

BROKEN CAROUSEL



GERMAN JEWISH SOLDIER-POETS
OF THE GREAT WAR

Selected, edited, and translated by
PETER C. APPELBAUM
with JAMES W. SCOTT



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Broken Carousel
German Jewish Soldier-Poets of the Great War
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This book is dedicated to a lost generation of German Jewish poets and thinkers, and the suffering Jewish civilians of Eastern Europe, caught between a hammer and an anvil.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	<i>Peter Appelbaum</i>	1
Translator's Note	<i>James Scott</i>	5
Chapter 1	<i>Immanuel Saul:</i> Stepfatherland.....	7
Chapter 2	<i>Walther Heymann:</i> East Prussia and War	17
Chapter 3	<i>Ludwig Franz Meyer:</i> Patriot and Zionist.....	61
Chapter 4	<i>Unfulfilled Promise</i>	127
	Walter Seligsohn	128
	Robert Ziegel	136
	Robert Löwenthal	148
	Albert Michel	152
	Goldfeld.....	156
	Julius Fürst.....	160
Chapter 5	<i>Alfred Lichtenstein:</i> Isaac Rosenberg's German Counterpart?	199
Chapter 6	<i>Samuel Jacobs:</i> Tisha Be'av in Time Of War	223
Chapter 7	<i>Leo Sternberg:</i> God Forges a Nation	239
Chapter 8	<i>Hartwig Heymann:</i> Song of the Sword	301

Chapter 9	<i>Disillusionment</i>	323
	Lion Feuchtwanger.....	324
	Ernst Toller.....	328
	Kurt Tucholsky.....	352
Chapter 10	<i>Jacob Diamant:</i>	
	War and Pogroms on the Eastern Front.....	355
	Notes	389
	Bibliography	399
About the Editors	403

Acknowledgements

FOR SOMEBODY SUCH AS myself brought up and educated in the English-speaking world, First World War poetry has been defined by men such as Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Isaac Rosenberg. Germany, a country of poets and dreamers, has been reticent about its own First World War literature. So it came as a surprise to me when I found such a large amount of poetry written by German-Jewish authors (many of them soldiers who died early in the war). The more I dug the more I found. The styles are many and sometimes overlap: romantic, idealistic, and super-patriotic; war-like and Germanic; expressionistic; accusatory; sad, betrayed, and questioning; harsh and cruel; and biting satirical. Most of the work has not been translated into English before but had lain dormant hidden from even German eyes.

Included are also some poems which, although only peripherally related to subject at hand, are nevertheless important because they shed light on the unenviable position of Jews as civilians in Central and Eastern Europe, including what used to be called "The Pale of Jewish settlement" in Eastern Poland Belorussia, and the Baltic states. No one knows how many of these Jews were killed as a result of the war, but more than 100,000 is not an unlikely number. These Jews were caught between two edges of a vice: On one hand the Central Powers who treated them with relative kindness, on the other the Russian army which, drawing from centuries of deep-rooted anti-Semitism, often treated them with barbarous cruelty. Even generations after Jewish emigration

to distant lands, Jewish fear of Cossack soldiers became legend to their children and even their grandchildren (one of whom I am).

Inclusion of the story of *Ostjuden* gains added significance given the fact that, a little more than three decades later, the roles would be reversed and the Soviet army were liberators, while the annihilating racial anti-Semitism of the National Socialists would destroy the entire fabric of Eastern European Jewish life.

The convoluted path which led to my interest in Jewish soldiers in the First World War German army has been outlined in my two previous books. For translation of the poems, I received help from a friend, Philip Benesch, Associate Professor of Politics at Lebanon Valley College, who put me in touch with James W. Scott, Professor Emeritus of German from that same institution. Jim is responsible for the poetry translations and the decision to present these texts in parallel columns.

