

“The Jew was doing his Christian duty”¹:
***The New Ghetto* as a Representation of Herzl’s Political Epoch**
“El judío cumplía con su deber cristiano”:
El nuevo gueto como representación de la época política de Herzl

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Abstract:

This essay asks how Herzl’s play, *The New Ghetto*, can be read as a representation of the sociopolitical tensions which affected and influenced the emancipated Jewish community in European capitals by the end of the 19th century. Among the pervading tensions of the time, I discuss the kinds of Antisemitism birthed by the emancipation: both the virulent kind that outright threatens and stereotypes Jews, as much as the subtle kind, of those who are willing to include Jews, so long as they desist from their Judaism. I also speak about internal tensions (within the Jewish community); for instance, in regards to the question of emancipating. While some Jews are baptized to advance socially and professionally, others still endorse the ideal of an emancipated Jew whose Jewish and European identities can coexist. Finally, I analyze how Jewish leaders confronted these ideologies that collide (often dangerously so) by creating two alternatives: Assimilationism and Zionism. While the first insisted on the belief that, through movements like the emancipation, Jews would succeed in integrating into what they considered to be their diasporic homes, the latter dismissed this hope, and instead turned to Zionism—or the establishment of a Jewish state—as the exclusive path toward Jewish security and prosperity. Having traced the manifestations of these ideologies and tensions within the play, I conclude by arguing that the play

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advocates for Herzl's own political ideology, by first representing his Assimilationist past and ultimately endorsing the Zionist future he would come to embrace, once all else had failed.

Key words: Theodor Herzl; Zionism; Assimilationism; Emancipation; Antisemitism; Jewish Theater

Resumen:

Este ensayo considera cómo la obra de teatro de Herzl, "El nuevo gueto", puede ser leída como una representación de las tensiones sociopolíticas que afectaron e influenciaron a la comunidad judía emancipada de las capitales europeas, a finales del siglo XIX. Entre las tensiones que prevalecían en la época, discuto los tipos de antisemitismo que se originaron con la emancipación: tanto el virulento, que directamente amenaza y estereotipa a los judíos, como el más sutil, que está dispuesto a incluir a judíos, siempre y cuando ellos desistan de su judaísmo. Hablo también de las tensiones internas (dentro de la comunidad judía); por ejemplo, en cuanto a la cuestión de emanciparse o no. Mientras que algunos judíos se bautizan para avanzar social y profesionalmente, otros todavía siguen el ideal del judío emancipado, cuyas identidades europea y judía logran coexistir. Finalmente, analizo cómo los líderes judíos confrontan estas ideologías que compiten (en ocasiones, peligrosamente) con la formación de dos alternativas: el asimilacionismo y el sionismo. Mientras que la primera insiste en la creencia que, a través de corrientes como la emancipación, los judíos lograrían integrarse a lo que consideraban su hogar diaspórico, la segunda descarta esta esperanza, y en su lugar cree en el sionismo—o el establecimiento de un estado judío—como el único camino para conseguir la seguridad y prosperidad judía. Habiendo trazado las manifestaciones de estas ideologías y tensiones dentro de la obra de teatro, concluyo con el argumento que la obra defiende la ideología política del mismo Herzl, ya que primero representa su pasado asimilacionista y ultimadamente apoya la esperanza sionista que él llegaría a albergar, una vez que todo lo demás hubiera fallado.

Palabras clave:

Teodoro Herzl; Sionismo; Asimilación; Emancipación; Antisemitismo; Teatro judío

In 1894, a week before the announcement of Alfred Dreyfus’ arrest, Theodor Herzl began writing one of his last plays, *The New Ghetto* (Moraly, 2018). Set in the Vienna of 1893, the play is a concise yet evocative representation of the sociopolitical turmoil in which European Jews found themselves after the emancipation. Following a century-long struggle for equal rights from European governments, Jews had to acknowledge that their expectations had not been met. Emancipation did grant them political rights, but it did not end the anti-Jewish sentiment that still restricted their freedom and endangered their wellbeing. In fact, Antisemitism as a formal ideology emerged in direct opposition to Jewish emancipation. Two movements were organized, then, to address this new crisis: Assimilationism and Zionism. The former insisted on the potential of Enlightenment ideals, arguing that Jews would eventually manage to integrate into what they now considered their European homes. The Zionists, however, had lost hope that the diaspora could ever become a home for the Jews, and instead worked toward establishing a state of their own.

