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*Arnold Zweig, the German-Jewish writer. A journalistic testimony of the times and experiments with the short story form*

**Summary**

This dissertation focuses on the Silesian German-language writer, Arnold Zweig (born in 1887 in Głogów, deceased in 1968 in East Berlin), whose works comprise different literary forms and genres, such as short stories, plays, essays and novels. Above all, he perceived himself as a German Jew, which was clearly emphasized by literary critics. Certainly, with this attitude Zweig stressed the unique German-Jewish cultural unity (which for some time was an illusion for him) and presented it as largely harmonizing within the highly tense European-Jewish relations. Even having lost hope for a smooth integration of the Jews in the army during the war, Zweig still put much emphasis on both the identity components. The German-Polish literary critic, Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1920-2013) specified this identity, attributed by Zweig to himself, in an interview of 1925 for the magazine "Jüdisch-liberale Zeitung", and referred to Zweig as the Prussian Jew.

Comparing the German Jews' way to the German majority society to their journey in other countries, one can note the uniqueness of the former, in which Prussia played a decisive role. This metaphorical journey had continued since the Enlightenment (undoubtedly under the influence of G.E. Lessing, Moses Mendelssohn, and others), and consisted in the reception and assimilation – or making it one's own – of the cultural and educational offer of the bourgeoisie, along with the bourgeoisie system of standards and values (cf. Lässig, p. 264). Thus the Jewish existence was being torn in two opposite directions between which German Jews had to choose: to stick to their Jewish origins and remain unique, or to become completely assimilated by learning the German language and accepting secular education, which in the 18th century meant the disappearance of the Jewish element in the general human one. The way of cultural and social integration was chosen by many liberal Jews, with relative success. Taking into account the considerable representation of Jews in academic, intellectual and artistic jobs around 1900, educational assimilation can be seen as a fact; undoubtedly, there are also other reasons of this more than average representation with reference to the general public, for instance due to the legal occupational restrictions affecting the Jewish minority.

This dilemma between the Jewish identity and the search for the ways for every Jew or for the Jewish minority to maintain identity inside/outside the majority society has left a considerable mark on the writer participating in the process, and on his works. The dilemma was taking the actual shape for Zweig during World War I and then again in the 1930s; also after his return from emigration in Palestine to the GDR this was a very important subject for him.

Although this problem appears in many works, statements and literary structures, so far it has played a relatively marginal role in research on Arnold Zweig's achievements. Much more emphasis was put on the widely known pacifist novels written by the author from Silesia, which were published in the

series *The Great War of the White Men* (1927-1954). More extensive academic interest in the novels criticising the war is understandable in view of the experience of the two world wars, but the Jewish aspects in Zweig's works should not be disregarded by literary studies, either. This aspect is important if one wants to present Arnold Zweig's way from an ardent supporter of war to a declared pacifist. In the past decades, two main research trends concerning Zweig could be observed: the first one, influenced by feminist criticism, focused on the study of female characters in his novels and short stories, while the second one dealt with his journalistic publications concerning Jewish problems, and analysed mainly the texts in which the very title implied a connection with the issue, such as *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*. Yet, Zweig's reasoning, as well as questions concerning the genres, rhetoric or short-story writing have not been reflected upon. The intention of this dissertation ensues from the research situation presented above.

The paper's objective is to analyse Arnold Zweig's short stories and essays in the historical context, including the texts which have not been studied in German literary studies so far. With respect to methodology, the hermeneutic approach has been applied, simultaneously taking into consideration the characteristic features of the genres of essay and short story, which since their origins in the Renaissance have shown a strong relation to individual experience, perspective and identity. It is by means of these forms that Zweig deliberates on the possible ways of the Jewish minority's moving towards the majority society: either synthetically, or fictionalizing particular cases. This was also done by the well-known Jewish intellectuals of the 19th century: Moses Hess, Cwi Hirsch Kalischer, Theodor Herzl, and Martin Buber in the 20th century, who, facing increasing anti-Semitism, rationalism and a sense of national identity of the European communities, dealt with the alternatives: assimilation vs. Jewish traditions and a pursuit to establish a Jewish state. Whereas in his short stories Zweig presents the society's problems and development, interpreting them by means of typical literary instruments, his essays can be treated as answers to the problems of various Jewish realities being the historical point of reference, which are presented by means of rhetorical figures in the texts. Such a historical point of reference is the problem of anti-Semitism; the essayist confronts its ideological elements, relying on the classicist humanism of the Enlightenment period and the positivist and naturalist world view.