I thank Alex Vgontzas and Barton Browning for their initial support and encouragement. As has been the case with all my work, Frank Mecklenburg and his staff at the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, are a tower of strength and an unequalled resource. David Roberts first published a selection of my translation on his website, giving me the confidence to continue, and Professor Edward Timms shared his wise counsel with me. I thank the Saul family for sharing the photograph of their great-grandfather and permission to publish a translation of his poem. Hans Hubert Gerards and Beate Knoblach both provided their special kind of help. Copyright approvals were also given by the Leo Baeck Institute, Aufbau Verlag, Titus Grab, and Michaela Ullmann (USC special collections). Leona Charles, Kathleen Krizsa, and Esther Dell provided yeoman librarian service in finding several little known texts, and Eleanor Leo her customary computer expertise.

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Best for last, my ever patient, resourceful, and wonderful wife Addie (*Eishet Chayil Mi Yimtza*) and my sunshine machine – my dear daughter Madeleine. Both of you are my strength and the joy of my life.

Note from editor: Where background information on a specific poet is freely available, this has not been referenced.

Peter Appelbaum

Translator's Note

THE EFFORT OF TRANSLATING a text from one language into another has long borne the stigma of a perhaps necessary, but ultimately impossible task, and nowhere is this truer than for poetic texts, and especially those using rhyming words as a significant literary device. The consonance of form and function, so perfect in the original, only rarely offers itself as smoothly on the mirror page. The genius poet/translators, able to comprehend a text and render it with equal poetic impact in their own tongue, are few; and I am quite sure that I am not among them. That said, my respect for the work of the young poets in this collection is great. A reader should expect to experience something of the skill they exhibit as creators of artful speech. I have therefore elected to offer what I hope to be readable versions, most particularly expressing the thought but also their imagery and the characteristic rhythm and flow of their language – at the nearly general expense of their rhymes. I found my work with these texts to have been a profoundly humbling and moving encounter. I can only hope to have given subsequent readers a similar opportunity. As every translation is simultaneously a commentary, the decision to include the original texts seemed essential. The conversation is there for anyone who chooses to participate in it.

James Scott



Immanuel Saul: Stepfatherland

IMMANUEL SAUL WAS BORN in 1876 in Rügenwalde (modern-day Darłowo, Poland) the son of a rabbi. He was a gifted and enlightened man with interests in music and intellectually erudite. He became a lawyer with a flourishing practice in Duisburg and married Hedwig Nassau, daughter of a wealthy industrialist, around 1904. By the time the war broke out Immanuel Saul had three sons and was 38 years old; despite this, he volunteered to fight for his country. He received an offer to return to Germany and train new recruits but refused, feeling that his place was in the front line. He became an infantryman and was killed on the Russian front in 1915. He is buried near the town of Jasiolda in Belorussia.

The following is excerpted from his memorial service: "With the death of Immanuel Saul the *Centralverein* loses one of its leading members in the lower Rhine valley. He was a man of liberal opinions, devoted to the idea of equality for all German Jews, and was on the *Centralverein* committee in Duisburg since its inception. I did not see him after the war began but heard that he had been awarded the Iron Cross. Although he is buried somewhere far away in Poland, his friends will never forget him." Dr. Richard Rosenthal, Lieutenant.

The following is the only poem left by Immanuel Saul:¹



Photo © Saul family

AN MEINE KINDER

Gedichtet am 11. Bis 12. Februar, 1915

Als ich hinauszog, für das Vaterland
Zu streiten wider Tücke und Verrat,
Da sprangt ihr frohbewegt um mich herum –
Und jauchztet eurem tapfern Vater zu.
Euch freute wohl der kriegerische Schmuck,
Die neuerrungene Würde eures Vaters.
Verborgen blieb dem kindlichen Gemüt,
Was es bedeutet, wenn von Weib und Kindern
Der Gatte, Vater zieht in Kampf und Tod. –
Doch später, wenn ihr reifer, klüger seid,
Und wenn vielleicht im Osten mein Gebein
Fern, einsam unter schlichtem Holzkreuz bleicht –
Dann wird ein Graun euch, ein Entsetzen packen,
Und jener Stunde werdet ihr gedenken,
Da er von euch den letzten Abschied nahm.
Dann tröst' euch die Gewissheit, dass er freudig
Begeistert sich den Reihen angeschlossen,
Die kämpfen sollten für des Reiches Ruhe.
Und wollt ihr wissen dann, w a r u m ich einst
So freudig, so begeistert mitgezogen,
Ich, dem ein süßes Weib das Leben krönte,
Dem euer Kindheit erste, holde Blüte
So schön, so lieblich doch entgegenprangte? –
Ich sag es euch. Nun merkt es wohl und segnet,
Der einst von euch hinwegzog, euren Vater! –
Mich zogs hinaus, weil ich ein D e u t s c h e r bin!
Nie hab' ich anders je gefühlt, gedacht
Als deutsch mit jeder Faser meines Herzens.
Dem Schüler schon ging eine Ahnung auf
Vom edlen Goldgehalt des deutschen Wesens.
Es jubelte mein kindlich' Herz, wenn es
Von deutschen Siegen, deutscher Größe hörte.