Herzl is referred to as one of the founders of modern political Zionism. However, a closer look into his writings—including the *Jewish State*, his diaries, and *The New Ghetto*—shows a complicated, shifting political and ideological journey. In this paper, I will show how Herzl’s ideological trajectory and historical context become manifest in his dramaturgical work. I will analyze his transition from promoting Assimilationist ideas to his subsequent embrace of the Zionist ideology he would famously defend in his texts and activism. To this end, I will use Pierre Van Paassen, Emanuel Neumann, Dmitry Shumsky, and Steven Beller to place Herzl’s writings within his biographical and historical context. Ultimately, I will show how *The New Ghetto* represents the ideological tensions that existed within the Jewish community at the time and analyze how Herzl instills his own political perspective into the narrative, such that the play functions as compelling advocacy for his views.

The New Ghetto is a 4-act play written in Paris in 1894. It centers on the lives of a handful of characters and the plot is relatively straightforward: a community of Jews deal with an economic mishap that affects many of their lives. In a simple, yet evocative way, Herzl brilliantly stages the

strongest tensions that pervaded in the post-emancipation era for European Jews by having characters symbolize important ideological tendencies. For instance, the spectrum of Assimilationism ranges from Dr. Bichler, who represents Jews who were baptized to advance professionally and socially, to Rabbi Friedheimer, who advocates for coexisting Jewish and European identities. To represent Zionism, there is Jacob Samuel, the embodiment of Herzl's own political trajectory: from Assimilationist to Zionist.³ The play also includes two characters which represent post-emancipation Antisemitism: Count Von Schramm, the virulent anti-Semite who stereotypes Jews and endangers their wellbeing, and Franz Wurzelechner, Jacob's (temporary) gentile friend, who becomes desperate to disassociate himself from Jews and all that they represent in the secular world. Moreover, Herzl's political perspectives are perfectly in line with the conclusive message of the play: the ghetto walls that had constricted European Jews for centuries had not been torn down with the emancipation. Instead, they merely turned invisible. Thus, the only solution left for the safety and freedom of the Jews laid in a state created by and for them.

Having delineated the structure and message of the play, it is valuable to read it through a historical lens, contextualizing its ideas within the Jewish ideologies of the late 19th century. In a way, all subsequent Jewish political movements originated from the effects—including the unfulfilled expectations—of the emancipation. The political emancipation of the Jews gained prominence in the 1750s, though it is important to remember that “emancipation was recurring and interminable”; that it was “neither a one-time, chronologically discrete event nor a linear one” (Sorkin, 2019: 5). In this paper, the term ‘emancipation’ signals the granting of equal political and civil rights to Jews; in other words, “the Jews’ inclusion, elevation, or equalization as a distinct religious group” (Idem, 2). However, despite the promise of equality and freedom entailed by emancipation, by the 19th century, Jews realized that this promise had not only remained unfulfilled, but that it unleashed a new crisis.

³ Even though Zionism does not formally appear in the play, it is the logical conclusion to Samuel's final plea: “I want to—get—out! (*Louder.*) Out—of—the—Ghetto!” (IV.8.). As we will analyze later, considering the historical context of the 1890s and Herzl's own political background, this can confidently be interpreted as an allusion to Zionism.