Arnold Zweig's aesthetic views reflect his profound assimilation of the ideals of the German bourgeoisie due to his socialization, starting from his school education in Katowice, through his studies at six German universities in German philology, philosophy and history of art. In his essay entitled *Das Werk und der Betrachter* (1909), the young man proclaims to be an upholder and continuer of form. Almost like in the case of Schiller, in the essayist's understanding, a work of art is born thanks to the form, and in Zweig's early works one can spot the stylistic influences of his favourite authors: Johann W. von Goethe, Thomas Mann and Heinrich von Kleist. Inspired by them, he reaches for the genre of the short story, a form concentrated on the individual. All of his short stories show a strict relation between the specific actions of an individual and the creation of a mental

and historical reality by Zweig. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that by means of the specific characteristics of both genres, the author analyses the difficult situation of the Jews facing the alternative of assimilation vs. Jewish uniqueness. And eventually, as if anticipating something, he searches for a third way.

Taking into account the difficult way of the Jews to the German majority society and the fact that Zweig refers to a comparable economic terminology in his argumentation, for instance in the title *Bilanz der deutschen Judeheit*, it can be stated that Pierre Bourdieu's cultural and sociological theory of capitals is a useful descriptive instrument in the analysis of both the short stories and essays. The French sociologist understands capital – a term deriving from the field of economics – as work that can appear in a material as well as spiritual/inner form. Bourdieu distinguishes three types of capital: economic capital convertible directly to money which can, in particular, be used for institutionalization purposes under the property law; the cultural capital (in the form of cultural competences) and the social capital (social networks, acquaintances and opportunities); the latter two can in some cases be converted into economic capital.

The dissertation is a hermeneutic analysis of the following literary texts written or published in the years 1909-1950: nine short stories dealing with Jewish issues and two new versions of the short stories of 1914. Assuming a diachronic approach to the short stories with a clear historical background, it has to be observed that Zweig begins his career with the short story, which, despite its conciseness ensuing from the traditional character of the genre, due to the plot and linear narration, describes with historical precision the Jewish existence in Prussia and simultaneously analyses the history of a family in a micro-scale. The protagonists of the short story entitled *Die Flucht der van Spandows* (1909) are the members of a Jewish family from the Netherlands who have come to Brandenburg March at the invitation of Frederick William I, the Prussian prince for whom they show obvious liking. Despite the recent Napoleonic wars, they feel obliged to both sides of the conflict which had equally contributed to the improvement of their social status - to Prussia for education and the Enlightenment, and to Napoleon for his Code of 1804. Thus Zweig goes back to the historical origins of the Jewish emancipation. The main protagonist, Ruth, reflects on the unclear identity situation in which German Jews are on their way to become a part of the German bourgeoisie: for her, it is "a time in which the old order was abolished, but in which a blasphemous corruption was also brought to the threshold of old religious ideas" (*Flucht*, p. 163). Ruth projects her reservations concerning assimilation to her husband, a Napoleonic officer and physician, whom she cannot forgive his conversion to Catholicism which took place in the cradle of the German nation, the cathedral in Cologne.

The problems of assimilation are also present in other short stories and against the background of other historical places. With respect to these aspects, the dissertation focuses on the following texts: *Die Krähe* (1913), taking place in a Silesian town, *Episode aus Zarenland* (1912), taking place in the Russian Empire, and *Quartettsatz von Schönberg* (1913). Prussian Brandenburg, similarly to Upper

Silesia with its multicultural character and the Russian lands, offered the writer numerous opportunities to present the Jewish destiny.

In the short story *Episode aus Zarenland* (1912) Zweig takes his readers to the Russian Empire where Saamen, an engineer and assimilated Western Jew works in one of German factories, and together with his son lives a relatively comfortable life. Zweig presents an incredible situation in the text: the assimilated Silesian Jews, looking down on the eastern European Jews, go to the town centre with the intention of observing a pogrom and unexpectedly become the targets of murderers. The dialectics of blindness and cognition which young Zweig linked in his essays with Aristotle's poetics finds its place in this short story as well, when the severely wounded son understands that the cultural capital collected as a result of assimilation, or even the social capital will not protect him from being murdered when confronted with the stigmatizing notion of race. This short story is of key importance as it proves that already in 1912 Arnold Zweig rejected the illusions of the Western European Jews and pointed out the common fate of all Jews. Thus Zweig deprives of illusion the views which distinguish the fate of the allegedly assimilated Western Jews from that of the Eastern Jews.