TO MY CHILDREN

Composed February 11-12, 1915

When I went out to shield the Fatherland
Against the threats of treachery and spite,
You danced around me full of pride and joy –
And clapped and cheered your father's bravery.
You must have liked the warlike uniform,
Your father's newfound dignity and worth.
But hidden from your child-like understanding,
Was what it means for husbands now and fathers
To leave their wives and children for the war.

But later when you're wiser, more mature,
And when, perhaps, my bones lie in the east
And bleach beneath a simple wooden cross –
Then you, too, may be seized by fear and horror,
And you will then recall that very hour
When he said to you all his last good-bye.
Then may it comfort you to know for certain
That he stepped inspired into the ranks
Of those who battled for the empire's peace.
And do you want to know **why** I once went,
To join the rest so joyful and enthused,
I, whose life a gentle wife had crowned,
To whom your early childhood had held out
The first sweet flower of your beauteous youth?
I'll tell you. Listen carefully and give your blessing,
To your father, who left you behind!
I had to go because I am a **German**!
I've never felt or thought myself as other
Than German with each fiber of my heart.
Already as a schoolboy I could sense
The noble gold within the German soul.
My childish heart rejoiced to hear the tales
Of German victories, German greatness told.

Es war erschüttert bis ins Innerste,
Wenn jäher Sturz das deutsche Volk betroffen
Das ging so tief, ging so ins Mark hinein,
Dass es ihm ward zum *e i g e n e n* Erleben.
Zumal ergriffen war mein kindlich' Herz
Vom kläglichen Geschick, das furchtbar hart
Das herrliche Geschlecht der Staufer traf,
Vernichtend ihren kaiserlichen Stamm.
So tief erfasst' es mich, dass ich – gesteh'
Ichs nur – der Schulbank noch nicht ganz entwachsen,
Ein Erstlingsschauspiel ihrem Sturze weihte.
Nun kam ein Kampf: nicht mit dem deutschen *H e e r*,
Nicht gegen Deutschlands stolze *M a c h t* allein –
Nein! Gegen deutschen Volkes deutsche Art,
Bewusst und boshaft, teuflisch eingeleitet.
Ein Kampf – nicht ritterlich mit blanker Waffe,
Durch Hungers grause Not verderben sollte.
Nein! Mit dem tück'chen Gifte der Verleumdung,
Geheimer Lüge, ruchlosem Verrat,
Kurz: jeder Niederträchtigkeit verschwistert,
Vernichten wollte er, was in langer Friedensarbeit
Das neu erstand'ne deutsche Volk geschaffen:
Die hohe Blüte uns'rer Wissenschaft,
Die Schöpfungen begeistert-voller Kunst,
Die Segnungen verfeinerter Kultur,
Die herrlich-stolze Schaffen deutscher Geister,
Den Frohlaut deutscher Dichtung und die Blüte
Des Wohlstands, den ein fleißig Volk geschaffen,
Die Segnungen, die Fleiß in brüderlichem
Verein mit hoher Geisteskraft geschaffen.
Ja, ausgelöscht, vom Erdenrund getilgt
Sollt werden deutsches Wesen, deutsche Art!
Es war ein Kampf, dem Herzen in der Brust,
Dem Denken im Gehirn, dem Blut der Adern
In höllisch-geiler Bosheit angesagt.