Indeed, rather than creating a peaceful environment shared by Jews and non-Jews, a phenomenon developed which is best described as ‘the ghetto with invisible walls’—a metaphor that crucially shapes the psyche of the characters in *The New Ghetto*. Emancipation had eliminated legal discrimination against the Jews. However, a formal current of sociopolitical Antisemitism began excluding and harassing Jews in new and organized ways. In other words, the ghetto did not disappear—it evolved. Herzl shows his frustration over the inefficacy of the emancipation in his writings: in his diaries, he declares, “Equal rights are included in the laws, but in fact they have been suspended” (Herzl, 1966: 13). Understandably, this awareness eventually becomes part of the justification for his Zionist ideology, as well, as he writes in *The Jewish State*:

No one can deny the gravity of the situation of the Jews. Wherever they live in perceptible numbers, they are more or less persecuted. Their equality before the law, granted by statute, has become practically a dead letter. They are debarred from filling even moderately high positions, either in the army, or in any public or private capacity. (Herzl, 1967: 22)

The dissonance between new legal possibilities for the Jews and the emergence of extralegal obstructions, was a cornerstone of post-emancipation times. Indeed, “Jews were excluded from Christian bourgeois society on the basis of group belonging (...) They comprised a group that was especially vulnerable to attack by enemies of post-emancipatory liberal order that emerged from within modern society” (Shumsky, 2018: 57). Pierre Van Paassen also explains this contrast compellingly:

The Emancipation, decreed at a moment when the high tide of idealism, engendered by the French Revolution, swept over Europe, fell short of being a truly liberating movement for the Jewish people. The French Revolution, it is true, proclaimed the individual, the citizen, as the center and the goal. *The human personality was set free. But it did not liberate Jewish life.* On the contrary, it isolated and impoverished it. (...) *The Jewish people were not set free in a national sense by the Emancipation.* (Van Paassen, 1966: vii-viii, my emphasis)

Here, Van Paassen creates a vital distinction between individual and communal rights, which would eventually become one of the central distinctions between the integration strategies of Assimilationists as opposed to those of Zionists. That is why a tension between legal rights and the continuous discrimination comes up significantly in the play. Indeed, it is characters' particular reactions to Antisemitism which explain, to a large extent, their ideological stance in terms of the two movements.

It is possible to interpret these invisible ghetto walls to signify more than Antisemitism: they also represent the difficulty Jews experienced trying to adapt to their new, supposedly 'welcoming' surroundings after centuries spent enclosed in the ghetto. Herzl depicts this struggle as follows:

When civilised nations awoke to the inhumanity of discriminatory legislation and enfranchised us, our enfranchisement came too late. It was no longer possible legally to remove our disabilities in our old homes. For we had, curiously enough, developed while in the Ghetto into a bourgeois people, and we stepped out of it only to enter into fierce competition with the middle classes. Hence, our emancipation set us suddenly within this middle-class circle, where we have a double pressure to sustain, from within and from without. (Herzl, 1967: 25-26)

Herzl describes the clash that followed emancipation from a Jewish perspective, noting that, besides non-Jews' refusal to admit them into their society, Jews themselves struggled to balance the two worlds that were now colliding. However, he traces the blame back to the original discrimination which led to the creation of the ghetto in the first place.

This sense of injustice and frustration at the Jewish state of perpetual submission in the diaspora translates into an evocative monologue in the play. In it, Jacob accuses Wurzelechner (who embodies a form of Antisemitism) as follows:

JACOB: Your people have been free citizens for hundreds of years, while we...
(Smiles wryly.) (...) It was your people who rubbed our noses in money—but now we are told to despise it! *For a thousand years you kept us in bondage—and now we're to acquire the souls of free men*, from one day to the next! Who is really free in his heart? Are you? We're not even permitted to have everyday human foibles. We're dirty Jews! (II.1., my emphasis)

The similitude between Herzl and Jacob here is almost transparent. Through this character, Herzl condenses the pressures of a discriminated existence in the diaspora. In a way, what is most tragic about this realization is that it seems unresolvable; after all, if inequality was the problem, emancipation should have been the solution. Both Herzl and Jacob realize that, even in the progress toward equality (represented by the emancipation), their history of oppression will follow them as a burden, not letting them—or their oppressors—soon forget it.

