

Gluck, Mary: *The Invisible Jewish Budapest. Metropolitan Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press 2016. ISBN: 978-0-299-30770-7; 272 S.

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In *The Invisible Jewish Budapest*, Mary Gluck argues that the „complex urban modernity“ that emerged in Budapest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted from „the development of a uniquely Jewish modernity that became part of the larger Hungarian cultural landscape“ (p. 4). Jews were encouraged to assimilate to the Hungarian nation after 1867, and many did so, with varying degrees of enthusiasm; however, the urban culture that emerged in Budapest drew heavily on Jewish culture even as the official discourse sought its negation. The metropolitan Jewish identity of Budapest began with the city's creation from the fusion of Buda, Pest, and Obuda in 1873. As the new city blossomed into a metropolis, Jewish cultural life flourished apace in coffeehouses and music halls, and was described in the pages of urban guidebooks and the boulevard press. However, „The Jewish question“ exploded into the popular consciousness and press in 1882-83, as the Tiszaeszlár blood libel trial and the specter of mass immigration of Russian Jews (themselves fleeing a wave of pogroms) led to a spate of anti-Semitism, including a wave of riots in Budapest and throughout the country. This gave rise to a „profoundly paradoxical political culture“ in which Jews were seen as both candidates for assimilation into the Hungarian nation (on the understanding that they divest themselves of all Jewish traits) but also, at some level, intransigently alien and unassimilable (p. 58, 172). In the face of this impasse in the political sphere, Gluck argues that productive interaction (or at least „pragmatic coexistence“) between Jews and gentiles in popular culture and commercial entertainment assumed a new importance: „Indeed, it could be argued that these realms developed the social antibodies to the dogmatic spirit and essentialist assumptions that sustained and fueled the Jewish question“ (p. 73). The isotypes of these social antibodies were

the widespread use of Jewish humor (*Judenwitz*) in popular publications, the prevalence of coffeehouse and music hall culture, and even a unique case of „cultural crossdressing,“ in which Hugó Veigelsberg, a writer for *A Hét*, took on the persona of Emma, a sharp-tongued Jewish housewife who attacked patriarchy and bourgeois domesticity. As a result, modernity in Budapest—the „cultural experience associated with the ambiguities, as well as the challenges, of metropolitan life“ (p. 4)—was inextricably linked with the experiences and contributions of the Jewish population.

In order to chronicle this forgotten history of fin de siècle Budapest, Gluck examines the „everyday narratives, informal practices, and popular rituals of urban life,“ such as popular guidebooks, popular press accounts of political crises, Jewish humor magazines and music halls, and the literary magazine *A Hét*, as „these were the informal spaces where new forms of Jewish sociability and self-identity were invented and made visible“ (p. 5). Gluck adroitly rises to the interpretive challenges posed by these ephemeral sources, as shown most clearly in her close reading of the Jewish humor magazine *Borsszem Jankó* (Johnny Peppercorn), founded in 1868 by Adolf Ágai. *Borsszem Jankó* relied heavily on *Judenwitz*, or Jewish humor, and caricatures of social types (the aristocrat, the clergyman, the German burgher, etc.) in its successful bid to become the most popular satirical magazine of the period. Despite *Judenwitz* relying heavily upon anti-Semitic stereotypes, Gluck argues that in this context it not only reflected but also challenged the political sphere, and *Borsszem Jankó* adapted this satirical idiom to mock all members of society, Jew and non-Jew alike (p. 105-107, 109). For instance, a major contributor to the magazine in its early years was Itzig Spitzig, a fictional Jewish reporter from Király Street, who regularly mocked Hungarian Jews' attempts to assimilate and, more broadly, the flaws and foibles of the culture to which they tried to do so. Ágai and his co-editors made Spitzig and the other fictional social types („Monocles,“ the noble; „Pater Povadik Hyacinthus,“ the reactionary Catholic priest; „Tobias Kraxelhuber,“ the German burgher; etc.) speak in id-

iomatic forms of Hungarian for both comedic effect and also to stress the diversity of peoples that made up Hungary. All of these jokes would be opaque, and some of them shockingly crude (for instance, when Spitzig suggests he'll be missing Passover seder with his brother-in-law because he has his own Christian girl to sacrifice (p. 134)), were it not for Gluck's meticulous explanation of their specific cultural, social, and political contexts. *Judenwitz* was uniquely Jewish humor, but in fin de siècle Budapest it appealed to a much broader audience: „Under the magazine's auspices, Jewish humor became the common currency of an urban culture that was notoriously lacking in other unifying elements“ (p. 104). The book provides the same close reading and deep analysis for all of its other sources as well, which range from polemical pamphlets to political cartoons to handbills for music hall performances to memoirs, with no major missteps. One possible exception to this rule is that Gluck might not adequately problematize Jenő Heltai's anecdotal comments about his alleged formative interactions with his uncle Theodor Herzl. One suspects that Heltai, a self-aggrandizing figure reporting these events well after the fact, was concerned more with polishing his reputation than getting the story right; if this was the case, it would complicate Gluck's larger argument about Heltai's intellectual trajectory away from the German cultural sphere and Zionism (p. 177-78). This is, obviously, a minor objection. While *The Invisible Jewish Budapest* is dense enough to pose a challenge to undergraduates and casual readers, its contribution to the field are significant and its reception of the 2017 Hungarian Studies Association Book Prize was richly deserved.

Gluck encourages us to rethink the complexities of Jewish assimilation and its relationship to urban culture in Budapest at the turn of the century. She concludes that the vibrant influence of Jewish humor and music halls persisted even after the anti-Semitic turn that accompanied Trianon and the collapse of empire: „insofar as Jewish Budapest was a state of mind and not an identifiable community, [...] the genie that had been allowed to escape from the bottle could not be forced back, and Budapest retained its metropoli-

tan character, renowned for its spirit of irreverence, subversion, and irony“ (p. 208). This is a provocative epilogue, as it suggests further inquiry into how these complex cultural trends and influences of the fin de siècle evolved during the interwar period, how they were affected by the Holocaust, and whether they lasted through the Communist era into today. We look forward the sequel.

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