But it was shaken to its very core
When swift misfortune struck the German nation.
It went so deep, into my very bones,
That it became **my own** experience.
It moved my childish heart particularly
To learn the fearful hardness of the fate
That struck the splendid house of Staufen,
And made an end of their imperial line.
So deeply moved was I – though I confess
To having been a boy and still in school –
I wrote an early play about their fall.
Now came a war: not just against our **troops**,
Not just against the mighty German **state** –
No! Against the German peoples' German ways,
With conscious malice, devilishly conceived.
A war – not gallantly with weapons bared,
It sought to starve us into giving up.
No! With spiteful, poisonous defamation,
The secret lies and ruthless treachery,
In short, in league with every base design,
They wanted to destroy what years of peaceful work
By the new German nation had achieved:
The blooming of our scientists' research,
Creations of inspired and earnest art,
The blessings of a culture most refined,
The splendid, lofty fruits of German minds,
The joyous sound of German poetry,
Prosperity, the product of hard work,
The blessings born of labor shared as brothers
Together with the power of great minds.
Yes, snuffed out and destroyed, wiped off the earth:
This should be the fate of all that's German!
It was a war, proclaimed against the beating
heart, the thinking mind, the flowing blood
In hellish, wicked fiendishness and hate.

Zu welchem Zweck? – Um Krämer zu bereichern,
Goldhungrigen bequemen Raub zu sichern.
Aufflammt es da in heil'gem Volkeszorn.
Wie sollt' es nicht im tiefsten mich empören,
Dass man das deutsche Wesen so verlästert,
Ja Schuld ihm gab die grässlichsten der Gräuel,
Mit niedriger Verleumdung seinen Adel
Hinab in Staub und schmutz'ge Pfütze zog.
Drum war es mir Befreiung, nicht Beschwerde,
Als mich das Los den Kämpfern zugesellte,
Die Rächen sollten Tücke, Lug, Verrat,
Verteid'gen deutschen Wohlstands reiche Blüte,
Vorkämpfer sein für Weib und Kind und Heimat,
Sie schützen gegen asiat'sche Horden,
Die Tigerbrut, die uns'res Ostens Fluren
Mit Frevel über Frevel schon geschändet.
Welch hehres Glück! – Drum zog ich freudig aus,
Ein Deutscher, Deutschlands Grenzen zu beschützen. –
 Und noch ein Zweites trieb mich in den Kampf.
Ein Jude bin ich, allzeit treu ergeben
Dem Stamm, aus dessen Blute ich entsprossen.
In Friedenszeiten sprach wohl der und jener
Verächtlich von der Juden Art und Wesen,
Man schalt ihn feig, unkriegerisch, schalt ihn
Des Lebens hohen Zielen abgewandt,
Gemeinem Nutzen nur ergeben, selbstisch,
Ja, schalt ihn – dieses war das härteste,
Der ärgste Schimpf, er traf wie Peitschenhieb –
Fremdling auf jenem Boden, den die Väter
Mit ihrem Schweiß schon, ihrem Blut gedüngt. –
Jetzt griff mir tief ans Herz die Not der Zeit.
E i n Wille eint, ein einz'ger heil'ger Drang,
E i n e Begeistrung, Juden und Germanen.
Dass Deutsch wir sind – nicht braucht es des Beweises.
Die Wahrheit liegt jetzt sonnenhell zutage,

And to what end? To make the merchants rich,
To give the gold-obsessed an easy hoard.
And then the people's fury was inflamed.
So how could outrage not consume my very being
To hear such slander on the German soul,
Yes, made it guilty of the worst offences,
With slanderous libel sought to drag its gentry
Down into the mud and dirt and filth.
And so I felt relief and not a burden,
When fate chose me to join the warrior host,
To seek revenge for malice, lies, deceit,
Defending our prosperity in bloom,
Vanguard now for wife and child and homeland,
Protecting them from Asiatic hordes,
The spawn of tigers who have terrorized
Our eastern lands with sacrilege and rape.
What great good luck! I left home filled with joy,
A German gone to guard the German borders. –