Continuing with the history of anti-Jewish sentiment, which spurred the need for emancipation to begin with, the Antisemitism of the 19th century represents the other side of this difficult transition from the ghetto. This time, prejudice came as a reaction to emancipatory efforts themselves. As Herzl recognized, “In the principal countries where Anti-Semitism prevails, it does so as a result of the emancipation of the Jews” (Idem, 25). Emanuel Neumann opines that possible reasons for this relationship between emancipation and Antisemitism include “The very speed and thoroughness of Jewish assimilation and the sudden incursion of the freedmen into hitherto prohibited fields” (Neumann, 1966: xv)⁴. Indeed, the emancipation—and the exit from the ghetto that it implied—was responsible for the significant increase of number of (tense) interactions between Jews and non-Jews.

⁴ It is interesting to compare Neumann’s argument with the way Herzl explains the logic behind Antisemitism: “Its remote cause is our loss of the power of assimilation during the Middle Ages; its immediate cause is our excessive production of mediocre intellects” (Herzl, 1967: 26).

Moreover, Neumann addresses this transition from enlightenment ideals that accomplished emancipation, to medieval instincts that still allowed hatred. He writes:

Nor did the growth of the democratic idea prevent the spread of anti-Semitism (...) The cry “all power to the people!” translated into realistic terms meant: All power and honor to the ethnic group, united, close-knit, homogeneous in culture and spirit, rooted in its historic soil, jealous guardian of its patrimony (...) Should this patrimony, created by the toil and blood of generations, now be enjoyed by “aliens” who had not shared in this creation, the upstart children of the Ghetto? (Ibid.)

Neumann gives a crucial insight to our understanding of these ‘liberal’ principles of 19th-century Europe: they were exclusive. Behind the clear dissonance between democratic principles that do not apply to all equally, is a notion of nationhood that supersedes it. In other words, why should Jews, who did not contribute to the emancipation of Europe as a whole from its conservative institutions—let alone that they were confined in ghettos—now enjoy from its newly achieved freedom? Neumann concludes that, in Antisemitic logic, Jews came to represent precisely the kind of ideals and lifestyle that the enlightenment had fought to end. He posits: “The anti-Semites had made a two-fold “discovery”: first, that the Jews were a distinct people, characterized by special traits; secondly, that these “Semitic” traits were odious and repugnant to the genius of the “master nations” of Europe”” (Idem, xv-xvi). According to this logic, the opposition to Jews was, in fact, a *reinforcement* of modern European principles.

This historical background on Antisemitism informs the way characters represent or deal with Antisemitism in the play. Since Herzl uses different characters to represent particular ideologies, Count von Schramm serves to symbolize an outward, dangerous kind of antisemite, while Franz Wurzelechner is the subtler, politically-conscious—yet equally damaging—antisemite. From the beginning, Schramm holds a reputation of treating the Jews with animosity. For instance, when Jacob recalls the time he did not agree to duel with the Count, he ponders that the reason the Count accepted his refusal was out of condescension. He remembers, with resentment: “(*Flares up.*) (...)

For him the matter was settled, according to the code of chivalry. (*Grinds his teeth.*) Not much honor, at that, dueling with a Jew! (I.7.). The fact that Schramm should have been suspected of this hostility is justified, for example, by his behavior in the wedding reception at the Hellmann's: “*The Captain scarcely disguises his contempt for the Jewish company*” (Ibid.).

However, the more virulent and stereotypical side of Schramm's Antisemitism comes up by the final scenes of the play, after his business has collapsed and he finds it convenient to scapegoat the Jews. Assuming the mine he owned has gone down because of Jacob's influence on the workers, he confronts him. The following dialogue ensues:

SCHRAMM: ...At first I didn't understand what you were after. What's the Jew up to, I asked myself?

JACOB: The Jew was doing his Christian duty.

SCHRAMM: Your fine brother-in-law told me you were a fool. He said he was at odds with you... But now I understand it all. You were hand in glove with him.

JACOB: That's a lie!

SCHRAMM: You're just another dirty Jew!

JACOB: You'll take that back! (...)

