understanding “The Operated Jew.”

The purpose of this chapter is therefore not so much to exonerate Panizza from the accusation of being an antisemite, though I hold it to be misguided. Rather, I aim to inquire in how far Amy Levy’s roughly contemporary short story “Cohen of Trinity” (1889) may have been an intertext for “The Operated Jew.” More specifically, my objective is to explore the implications of Panizza’s – as I would suggest – largely ludic engagement with the earlier text. The suggestion is of course not entirely arbitrary, though the connections between both texts may seem less obvious at first glance than I think them to be. Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, a comparison of Panizza’s grotesque with Levy’s short story has not yet been attempted, and positive proof of this intertextual relationship is indisputably elusive.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bierbaum, “Oskar Panizza,” 1893, 986: “Denn das ist Panizzas Art gerne: sich einen recht vertrackten Standpunkt zu wählen, von dem aus die ganze Welt in monströser Verkürzung erscheint.”

¹³ Ibid.: “Diesen Standpunkt muß der Leser mit einzunehmen verstehen, sonst bleibt ihm alles unverständlich.”

¹⁴ Ibid.: “das einzige antisemitische Kunstwerk, das ich kenne. Hier läßt die eminente Kunst die Brutalität der Tendenz vergessen.”

Yet Panizza, a voracious reader, was particularly well acquainted with English literature. In order to overcome the depression from which he suffered following a brief spell as resident psychiatrist in a state-run “Irrenanstalt” (lunatic asylum) in Munich, the writer had left in autumn 1885 for London and the British Museum.¹⁵ In preparation for his sojourn, Panizza had immersed himself, under the tutelage of a Mrs. Callway, in English language and literature.¹⁶ This interest is reflected in a number of his own works which indicate also his intimacy with the cultural scene of the British metropolis.¹⁷ There is no reason to assume that he would have abandoned his pursuit after his return via Berlin to Munich a year later in autumn 1886, and he may well have come across “Cohen of Trinity,” which was prominently placed in the May issue of *The Gentleman’s Magazine* of 1889.

Similar to her story’s eponymous protagonist, Amy Levy (1861–1889), a promising young Jewish writer, who moved in the circles of Olive Schreiner, Oscar Wilde and Vernon Lee, committed suicide – only weeks after the publication of “Cohen of Trinity.” While not too much significance should be afforded to the biographical analogy, it may nevertheless have been another factor to recommend her short story to Panizza’s scrutiny. He, too, was a troubled mind and ended his days in 1921 in an asylum, after he had enforced his compulsory hospitalization in 1904.¹⁸

Like “The Operated Jew,” the “Jewish” fiction of the Anglo-Jewish writer Amy Levy – her novel *Reuben Sachs* (1888) and her short story “Cohen of Trinity” – has been denounced as antisemitic. Intriguingly, in this instance the writer was attacked most ferociously from within the Anglo-Jewish community, of which she herself was a part, but which felt it was misrepresented in her work, a pattern that was to recur in British Jewish writing.¹⁹ More specifically, as a Jewish writer, Levy has been accused of Jewish self-hatred.²⁰

Jewish – No Mistake, and No Escape

Oskar Panizza’s “The Operated Jew” was first published in 1893 in the writer’s second collection of grotesques, *Visionen*, republished in 1914 as *Visionen der Dämmerung*. It records in retrospective narration of a medical student the frantic attempts of a Jewish fellow student, Itzig Faitel Stern, to turn himself into a goy, by fair means or foul. Clearly marked as an oriental other, the Jew eventually decides to have his misshapen body surgically transformed, “so he could become

¹⁵ Panizza, *Psychopatia criminalis*, 2015, p. 152.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See, e.g., his *Londoner Lieder*, 1887; *Legendäres und Fabelhaftes*, 1889; the grotesque “Eine Negergeschichte,” [1893] 1914; and the essay “Der Klassizismus und das Eindringen des Variété,” 1896.

¹⁸ See Bauer, *Oskar Panizza*, 1984, pp. 217–221.

¹⁹ See, e.g., the case of Brian Glanville whose novel *The Bankrupts* (1958) “provoked a prolonged and hostile communal disdain.” Cheyette, “Introduction,” 1998, p. xxvii.

²⁰ For a discussion, see Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 2005, pp. 153–160.

the equivalent of an Occidental human being."²¹ He suffers traction, breaking and resetting of bones, a spiked corset and more. This is the notorious nose job blown out of all proportion, and Sander Gilman naturally does not fail to mention Panizza's story in his book on the Jewish body.²²

Yet in order to complete his transformation, the Jew needs to exchange his soul for a Germanic one. The first question, of course, debated at length by his advisors, is whether Faitel in fact has a soul. Undeterred, the Jew himself, having heard about the nature of the Germanic soul, is determined to have one just like it: "Faitel had heard about the chaste, undefined Germanic soul, which shrouded the possessor like an aroma. This soul was the source of the possessor's rich treasures and formed the *shibboleth* of the Germanic nations, a soul which was immediately recognized by all who possessed one. Faitel wanted to have this soul."²³