Having gained the experience of the human fate being predestined by blood or origin, the younger Saamen brother, a student in a Silesian junior secondary school, in the short story entitled *Die Krähe* (1913), makes an unusual decision concerning blood revenge. He takes revenge on a random Russian soldier guarding the frontier who could definitely not have taken part in the pogrom. Imagining the substitute victim resulted from his profound mental trauma. In the short story, Zweig, who was brought up in Silesia, makes use in his literary presentation of the Jewish history of the historical, political and geographical location of Upper Silesia (it takes place in the Three Emperors' Corner – a former tripoint at the confluence of the Black and White Przemsza rivers, near the town of Myslowice) as well as the characteristic cultural diversity of the region. In the times of Arnold Zweig's youth, not only Germans, Poles and Russians used to live as neighbours here and influence one another. Between Jews, who also lived here and assimilated with each of the three communities, some cultural differences appeared as well. In this context, the fact that Upper Silesian Jews, as exemplified by Zweig himself, considered themselves primarily to be German citizens and representatives of the German culture, rather than members of some religious or racial minority, seems to be very significant. Silesian Jews, similarly to Western European Jews, felt that with respect to the world view, they were closer to their German Protestant neighbours than Eastern European Jews coming over in ever growing numbers. Zweig reaches the same conclusions in his short story as historians who will write about it in the future.

Another text in which the psychological aspect is highlighted is the third short story in the Saamen brothers series – *Quartettsatz von Schönberg* (1913). The young man, severely wounded in the pogrom, and then luckily saved, having gained chemical education as well as experience of Eastern European and Western European Jews, stands in front of the Monument of the Battle of Nations in Leipzig, which – as a “worshipper” of Napoleon – he finds to be aesthetically wrong. He fixes his eyes

on the Saxon petty bourgeoisie, the banality of their way of life completely deprived of any grandeur. Right before his departure for Palestine, where he goes as a person being far from Judaism in the cultural sense, as one might think reading the description of the Hebrew grammar book he packs in his suitcase, the protagonist goes to a concert in Leipzig. This young man, tired of Europe, experiences the revolutionary music of Arnold Schönberg. It is a reviving encounter with modernist music for him which shows him that Europe's time is not up yet, that Europe still has potential for a breakthrough. The narrator not only enriches the awakening from stagnation experienced thanks to the music with a game of colours like in an expressionist painting, but he also makes a reference to the imminent military conflict. With this short story Zweig celebrates the industrial, technical and cultural potential of modernism. The text also heralds the author's enthusiasm for war, declared in his letters from the beginning of WW I, which he understood as liberation from a perspectiveless narrowness, but also an opportunity for Jews to rightfully participate in the destiny of the German nation. The illusory character of this approach is presented in an important fragment of the novel entitled *A Young Woman from 1914*, which proves that anti-Semitism in the German army still thrives. Young Jewish recruits find themselves at the crossroads – whether to enrol in the group going to the Eastern front or the Western front: “The East has its weak points, especially for the Israelites, because of the numerous fellow worshippers living there. How will a good attitude and appropriate behaviour help a soldier who is a Jew there? He will witness his superiors or colleagues speaking with contempt about Jews anyway [...]. In the West, one is attracted by Lille, Gothic churches, museums, educated people; in the East – there is destitution [...].” (*Young Woman*, p. 128).

A synthesis of the crucial character of modernism and war/war enthusiasm is also noticeable in Zweig's war novels. An analysis of the interpretations of the patriotic short stories written at the beginning of WWI proves the young writer's transition from a war enthusiast who unquestioningly believed in German propaganda and used it in his writings to an ardent pacifist. In his short story published in 1951, *Westlandsaga*, Zweig corrected both the anti-Belgian message from *Die Bestie*, and the anti-British overtone of *Ein Blick auf Deutschland* (1914). In this much longer short story Zweig presents the characters, formerly depicted as German victims of the Belgian beast, as brutal invaders who force their way into the house of a defenceless Belgian farmer. Simultaneously, the author reveals the manipulative actions of German war propaganda, presenting one of the characters, a German nun who, despite her long stay in England, has a very narrow nationalistic viewpoint, which in time brings her close to the national socialist movement.