SCHRAMM: And if I don't— you'll crawl, as you did once before? (...) I know your kind! You'll crawl for your brother and for yourself. You dirty Jews are all the same! (III.7.)

This clash between the Count and Jacob represents the clash between ‘assimilated’ Jews, who have entered and begun shaping the secular workforce, and the non-Jews who used to control it entirely. Schramm here exemplifies many of the classic discrimination tropes against Jews. He addresses Jacob as a ‘type’ (“the Jew”; “I know your kind!”) and assumes he machinated a corrupt and selfish scheme: “What's the Jew up to?” Schramm also alludes to the stereotype of Jews' relentless loyalty to each other, at the cost of all others: “You'll crawl for your brother and for yourself.” And, of course, he uses offensive imagery and language, such as: “you'll crawl,” and, “You dirty Jews.” It is also worth noting here Herzl's famous ironic style in Jacob's poignant remark, “The Jew was doing his Christian duty.” This sentence is also valuable in that its ridicule of Schramm connotes

a deeper critique of their contemporary Europe. That is, it symbolizes the failure of a society that was meant to enact both the Christian value of compassion and the liberal principles of the enlightenment—a combination that, theoretically, would *prevent* Antisemitism. Instead, Jews were left to protect themselves from gratuitous hatred by behaving overtly righteous, and “turning the other cheek” themselves.

Wurzlechner demonstrates a different approach to Antisemitism—perhaps a more tragic one, at that. After all, Franz is overall a good and loyal man, and he seems to genuinely esteem Jacob. However, this is all outweighed by the consequences of associating too closely with the Jews. Indeed, the friendship dissolves as soon as Franz realizes that it implies a proximity to other Jews that he finds deeply uncomfortable. Wurzlechner’s Antisemitism then, first and foremost, emphasizes the difference between Jews and the rest of society; as he clearly states at the end of the Hellmann’s wedding reception: “It’s another world!” (I.8.). Still, the main exposition of the kind of Antisemitism that Franz represents comes when he announces to Jacob that they can no longer see each other. Franz begins by stressing how different—and, he argues, incompatible—the two worlds that Jacob has been trying to connect really are. Wurzlechner complains: “Your environment is different— the company you keep. I don’t belong there— with these Rheinbergs, Wassersteins, the whole lot of them” (II.1.). Franz’s note on difference slowly evolves into a generalizing tone that not only addresses Jews as a completely homogenous group (a list of Jewish-sounding last names, a solid “them”) but, moreover, that is thoroughly unlikeable, too. Franz adds, as if the hostility is self-explanatory: “Can’t you see? I can’t take them— they rub me the wrong way” (Ibid.).

What is interesting about Franz’s comments is that he seems conflicted: on the one hand, he cannot ignore neither his personal distaste nor how alien he feels from all other Jews; still, he wishes the situation were different. As he laments to Jacob: “Somehow it doesn’t seem quite fair” (Ibid.) (though it is worth noting the irony that Franz resents his loss of friendship more than the fact that Jews are perceived in such a way that ‘justifies’ this break). Still, Wurzlechner is so uncomfortable with an expression of outright Antisemitism that when Jacob laments his friend’s despise towards

his family, he quickly retorts: “I never said any such thing!” (Ibid.). Yet, as conflicted and sensitive as Franz might have been, the decision over which of these interests to prioritize is clear. He finally admits: “(*Shaken.*) Jacob, believe me, I can’t help it. I wish I could tell you. I—well, I plan to go into politics” (Ibid.). The conversation concludes when both Franz and Jacob resign, understanding that Franz’s decision is definitive and, tragically, comprehensible. After all, it represents the pervasiveness of Antisemitism—they can protest it, but they are still subject to the way it controls and shapes both of their environments.

Another factor that is relevant to consider in Herzl’s depiction of Antisemitism is how the protagonist, Jacob deals with its manifestations in the play. The way that Jacob treats Antisemitism, in contrast with other characters, suggests that only he is sensitive and attuned to the way it impacts their lives. Thanks to this sociological awareness, he is able to predict which situations could spur Antisemitism, and the play continuously shows his efforts to prevent that outcome.⁵ For instance, when entering a business deal with his brother-in-law and Schramm, he shows how much he cares that they behave as “decent people” (II.8.), so that they do not give the Count any more ‘reasons’ to be antisemitic.