However, the most recent scientific research suggests to Faitel that it will not be possible to adapt his own inferior soul and eventually, convinced that the soul resides in the blood, he resolves to purchase Christian blood and to have a blood transfusion. Crowing in glee, he chants: "Kaaf ich mer ä christlich's Blut! Kaaf ich mer ä christlich's Blut!"²⁴ The translator's best efforts are not equal to rendering this adequately: "I gonna buy me sum Chreesten blod! I gonna buy me sum Chreesten blod!"²⁵ Invoking Yiddish inflection, the accent in the German original is atrocious and suggests the stereotypical image of the sinister Jew of antisemitic provenance, cackling and rubbing his hands; the repetition is, moreover, reminiscent of fairy-tale Rumpelstiltskin dancing around the fire and gloating in his illicit desire. The dangerous operation works but its long-term success is doubtful: "[Faitel] never allowed himself to be thoroughly questioned about its success and the psychological effect. It appeared that it had not been very great, for after a few weeks we found him again making new attempts to gain possession of the German soul."²⁶ With this powerful image, Panizza shrewdly alludes to and ridicules the blood libel, the perennially resurfacing allegation of ritual murder and unholy mystic practices of the Jews.

²¹ Panizza, "The Operated Jew," 1991, p. 57; for the original text, see Panizza, "Der operierte Jud'," [1893] 1914, p. 224: "um ein gleichwertiger abendländischer Mensch zu werden."

²² Gilman, *The Jewish Body*, 1991, pp. 203–205.

²³ Panizza, "The Operated Jew," 1991, p. 59; see Panizza, "Der operierte Jud'," [1893] 1914, p. 226: "Faitel hatte von jener keuschen, undefinierbaren, germanischen Seele gehört, die den Besitzer wie einen Duft umkleide, aus der er [*sic*] das Gemüt seine reichen Schätze beziehe, und die das Schiboleth der germanischen Nationen bilde, jedem Besitzer beim anderen sofort erkennbar. Faitel wollte diese Seele haben."

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

²⁵ Panizza, "The Operated Jew," 1991, p. 60.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61; see Panizza, "Der operierte Jud'," [1893] 1914, p. 228: "Aber über den Erfolg, den psychischen Erfolg, wollte er sich nie recht vernehmen lassen. Allzu groß schien derselbe nicht gewesen zu sein, denn nach mehreren Wochen fanden wir ihn schon wieder bei neuen Versuchen, sich in den Besitz der deutschen Seele zu setzen."

After his initial success – as Siegfried Freudenstern Faitel passes as a scion of the Hanoverian landed gentry – the ultimate abject failure of the Jew to pretend to be a normal, i.e. an occidental, human being is the more devastating. At the end of the story, during the celebration of his wedding to a German maiden, his body – and presumably also his soul – inexorably reverts to its essence. What remains, exposed to the disillusioned gaze of his “creator” (the surgeon Klotz, who transformed his body), of the narrator, and of the reader, is the violated body of the Jew in total collapse, writhing and exuding the horrible *foetor judaicus*: “A terrible smell spread in the room, forcing those people who were still hesitating at the exit, to flee while holding their noses. Only Klotz remained behind. And finally, ... [his] work of art lay before him crumpled and quivering, a convoluted Asiatic image in wedding dress, a counterfeit of human flesh, Itzig Faitel Stern.”²⁷

The narrator’s recurring insistence on the Jew’s simulacrum character, which he emphasizes also earlier in the text,²⁸ is particularly striking. Even after the reversion of his transformation, Faitel is a “vertracktes asiatisches Bild.” The first adjective, beyond the translator’s choice of “convoluted,” suggests more specifically the “distorted” (“verzerrt”) condition of this image, like the reflection in a distorting mirror.²⁹ In conjunction with the failed efforts to fashion the Jew into a work of art, another imitation game, this reinforces the imaginary character of this counterfeit piece of human flesh which, in the distorting mirror of the occidental mind, cannot be seen for what it is and which therefore is not comprehensible on its own. It is always measured against some preconceived and, as the second adjective reveals, orientalist category as an other that is invariably determined by its construction as an imagined non-occidental alien.

On the surface, the evidence would certainly seem to suggest that a text such as this cannot be but the product of a rabid antisemitism. As such, Panizza’s grotesque appears to be much more obviously incendiary than Levy’s short story which, by comparison, is at most mildly provoking. Her “Cohen of Trinity” is about a Jewish writer expelled from Cambridge because he “had entirely failed to follow up [his] preliminary distinction”³⁰ and who eventually kills himself a few years later at the peak of his unexpected literary success. As in her earlier novel *Reuben Sachs*, if more subtly, Levy castigates in her story the materialism of Anglo-

²⁷ Panizza, “The Operated Jew,” 1991, pp. 73–74; see Panizza, “Der operierte Jud,” [1893] 1914, p. 242: “Ein fürchterlicher Geruch verbreitete sich im Saal, der die noch am Ausgang Zögernden mit zugehaltenen Nasen zu entfliehen zwang. Nur Klotz blieb zurück. Und schließlich, als auch die Füße des Betrunkenen vor Mattigkeit nicht mehr standzuhalten vermochten, lag zuckend und gekrümmt sein Kunstwerk vor ihm auf dem Boden, ein vertracktes asiatisches Bild im Hochzeitsfrack, ein verlogenes Stück Menschenfleisch, Itzig Faitel Stern.”