There was a second thing drove me to war.
I am a Jew, and live in true devotion
to the lineage from whose blood I've come.
In lineage there were always these and those
Who spoke with scorn of Jewish ways and manners.
They called them cowards and unfit to fight,
Uninterested in life's transcending goals,
Mean, low and selfish, gain-obsessed,
They called them – and this was the cruelest blow,
The worst insult, it struck like a whip lash –
Foreigners upon that very soil,
For which our fathers paid with sweat and blood. –
The present danger reached into my heart.
One wish unites, a single holy urge,
One ecstasy those Jewish and Germanic.
That we are German needs no proof at all,
The truth indeed shines clearly as the sun,

Da froh, aus eig'nem Trieb die Juden sich
 Um ihres Vaterlandes Fahnen scharen.
 Mir zu gewinnen – sei's, wenn fällt das Los,
 Auch mit dem eig'nen Blut – das Vaterland,
 Das mir wie meinen Brüdern, leider, leider
 Gar vielfach wie ein Stiefvaterland gewesen,
 Das war mein fester, wohlerwogner Wille.
 Jetzt wird sich's zeigen, dass wir niemals unwert
 Des Vaterlands gewesen, das wir lieben,
 Dass es zu unrecht uns hintangesetzt,
 Und dass wir tapfer sind, wenn's gilt den Feind
 Zu schlagen, wie einst vor Jahrtausenden
 Der edle Heldenstamm der Makkabäer. –
 Und gegen wen geht heut der Kampf?
 Sinds nicht

Die alten tiefverruchten Feinde Judas,
 Die grausamen Bedrücker uns'rer Brüder,
 Die Feinde der Kultur, des Rechts, der Freiheit,
 Die heute Deutschlands Feinde sind? E i n H a s s
 Eint heute – endlich! endlich! – Freiheitsfreunde,
 Kulturvorkämpfer, Deutsche mit Juden.
 Uns allen blüht ein gleichgeartet Schicksal:
 Ein Unsieg bringt uns allen Untergang
 Ein Sieg befreit, erhebt, beglückt uns alle.
 Denn welche Schonung, welch Erbarmen soll
 Der Jude von der Mörderbrut erwarten,
 Die jetzt im eig'nen Lande jüdisch Blut
 Vergießt in Strömen, jüdischen Frau'n und Kindern
 Die ärgste Schmach antut? –
 Drum zog ich aus,
 Ein d e u t s c h e r J u d e in den heil'gen Kampf.



Offiziersstellvertreter I m m a n u e l S a u l, Duisburg*

*Inzwischen im September 1915 vor dem Feinde gefallen.

As Jews leave for the war of their own will,
 And, joyful, gather 'round their country's flag.
 To earn for myself – yes and with my blood
 Should fate decree – this Fatherland, which seemed
 To me and to my brothers, sadly, sadly,
 All too often a stepfatherland,
 This was my firm and well-considered wish.
 Now all will see that we were not unworthy
 Of the Fatherland which we all love,
 That it was wrong to move us to the back,
 And that we do stand bravely when we're called
 To fight the foe, as once in days of yore,
 The noble heroes of the Maccabees. –
 And against whom do we now fight?
 Are they not
 The old notorious enemies of Judah,
 The barbarous oppressors of our race,
 The enemies of culture, right and freedom,
 Who move against Germany now? – **One hate**
 Unites – at last! at last! – the friends of freedom,
 All vanguards of culture, Germans with Jews.
 We all are bound to share one common fate:
 Defeat will mean our downfall, that is sure,
 But victory sets us free, ennobles, and makes joyful.
 For what protection, bit of mercy can
 A Jew expect out of the murderous band,
 That now spills Jewish blood in their own lands
 In streams, and visits deep disgrace
 On Jewish women and children?
 And so I go,
 A **German Jew** to join the holy war.



Warrant Officer **Immanuel Saul**, Duisburg*

*Among those who fell before the foe, Sept. 1915.