In fact, one of Jacob’s main character traits is the extent to which he tries to not only be a responsible Jew, who prevents Antisemitism, but one who behaves compassionate towards the rest of society (as shown when he helps the Socialist workers). This behavior is criticized by many, but mainly the Rabbi, who warns Jacob of the story of ‘Moses of Mainz.’ This is the tale of a Jew who heard a cry for help from ‘outside of the ghetto’ (both in the literal and the allegorical sense) and, out of compassion, trespassed the walls to attend to it. As a result, he died: he had been set a trap. Interestingly, if there is anyone else that shows a similar sensitivity in interpreting and preventing Antisemitism is the Rabbi—at one point he even defends Jacob from Rheinberg’s doubts (II. 5.). Yet the Rabbi’s stance is different—it is aligned with the message of the Mainz

⁵ Jacob’s attitude here, not surprisingly, reminds of Herzl’s. For example, at one point Herzl entertained the idea of establishing prizes that would be granted to Jews whose contributions to general society were particularly beneficial. This, he thinks, would achieve “general amelioration” and positive “publicity” of the Jews in front of their non-Jewish compatriots (Herzl, 1966: 8).

story: he insists Jews must protect and care for themselves before they can worry about anyone else. However, Jacob fundamentally disagrees with this approach. This contrast becomes clear in Jacob’s interaction with the Rabbi, when the latter asks if the fate of Mainz had effected any ideological change—but it did not:

JACOB: I say that my heart goes out to Moses of Mainz, that I am proud of him. All of us should take him as an example. The cry for help is sometimes genuine.

RABBI: But we’re too weak!

JACOB: What merit is there when the strong show compassion? (III.4.)

Thus, not only is Jacob insistent on the need to prevent and combat Antisemitism, but his compassion extends to outside of the ghetto walls, despite the risk entailed. Still, the conclusion of the play has the potential of overturning this approach—as Jacob declares, on his deathbed: “Tell the Rabbi...like Moses of Mainz!” (IV.7.).

The prevalence and infectiousness of Antisemitism spurred the need for a solution; this bred the movements of Assimilationism and Zionism. Herzl endorsed the former before promoting the latter—an ideological transition present in both his personal writings and in *The New Ghetto*. To begin, Assimilationists proposed the complete integration of individual Jews into modern European societies—they “seized upon their new-found opportunities, penetrating into every sphere of cultural and economic life. They prospered and rose to eminence” (Neumann, 1966: xv). As will be discussed later, it is important to emphasize that this kind of integration was planned on an individual, rather than a communal, level (Van Paassen, 1966: vii). There are many reasons for which Assimilationists sought to insist on Europe as their (only) home; not only had it granted them equal rights, but it had also come to represent the liberal ideals many of these Jews genuinely endorsed. As such, assimilation seemed worthwhile for many Jews, even for those who regretted having to sacrifice some of their Jewishness in exchange. As Neumann elaborates:

The price of Emancipation was assimilation and the disappearance of the Jewish people as a distinct entity among the nations. The condition was accepted. (...)

None but a religious bond was to exist henceforth between Jews. (...) Henceforth they would be Frenchmen, Magyars, Germans—of the “Mosaic persuasion.” In language, dress and manners—in their very thoughts and sentiments—they would be wholly at one with their fellow countrymen, indistinguishable for all practical purposes from the peoples among whom they dwelt. (Neumann, 1966: xiii-xiv)

As explained, assimilation had a pull that attracted many liberal Jews, since they saw this as the opportunity to embrace European nationalism and finally join the ranks of their compatriots—even if that implied a reduction of Judaism to merely an optional religious preference.