²⁸ See, e.g., Panizza, “The Operated Jew,” 1991, pp. 55–56 and “Der operierte Jud,” [1893] 1914, p. 223.

²⁹ See Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 1854–1961, s.v. “vertrackt”; other connotations include “cursed” (“verflucht”) and “infernal” (“verteufelt”).

³⁰ Levy, “Cohen of Trinity,” 1889, 418.

Jewish society as well as its internal divisions and Jewish (“tribal”) characteristics. While Cohen’s fierce individuality is emphasized, he is nevertheless perceived in relation to the imagined sleazy chaos of his family home and his characterization, like Fایتel’s, is so conformed to prevalent antisemitic stereotypes as to challenge them: “A curious figure; slight, ungainly; shoulders in the ears; an awkward, rapid gait, half slouch, half hobble. One arm with its coarse hand swung like a bell-rope as he went.” The trencher cap “pushed to the back of his head revealed clearly the oval contour of the face, the full, prominent lips, full, prominent eyes, and the curved beak of the nose with its restless nostrils.”³¹

The impact of this characterization – which is in fact echoed and expanded in “The Operated Jew”³² – is reinforced by the explicit non-Jewishness of Levy’s narrator whose ambivalent response to Cohen as an object of distantly amused scrutiny is further provoked by the Jew’s behavior: “His unbounded arrogance, his enormous pretensions, alternating with and tempered by a bitter self-depreciation, overflowing at times into self-reviling, impressed me, even while amusing and disgusting me.”³³ In addition to his physical defects, the psychological deformation of the Jew manifests itself in “the most vulgar desire for recognition,”³⁴ an observation which echoes and amplifies the narrator’s earlier comment that “[a] desire to stand well in one another’s eyes, to make a brave show before one another, is, I have observed, a marked characteristic of the Jewish people.”³⁵

However, what may speciously appear to be manifestations of the author’s Jewish self-hatred should rather be seen as the desire for a frank and unbiased characterization, untainted by the allo-Semitism decried much later by Zygmunt Bauman and which posits the Jew as the perpetual other: whether perceived as positive (philosemitism) or negative (antisemitism), the Jew is construed as different in either case (allo-Semitism).³⁶ In an essay on “The Jew in Fiction” (1886), Levy had reprimanded George Eliot for eliding the complexity of Jewish life in her *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and for failing to do justice to the “surprising virtues and no less surprising vices” of the Jew.³⁷ Her own *Reuben Sachs* is clearly conceived as a corrective to the earlier novel. “Cohen of Trinity” is arguably a further step in the same direction. By assigning the criticism, in her novel still articulated from an implicitly Jewish perspective, to the similarly ambivalent non-Jewish narrator persona, Levy externalizes the insider’s perception: Cohen is just such a mixed character with virtues and vices – warts and all.

³¹ Ibid., 417–418.

³² See Panizza, “The Operated Jew,” 1991, pp. 47–52 and “Der operierte Jud,” [1893] 1914, pp. 214–219.

³³ Levy, “Cohen of Trinity,” 1889, 420.

³⁴ Ibid., 423.

³⁵ Ibid., 420.

³⁶ See Bauman, “Allosemitism,” 1998, pp. 143–156.

³⁷ Levy, “The Jew in Fiction,” 1886, 13.

Yet the story prominently projects the narrator's failure of fully understanding Cohen's complexity. This is emphasized by its almost paradoxical denouement when he reflects on the Jew's suicide: "In his hour of victory the sense of defeat had been strongest. Is it, then, possible that, amid the warring elements of that discordant nature, the battling forces of that ill-starred, ill-compounded entity, there lurked, clear-eyed and ever-watchful, a baffled idealist?"³⁸

The final tentative suggestion of Cohen's hidden idealism adds a redemptive facet to the representation of his character which nevertheless emphasizes the narrator's, and the world's, failure of understanding him both as an individual and as a member of his "tribe." It is, simultaneously, also indicative of the disappointed hope of belonging which implicitly vindicates the alleged Jewish materialism in a wider social context as overcompensation. Perhaps even more importantly, his undetected internal depth counters the almost entirely external characterization of the Jew – his corporeal and physiognomic peculiarities complemented by the narrator's prejudiced imaginings of Cohen's Jewish family life, based on very little information:

I seemed to see it all before me: the little new house in Maida Vale; a crowd of children, clamorous, unkempt; a sallow shrew in a torn dressing-gown, who alternately scolded, bewailed herself, and sank into moody silence; a fitful paternal figure coming and going, depressed, exhilarated according to the fluctuations of his mysterious financial affairs; and over everything the fumes of smoke, the glare of gas, the smell of food in preparation.³⁹

The narrator is well aware that Cohen would not want to be determined by such a string of stereotypical imaginings: "naturally enough, it was as an individual, not as the member of a family, that Cohen cared to discuss himself."⁴⁰ This does not, however, dissuade him from elaborating Cohen's individual traits within a subliminally, yet recognizably antisemitic discourse on allegedly Jewish characteristics.