Arnold Zweig frequently stressed the relations between World War I and World War II, which is also shown in his short story *Symphonie Fantastique* published in 1943. It is 1933. The protagonist, standing at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Paris, thinks about the fate of his father, who died in WW I. Coming back to the place after the German invasion on France, he gives up his dream to become a musician and to write a biography of Hector Berlioz. Instead he becomes a soldier and fights in the battle of Bir Hakeim in Libya. Creating a unique framing device, the narrator once again looks



at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Paris, where a wreath was placed for the would-be musician killed in the desert battle with the inscription: "To the forever unknown genius of humanity" (*Symphonie*, p. 377), and thus the creative achievements of an individual are transferred to the genius of humanity. The broader perspective of understanding works of art, including literary works of art, as an expression of a particular author's experience but also of an entire community's experience, may result from the applied humanist method in the spirit of hermeneutics (*Horizontverschmelzung*).

For Zweig, the war experience also meant another – this time more meaningful – meeting with Eastern European Jews. His perception of Eastern European Jews is somehow reflected in the short stories *Ein Vorfaschist* (1922) and *Was der Mensch braucht* (1937). In the former, the main protagonist, a physician, decides to refuse to offer any kind of help to the Jews to be wounded in an imminent pogrom. Originally, he planned to make a bundle on selling dressing materials with considerable profit, but eventually his anti-Semitism and nationalism gained the upper hand over financial calculation. He seems to think it would be very patriotic if the Jews accused of favouring the communist ideas and the Bolsheviks were simply to die. In the short story *Was der Mensch braucht* (1937) the order to confiscate personal property given by the German army stationed in Lithuania leads to a disease, and subsequent death of some Jewish children. This story proves that after the second encounter with Eastern Jews Zweig was fascinated with their language, literature and forms of religious life. He made a clear attempt to remove Eastern European Jews from the topographic periphery when the narrator in the story stressed the Eastern Jewish children's passion for music and mathematics, thus combining logic with sensuality – the two opposite poles of ideological anthropology. Hence, Eastern Jews are presented as an elementary group of humanity, and, in the spirit of classical German philosophy, placed in the centre of humanity.

From the perspective of Zweig's essays, it can be stated that the short stories are a literary fictionalization of the messages contained in the journalistic texts. The essayist experiments with the freedom of flexibility of an essay, drawing on it in his argumentation referring always to the topical problems and marked historically, sociologically, literarily, or philosophically. The flexibility and open character of Zweig's essays allows readers to tread on various paths of reflection and thus examine the problems of anti-Semitism or the uneasy way of Jews to become a part of the bourgeoisie system from very many perspectives. Readers can also determine the central questions and issues to which the writer frequently returns: anti-Semitism, assimilation, Zionism and German-Jewish symbiosis. In this context, there are also certain revisions, reformulations or transformations of Zweig's approach connected with his social experience and contemporary political events.

The discussed essays allow readers to see the writer as a Jewish intellectual disappointed with the modern anti-Semitism, who, after his traumatic and disillusioning war experiences, poses as a determined Zionist in his essays written during the war and right after it. This is exemplified by the essays written during the war *Juden und Deutsche*, *Jude und Europäer* (both of 1917). Zweig abandons the illusion of Eastern European Jews becoming accepted by the European majority

societies. Hoping for such an ending is illusionary; he stresses "Wherever a Jew belongs, he is not a European, it is determined by one profound sense" (*Jude und Europäer*, p. 23). In the essay entitled *Aussenpolitik und Ostjudenfrage* (1920) the writer refers to the social debate on the foreign policy of the Weimar Republic in the first years after 1918. Just like in the discussed short stories, here Zweig also criticizes postwar anti-Semitism, Jewish pogroms in Eastern Europe and German hostility towards Eastern Jews. The writer vividly highlights the relation between the Eastern Jewish and German souls that can be observed in the trustful and confident attitude of the Eastern Jewish community to German invaders during World War I.

Zweig's later essays show a balancing intention. Each time the essayist reacts to anti-Semitic riots in the Third Reich, the dormant anti-Semitism of the Weimar Republic and earlier the Empire, which were culturally based on the anti-Semitic publication of Richard Wagner *Das Judentum in der Musik* (1850), and presents his topical texts, e.g. in 1933 – the essay *Jüdischer Ausdruckswille* and the study *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*. Wagner's pamphlet symbolizing a certain demarcation line for modern anti-Semitism was thus an important reference text for Zweig's balancing essays. In his essays he clearly criticizes Wagner's defamation of Jews in the cultural context. The composer presented Jews as uncreative parasitic imitators of the majority society's culture. In opposition to Wagner, Zweig attempts to prove Jews' participation in, and importance for, German culture.