Indeed, the story to a large degree builds up, and is built on, this dichotomy of clichéd outer and ultimately unknowable inner person. It is predicated on Cohen's desperate desire to make himself known as an individual. "[H]e was so fond of explaining himself," the narrator remarks en passant in the introductory section. "They *shall* know, they *shall* understand, they *shall* feel what I am,"⁴¹ Cohen later explains his literary aspirations in retrospect to the narrator, only to acknowledge after his publication success the futility of the attempt – hence also the significance of the narrator's recognition of no more than a "dim, fleeting sense" of what may have motivated Cohen's suicide.⁴² Ultimately, Cohen's most salient characteristic is his unknowability both as an individual and as a Jew as opposed to the supposed knowability suggested by the imaginary fill-ins supplied by the narrator and

³⁸ Levy, "Cohen of Trinity," 1889, 424.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 423; emphasis in original.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 424.

generously complemented by a proliferation of stereotypical descriptions of the Jews as a “versatile race,”⁴³ as loud and uncouth, as moody, “according to the fluctuations of ... mysterious financial affairs”⁴⁴ – and so on and so forth. This manner of clichéd thinking is exposed in the story as foreclosing any deeper understanding of the other.

The narrator is, in fact, aware of the complex nature of Cohen’s personality which he superciliously describes as marked by “a most unattractive lack of simplicity.”⁴⁵ Like the book on which his eventual success is based and which is arrogantly entitled *Gubernator*,⁴⁶ Cohen inadvertently resists easy categorization. As such he poses an implicitly anarchical threat to a society relying on stratification and conformity. Yet Cohen conforms not even to the subset of the Jewish community which replicates the societal strictures of the majority group. “Little Leuniger,” the only other Jew in the story, who “was the fashion at that time” among a particular set of “young puritans, aristocrats and scholars,”⁴⁷ turns a cold shoulder to the recognizably alien Cohen and the narrator reports him saying “that Cohen’s family were not people that one ‘knew’”⁴⁸ – the willful neglect of “knowing” the other perfectly articulated in the ubiquitous phrase of social arrogance.

Leuniger is a constant in Levy’s “Jewish” fiction. The assimilated young man of affluent and socially refined, but arriviste, Jewish background has been read by Linda Hunt Beckman, and by others before her, as a partial *alter ego* of Levy.⁴⁹ In the parlance of postcolonial theory, Leuniger presents another, if less obvious, threat to society: he is a “mimic man”⁵⁰ and as such ambivalently embodies “at once resemblance and menace,” as articulated by Homi Bhabha with reference to the fraught relationship between colonizer and colonized.⁵¹ The “other” trying to become like the “self” in a process of assimilation or mimicry poses an existential threat because it challenges essentialist notions of identity and superiority and subjects the self to the other’s scrutiny as well as, perhaps more frighteningly, to its own. Though the latter course is not taken by Levy’s narrator, it is nevertheless insinuated to the perceptive reader.

In “Cohen of Trinity,” the ambivalence of mimicry as “*almost the same, but not quite*”⁵² is a recognition ultimately shared by “little” Leuniger, as he is patronizingly referred to by the narrator.⁵³ It is also the motivation for his rejection of Cohen

⁴³ Ibid., 417.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 420.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 418–419.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 421–422.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 419.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 420.

⁴⁹ Beckman, “Leaving ‘the tribal duckpond,’” 1999, 199.

⁵⁰ Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 1994, p. 87.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 86.

⁵² Ibid.; emphasis in the original.

⁵³ See Levy, “Cohen of Trinity,” 1889, 419.

because the Jewish Jew suggests to him another “*almost the same, but not quite*” which alienates him even further from the dominant social group and potentially aligns him with a purely Jewish and putatively oriental essence. After all, his social position is precarious, as the narrator surreptitiously suggests with the temporal qualifier of Leuniger’s popularity: “at that time.”⁵⁴ Indeed, as Beckman observes about Levy’s unpublished early short story “Leopold Leuniger: A Study” (1880):⁵⁵ “What stuns Leopold into despair is the recognition that one cannot stop being a Jew: that self-transformation, self-reinvention, is impossible.”⁵⁶

Yet tracing the sense of self-hatred embodied by Leuniger in the Anglo-Jewish writer’s fiction, Beckman charts “a developmental process in which self-hatred was a way-station, but not an endpoint” to her.⁵⁷ Beckman argues that by the time Levy completed her novel and final short story, she “had developed literary techniques that allowed her not only to write with extraordinary sophistication about Jewish anti-Semitism but also to address effectively the larger problem of how to represent Jews in fiction.”⁵⁸ As Beckman astutely observes, “Levy’s most daring technique, one that is vulnerable to misinterpretation by the reader, is that she puts the very ideas and assumptions that make up the dominant culture’s distorted image of the marginalized group into the remarks made by the mainstream voice.”⁵⁹ Although not openly satirical, her story employs in this manner the satirical technique of confronting the reader with a mirror of their folly.

The recognition that one cannot stop being a Jew is of course shared by Faitel in Panizza’s grotesque, if on a very different level from Leuniger’s internal reflection in response to an overheard slight. The internal process of recognition in Levy’s early narrative is externalized in “The Operated Jew” to the extent that Faitel’s essence forcefully reasserts itself almost like an inescapable force of nature. If anything, Panizza’s grotesque is, as I would suggest, even more vulnerable to misinterpretation. Yet in relation to Levy’s story, it emerges as a radicalization and as a ludic “hyperbolization”⁶⁰ not only of its main narrative constituents of narrator and Jew but also of its subtle satirical potential.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ The unpublished text of “Leopold Leuniger: A Study” has been reproduced in the appendix of Beckman, *Amy Levy*, 2000, pp. 69–74.

⁵⁶ Beckman, “Leaving ‘the tribal duckpond,’” 1999, 188.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 199.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 195.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Though used in a slightly different manner in its original context, I have used Mikhail Bakhtin’s term here, which usefully suggests one of the main characteristics of the grotesque; see his *Rabelais and His World*, [1965] 1984, p. 322.

Ludic Hyperbolization and the Grotesque

In their respective attempts to vindicate Panizza, both Conrad and Bierbaum accentuated specifically the grotesque quality of his writing. The latter, more importantly, sympathetically explained Panizza's preference for this style with the writer's irreverent disposition and well-nigh compulsive ludic inclination. In contrast, Thomas Mann, who was also acquainted with Panizza, was anything but sympathetic toward him. The eminent writer's reflections on the nature of satire and the grotesque may nevertheless help to elucidate the ludic impulse so prominent in Panizza's work and, more particularly, in his "The Operated Jew."

In his preface to the 1926 German translation of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), Mann maintained that the grotesque, because modern art had "ceased to recognise the categories of tragic and comic," was its "most genuine style," that it was, in fact, the "genuine anti-bourgeois style."⁶¹ Panizza, anti-bourgeois to the core, might have agreed with the latter statement. Yet Mann, in turn, did not appreciate the other's approach to the grotesque, though he took some inspiration from his work;⁶² three decades earlier – similar to the other, i.e. Michael Georg, Conrad – the young Mann had accused the author of *The Council of Love* of tastelessness in his perplexing vindication of the prison sentence passed on him.⁶³ Even though the older Mann may have seen the grotesque as "the only guise in which the sublime may appear,"⁶⁴ he clearly did not recognize manifestations of the sublime in Panizza's grotesques. To him, as he expounded in *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (1918), the grotesque was "the supratrue and the exceedingly real, not the arbitrary, false, antireal, and absurd."⁶⁵ He declared that satire was "of necessity grotesque art" or, in other words, "expressionism,"⁶⁶ which "most deeply despises the imitation of reality" and "resolutely dismisses all obligation to reality and replaces it with the sovereign, explosive, ruthlessly creative decree of the intellect."⁶⁷ As such he perceived the danger "of degeneration into mischief" to be inherent in satire because, as he added, "a distorted picture without basis in reality

⁶¹ Mann, "Joseph Conrad's 'The Secret Agent,'" [1926] 1933, p. 241.

⁶² Mann's novella "Gladius Dei" (1902) is based on Panizza's "Der Korsetten-Fritz" (1893), see Lieb, "Window Dressing," 2014, p. 315. See also Vaegt, "Thomas Mann und Oskar Panizza," 1975, 231–237.

⁶³ See Dobijanka-Witzczakowa, "Auf dem Weg zur Moderne," 2002, p. 20.

⁶⁴ Mann, "Joseph Conrad's 'The Secret Agent,'" [1926] 1933, p. 241.

⁶⁵ Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, 1983, p. 417; see Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, [1918] 1956, p. 557: "Das Groteske ist das Überwahrre und überaus Wirkliche, nicht das Willkürliche, Falsche, Widerwirkliche und Absurde."

⁶⁶ Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, 1983, p. 417; see Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, [1918] 1956, p. 557: "Satire [ist] notwendig Groteskkunst, das heißt: Expressionismus."

⁶⁷ Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, 1983, p. 416; see Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* [1918] 1956, p. 556: "Expressionismus ... ist jene Kunstrichtung, welche ... die Nachbildung der Wirklichkeit aufs tiefste verachtet, jede Verpflichtung an die Wirklichkeit entschlossen kündigt und an ihre Stelle den souveränen, explosiven, rücksichtslos schöpferischen Erlaß des Geistes setzt."

that is nothing other than an ‘emanation’ is neither distortion nor image, but *mischief*⁶⁸ – or, perhaps, *ilinx*? Such writing, according to Mann, is the product of a “ruthless estheticism.”⁶⁹

Panizza clearly is not above some mischief in his grotesque. Yet is “The Operated Jew” the kind of mischief denounced by Mann? Is it the product of such a ruthless estheticism? I suspect Mann would have thought so. Yet the putative intertextual relationship with Amy Levy’s “Cohen of Trinity” suggests that there may be another dimension to Panizza’s grotesque. While “The Operated Jew” clearly is not a direct re-writing of the earlier story, the hyperbolic elaboration to which it was subjected by Panizza may give an indication of the creative process of which his own narrative was the outcome. This process suggests that Panizza’s mischief, if mischief it is, is an expression of his ludic impulse and, more particularly, an emanation of mimicry (in Caillois’s sense) and of *ilinx*.