Under the auspices of classical antinomies and syntheses, the writer integrates the Jewish existence with cultural progress as well as with a view concerning the hybrid race as a social resource. Reviewing F. Nietzsche's evaluative presentation of Jews and racial hybridity and relying on cultural, literary, sociological and economic argumentation, the essayist opposes Wagner's as well as fascist devaluation of the Jewish cultural capital, the traces of which can be found in the language even today. Zweig's essays, in which he reaches for both philosophical syntheses of German idealism and natural sciences and their discourse on human races, bring Jews back from the outskirts to which they were taken by anti-Semitic denigration to the centre of the German society and the centre of Europe. Zweig presents Jews' way from the general public, through the interpreter and intermediary, to the unique creator. His study of self-consciousness – *Bilanz* – shows the point of view characteristic of the balancing texts of the German-Jewish writer: the names quoted by him are the names of people who prove the fact that since the late 18th century in Germany and Western Europe the Jewish acculturation process has continued, supported by the idea of enlightened or liberal reason incessantly mentioned also by Zweig. The author's work, putting emphasis on Jewish accomplishments, places him in the Enlightenment tradition of social equality, which, since the late Enlightenment period, has been structured by means of collective biographies. Collective biographies gained popularity in the late 19th century, in the period of the development of nationalist ideas. They were used also by many groups fighting for emancipation, not only by Jews. For instance, in 1898 Sophie Pataky published a 2-volume *Lexikon deutscher Frauen der Feder*, which apart from the authors' biographies comprised also a list of their works.

The aforementioned polemics with Wagner can also be observed in Zweig's perception of the history of German literature. In his essay *Zum Problem des jüdischen Dichters in Deutschland* (1913), the writer opposes the accusation of unproductiveness attributed to Jews, which was allegedly proved by the absence of Jewish literature, and claims that also German national literature developed relatively late, and originally drew on translations mostly. Furthermore, the essayist clearly argues with the humiliating reduction of Jews to the role of parasites who are allegedly not able to create outstanding works.

In his essays Zweig makes use of the notion of culture deeply rooted in the German-language cultural circles, where it refers to the dimension of spirituality, self-education and human inner culture. It is the German concept of culture that Zweig analyses in his balancing texts, where he associates 'culture' with specific works of art, books and philosophical systems in which human and national characteristics are manifested. This concept is balanced depending on the discourse, and finally in Zweig's essays it overcomes the limitations of the specific German understanding of culture. Like Goethe with his notion of 'Weltliteratur', Zweig also approximates 'culture' to 'civilization', emphasizing that it is the cultural transfer that ethically contributes to civilisation. And he points to the Jewish nation and its significant contribution to the general cultural work.

A linguistic analysis of Zweig's image of the Jew also proves that the German-Jewish writer presents in his essays an image of the German Jew developed both by the German culture and history as well as a Jewish, Mediterranean and ancient mixture, and simultaneously characterizes him as a hybrid. Referring to hybridity, he opposes the anti-Semitic argument concerning Jews' racial inferiority. With respect to the deliberate choice of adjectives and nouns, his polemics with anti-Semitic pamphlets is characterized by evident emphasis on the Jewish bond with culture in which Jews are active and creative participants and architects of the European world. Due to the frequently used collocation "German Jews", the essayist emphasizes the long lasting German-Jewish history. Using such denominations as "brilliant Jews" or "creative Jews", and stressing Jewish creativity, the writer secures an important place in the discourse for himself. Thus, Zweig also presents in his essays an image of the German Jew who is not only an ardent recipient of the German and European culture, but also – as a Jewish citizen – enriches the culture with his artistic genius and talent, which were developed in the course of his long lasting contacts with various European nations.

The dissertation points out that Arnold Zweig's works make a wide historical arc. The writer searches for a third option between the two historical alternatives: assimilation and Jewish uniqueness; by disappearing in the German, French or other European culture, nothing exceptional can be created; only by amalgamation can something new be achieved and then serve as an intermediary between the majority society and the minority society. What has been assimilated by Jews in the course of their historical journey to the European nations, and their specific views and mentality characteristic of their spirituality for ages, should lead to a form born out of freedom. According to Zweig, "Life and its free



development are based on material grounds, like a plant is based on the nutritive properties of the fertile soil supporting it: it grows thanks to them, but they are also visible in it as a transformed and elevated substance. Life is development. Every living creature and each of its different forms, in the barren or rich conditions of life, whichever they can find, look for the greatest possible freedom” (*Bilanz*, p. 154).

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