Levy’s story must have piqued the writer’s interest, whose *Visionen* includes two other grotesques about racial outsiders – “Eine Negergeschichte” (1893; “A Negro’s Tale”) and “Indianergedanken” (1893; “Indian Thoughts”).⁷⁰ Like “The Operated Jew,” these stories contain an element of subversion and discomfiture in the personas of their increasingly unsympathetic and unreliable narrators and ultimately, if stealthily, take sides with the abused or misunderstood object of the narrators’ scrutiny. Panizza would have recognized the same technique in “Cohen of Trinity”; and he would then also have appreciated the potential it offered to his ludic impulse.

Indeed, Panizza’s grotesque emanates a ludic delight in excess that almost verges on the obscene and that finds perfect expression in the hyperbolization to which he subjects his Jew. The writer afflicts Faitel with a plethora of antisemitic stereotypes, many of them of orientalist provenance, which it would be difficult to exaggerate any further. As such Panizza hyperbolizes widely disseminated perceptions of the Jew as an oriental other in contemporary German society but also, and more specifically, I would suggest, Levy’s own much more subtle and deliberately stereotypical construction of the alterity of the “Jewish” Jew who is nevertheless almost imperceptibly enveloped in an oriental miasma as well.

Yet the foundational conundrum remains the same also in Panizza’s grotesque: both Jews – Cohen and Faitel – are ultimately forced into an inescapable impasse which, in each instance, leads to their destruction. In Cohen’s case, this derives from his urge to fight against stereotyping – a battle which, like Faitel, he is des-

⁶⁸ Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, 1983, p. 417, emphasis in the original; see Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, [1918] 1956, pp. 557–558: “... die Gefahr nämlich der Entartung zum *Unfüg* (denn ein Zerrbild ohne Wirklichkeitsgrund, das ist nichts, als eine ‘Emanation’, ist weder Verzerrung noch Bild, sondern ein Unfüg).”

⁶⁹ Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, 1983, p. 417; see Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, [1918] 1956, p. 558: “Ruchloser Ästhetizismus.”

⁷⁰ See Panizza, “Eine Negergeschichte,” [1893] 1914, pp. 243–253, and “Indianergedanken,” [1893] 1914, pp. 347–356.

tinged to lose. In the latter's case, amplified through the author's vertiginous use of *ilinx*, the battle and the Jew's defeat are of course much more spectacular and more controversial for the grotesque hyperbolization with which Panizza invests Levy's figural constellation and in particular the Jew. The literary productivity of Cohen as a (futile) means of explaining himself is transmuted in "The Operated Jew" into a transformational impulse. Unlike Cohen, Faitel does not seek to make himself known in order to deflect stereotyping. Rather, he attempts to turn himself into the "other" by confronting each stereotype and thus rendering stereotyping meaningless. As a result of the contradictory impulses of transformation and its precipitating reversion, Cohen's internally motivated suicide is therefore transmogrified in "The Operated Jew" into Faitel's externally imposed total collapse. Both signal the Jews' failure to overcome stereotyping.

In each text this Sisyphean endeavor is dispassionately observed by its respective narrator whose detached relationship with "their" Jew is crucially similar, though once again Panizza hyperbolizes the constellation prefigured in Levy's story. In "Cohen of Trinity," the narrator nonchalantly observes about his relationship with the Jew: "There never indeed existed between us anything that could bear the name of friendship. Our relations are easily stated: he liked to talk about himself, and I liked to listen."⁷¹ Indeed, like Panizza's, Levy's Jew emerges in the course of the narrative as the object of the narrator's distanced scrutiny. Beckman emphasizes that Levy's narrator studies Cohen "in a manner that is peculiarly clinical."⁷² Yet underneath his polished veneer and his volubility, this narrator is clearly deficient in true understanding and empathy. His opinions are riddled with clichéd imaginings and he is certainly no better equipped to make real friends than Cohen.⁷³

In "The Operated Jew," the "clinical" stance of the narrator is articulated even more explicitly as pseudo-scientific. It serves the author more specifically to taint the persona of his narrator who takes on a much more active role in goading on the object of his interest, like another Mephistopheles. Faitel emerges in the narrative as the operated-on victim, the product of a crippling societal antagonism and of debilitating medical and psychological experiments. Indeed Faitel's initial attempts to transform himself intensify only in response to the suggestions of the devious narrator⁷⁴ who professes to have befriended him mainly because of a purely medical or rather anthropological curiosity:

⁷¹ Levy, "Cohen of Trinity," 1889, 419.

⁷² Beckman, "Leaving 'the tribal duckpond,'" 1999, 197.

⁷³ See Levy, "Cohen of Trinity," 1889, 419.

⁷⁴ Indeed, with the potentially warped temporal representation of the narrator, the text suggests that even those initial attempts may have been stimulated by the narrator who at a later point says: "Soon after the beginning of our acquaintance, I made some suggestions to Faitel in regard to changing him and making him more modern, and I found that he was receptive to these remarks." Panizza, "The Operated Jew," 1991, p. 53; see Panizza, "Der operierte Jud," [1893] 1914, p. 220: "Gleich nach den ersten Tagen unserer Bekannt-

Now, I no longer want to keep the reader in the dark as to how I became associated with this remarkable figure. Nor do I want to cloak my purposes in mystery and mislead the reader who might suppose that it was pity which moved me to make the close acquaintance with this dreadful piece of human flesh named Itzig Faitel Stern.⁷⁵

This address to the reader introduces for the first time the notion of the “piece of human flesh.” The unusual and disconcerting phrase – perhaps even more so in the German compound “Menschenfleisch”⁷⁶ – reduces Faitel to somewhat less than a human. It strips him of any individuality, cultural ties, and social belonging to mere meat. Moreover, with “Menschenfleisch” reverberates also that other word, unspoken and unspeakable: *Menschenfresser*, or cannibal. The savagery it suggests is transferred by implication to the cold dissecting glance of the narrator who, in his own way, turns into a kind of *Menschenfresser* in relation to Faitel, whose humanity he indeed devours over the course of his narrative up to its concluding sentence in which he once more refers to the Jew as human meat, cruelly deriding all his aspirations as “verlogen” and with a certain amount of *Schadenfreude* reasserting his narrative disciplining of the other’s failed attempt at mimicry.⁷⁷

The depersonalization of the Jew appears to be the result of the narrator’s malicious effort to dissociate himself from this outsider. He moreover describes his interest in Faitel in explicit analogy to source material and methods of contemporary ethnographic and anthropological study which in addition invoke colonial discourse, thus extended by implication to the Jew:

There was certainly a great deal of what I would call medical or rather anthropological curiosity in this case. I was attracted to him in the same way I might be to a Negro whose goggle eyes, yellow connective optical membranes, crushed nose, mollusk lips and ivory teeth and smell one perceives altogether in wonderment and whose feelings and most secret anthropological actions one wants to get to know as well!⁷⁸

schaft machte ich Faitel Vorschläge hinsichtlich seiner Umwandlung in etwas modernem Sinne und fand damit bei ihm die entgegenkommendste Aufnahme.”

⁷⁵ Panizza, “The Operated Jew,” 1991, p. 52; see Panizza, “Der operierte Jud’,” [1893] 1914, p. 219: “Ich will den Leser darüber nicht länger im unklaren lassen, wieso ich zu diesem merkwürdigen Umgang kam, will mir nicht ein Mäntelchen umhängen, welches mir schlecht stehen würde, indem ich den Leser auf die Vermutung kommen lasse, es sei Mitleid gewesen, das mich in die Nähe dieses grauenhaften Stückes Menschenfleisch, genannt Itzig Faitel Stern, brachte.”

⁷⁶ Zipes’s translation is problematic in that the German “Menschenfleisch” suggests in this context not so much “flesh” in English, but “meat.”

⁷⁷ Again, Zipes’s translation – “a counterfeit of human flesh” – is problematic here. The original – “ein verlogenes Stück Menschenfleisch” – may historically potentially carry the connotation of “counterfeit,” but may more plausibly be understood in the sense of “hypocritical,” “dishonest,” “fraudulent”; literally, it means “lying.” The meaning is accordingly radically narrowed if not outright changed in Zipes’s translation which suggests Faitel’s inhumanity as opposed to the more obvious reference to his efforts to transform his identity. See Panizza, “The Operated Jew,” 1991, p. 74, and “Der operierte Jud’,” [1893] 1914, p. 242.

⁷⁸ Panizza, “The Operated Jew,” 1991, p. 52; see Panizza, “Der operierte Jud’,” p. 219: “Es war gewiß viel, wie soll ich sagen, medizinische oder besser anthropologische Neugierde dabei; ich empfand ihm gegenüber, wie etwa bei einem Neger, dessen Glotzaugen, dessen gelbe

Ultimately denying the Jew his humanity, the narrator explains arrogantly from his supposedly scientific vantage point: "I observed with astonishment how this monster took terrible pains to adapt to our circumstances, our way of walking, thinking, our gesticulations, the expressions of our intellectual tradition, our manner of speech."⁷⁹

This narrator – I have called him devious, but he might just as well be described as "verlogen" – is indeed no friend to the object of his curiosity. When he calls Faitel in the first paragraph of the story "my best friend at the university,"⁸⁰ this adds in retrospect only to the reader's doubts about his emotional stability and social competence and consequently also his reliability as narrator. In the course of his narrative, he not only spurs Faitel on toward his cataclysmic end, but the alleged anthropological vantage point claimed by him is clearly indebted to contemporary pseudo-scientific theories of racial difference which provided the grounds also of "scientific" modern antisemitism.⁸¹ As such the text either valorizes anthropological racialism together with its adherent or – as would seem more plausible, given the unsavory aspects of its narrator – it in fact discredits both. Ultimately, the narrator is becoming more and more monstrous himself and increasingly inhumane in the way in which he progressively dissociates himself from the Jew as the abused object of his psycho-anthropological experiment.

Accordingly, the final glimpse of the unexpected profundity of Cohen's character afforded to Levy's narrator is excised by Panizza and instead turned into a mad *danse macabre* during which all the external markers of Faitel's Jewishness reassert themselves. Indeed, the external determination by stereotyping resisted by both Jews in vain is similarly reasserted in both texts. In Levy's story, it is emphasized with the tantalizing glimpse on an undiscovered and now eternally lost internal dimension; in Panizza's grotesque, the mere idea of such another dimension is forcefully – and, as the reader should realize, implausibly – eliminated.

Ultimately, both narratives share the recognition that the individuals who have become the objects of the narrators' scrutiny and who happen to be Jews remain unknowable from the inside. The stereotypical antisemitic pyrotechnics employed by Panizza only serve to emphasize his narrator's – and by implication also the reader's – blindness towards the humanity and the individuality of the Jew. Again,

Augenbindehaut, dessen Quetschnase, dessen Molluskenlippen und Elfenbeinzähne, dessen Geruch man mit Verwunderung wahrnimmt, und dessen Gefühle und geheimste anthropologische Handlungen man ebenfalls kennen lernen möchte!"

⁷⁹ Panizza, "The Operated Jew," 1991, p. 52; see Panizza, "Der operierte Jud," p. 219: "Mit Verwunderung beobachtete ich, wie dieses Monstrum sich die grauenhafteste Mühe gab, sich in unsere Verhältnisse, in unsere Art zu gehen, zu denken, in unsere Mimik, in die Äußerungen unserer Gemütsbewegungen, in unsere Sprechweise einzuleben."

⁸⁰ Panizza, "The Operated Jew," 1991, p. 47; see Panizza, "Der operierte Jud," [1893] 1914, p. 214: "mein bester Freund auf der Hochschule."

⁸¹ For the contemporary development of anthropology in Germany and its links with colonialism and antisemitism, see Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 2010.

Panizza would have found this pre-formed in Levy's story. But through his exaggeration the effect is exploded; it is re-invested with a different kind of subtlety and contributes to the author's strategy of satiric hyperbolization and, as in Levy, of making the reader realize their complicity in the abjection of the Jew. Panizza is laying it on so thick that his text in effect deconstructs itself – as witnessed by its resistance to the attempted appropriation by the Nazis.

The Ludic Exposure of Antisemitic Stereotyping

In conclusion, I would like to return briefly to Thomas Mann. Panizza, as if he were anticipating – and, in fact, playing with – Mann's much later theorizing of the grotesque as the style of expressionism, has his narrator outline his literary aspirations in the first paragraph of his story. Explaining that to apprehend the complexity of Faitel's nature would require the aid of "a linguist, a choreographer, an aesthete, an anatomist, a tailor, and a psychiatrist,"⁸² he concedes:

Thus, it will not be surprising after what I have just said, when my sketch presents only bits and pieces. I must rely on my five senses which, according to today's prevailing school of literature, should completely suffice for creating a work of art – without attempting to ask too much about the why and how and without attempting to provide artificial motivation and superficial construction. If a comedy should originate instead of a work of art, then the school of literature bear the responsibility.⁸³

This is not only another confirmation of the unknowability of the other whose internal nature, even if all the experts mentioned were enlisted, would still resist easy classification. After all, as the narrator acknowledges, Faitel "was a phenomenon."⁸⁴ The narrator moreover situates his account within the purview of impressionism, the very style against which Mann had pitched his conception of expressionism and satire and which he characterized in contrast as passive, humble and realist.⁸⁵ Yet in spite of his narrator's claims, and in fact undermining them, Panizza adheres to what Mann would later identify as expressionism. From the outset the satire of

⁸² Panizza, "The Operated Jew," 1991, p. 47; see Panizza, "Der operierte Jud'," [1893] 1914, p. 214: "Ein Linguist, ein Choreograph, ein Ästhetiker, ein Anatom, ein Schneider und ein Irrenarzt wären nötig, um die ganze Erscheinung von Fajteles, was er sprach, wie er ging und was er tat, vollständig zu begreifen und zu erklären."

⁸³ Panizza, "The Operated Jew," 1991, p. 47; see Panizza, "Der operierte Jud'," [1893] 1914, p. 214: "Daß nach dem Gesagten mein Vorwurf nur Stückerarbeit liefern wird, ist nicht zu verwundern. Doch ich verlasse mich auf meine fünf Sinne, die nach der gegenwärtig herrschenden literarischen Schule vollständig genügen, ein Kunstwerk zu liefern; ohne viel nach warum und wie zu fragen und ohne künstliche Motivierung oder gar transzendente Konstruktion zu versuchen. Wenn statt des Kunstwerks eine Komödie entsteht, so mag sie, die Schule, die Verantwortung tragen."

⁸⁴ Panizza, "The Operated Jew," 1991, p. 47; see Panizza, "Der operierte Jud'," [1893] 1914, p. 214: "Faitel ... war ein Phänomen."

⁸⁵ Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, 1983, p. 416; see Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, [1918] 1956, pp. 556–557.

"The Operated Jew" thus gives the lie to its narrator's pretensions. It also challenges the ruthlessness of the estheticism attributed by Mann to expressionism by the ludic elaboration of what emerges nevertheless as a very serious purpose: the exposure of rampant antisemitic stereotyping as it had, less explosively, also been criticized by Levy.

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