In his diaries, Herzl shows the Assimilationist tendencies that he entertained at some point in his life. Indeed, Steven Beller describes Herzl’s pre-Zionism life as “typical of his generation of Central European Jewry” (Beller, 1991: 1); indeed, his lifestyle seemed to prove the success of his assimilation into the modern society that surrounded him. For instance, he speaks of emigration (including, theoretically, to Palestine) as an option equally valid to staying in Europe and assimilating: “Two ends are possible. Either to remain or to emigrate” (Herzl, 1966: 6). Once, he even shows a preference toward staying: “Whether they stay or migrate, Jewish masses must first of all be improved in the very places they are now (...) And emigrate later—*if it’s necessary*” (Idem, 8, my emphasis).

Indeed, Herzl believed in the potential of individual assimilation into European society as the first (and perhaps, ideal) method of integration. Dmitry Shumsky notes that “Herzl believed that the only way for Austrian Jews to complement their legal emancipation with social emancipation (...) was by *assimilating as individual Jews* into the non-Jewish (German-speaking) sociocultural environment” (Shumsky, 2018: 57, my emphasis). There was even a time in Herzl’s Assimilationist period when he suggested racial mixing in order to better the ‘Jewish race.’ As Beller tells, “Herzl opined that the Jews needed to be racially mixed with those in whose midst they lived (Germans) to improve the breed. At this point his ideal was a ‘cross-breeding of Western and Oriental races on the basis of a common state religion.’” (Beller, 1991: 6). However, as will

be later discussed, Herzl eventually recognized the limits of the Assimilationist project and instead turned to Zionism (though some of his former ideas immigrated into his political future, as well as into his playwriting).

In the case of Assimilationism, *The New Ghetto* shows a fascinating range of characters that fit within its scope: from Dr. Bichler, the baptized Jew, to Rabbi Friedheimer, who is both religious and proudly European. The play contextualizes the Assimilationist ideologies of these characters within a framework where Jewishness is, despite any efforts, inescapable. One of the more profound elaborations on this topic is brought up by Jacob, in his conversation with Wurzlechner. He explains, sourly:

You studied law, Franz, because the Wurzlechners have always been lawyers or doctors in Vienna. Wasserstein too is what his ancestors made him—what their destiny made him. It may not be to his credit. But it’s not his fault (...) In our case it wasn’t even nature that made us what we are, but history. It was your people who rubbed our noses in money—but now we are told to despise it! (II.1.)

Jacob points to another sort of confinement that, in a way, could also be associated with the invisible ghetto walls; that is, the tragic irony that all the Jewish traits that non-Jews despise, *they* provoked. According to that idea, Jews were forced to be a particular kind of people—work at certain professions, live in specific places and under certain conditions—and were later hated (and sometimes killed) for it. Yet it is not only non-Jews who do not let Jews escape their identity; it is also the Jewish community itself which often fights to retain its essence (sometimes while trying to embrace its European identity, too).

An example of this attempt to reconcile (religious) Jewishness with holding on to a European (secular) identity is Rabbi Friedheimer. In fact, many of the important encounters in the play between Assimilationist and Zionist ideas take place in the dialogue between the Rabbi and Jacob. The main one begins when the Rabbi pities Jewish Russian emigrants, and says:

RABBI FRIEDHEIMER: ...Those poor people! Yes my friends, we are not nearly so badly off as our coreligionists. We at least can stay in our homeland!

JACOB: On sufferance!

RABBI FRIEDHEIMER: We enjoy the protection of law. It's true, we are looked down upon once again, just as in the old days, when we lived in the ghetto. But the walls have come down.

JACOB: The *visible* walls.

RABBI FRIEDHEIMER: Antisemitism isn't all bad. As the movement gains force, I observe a return to religion. (...) True, the ghetto was crowded and dirty, but the virtues of family life flourished there (...) Don't belittle the Jewish quarter, my dear friend! Poor it is, but it's our home.

JACOB: I don't belittle it. I only say we must get out of it.

RABBI FRIEDHEIMER: (*Rises.*) And I tell you we cannot do it! When there was still a real ghetto, we were not allowed to leave it without permission (...) Now the walls and barriers have come invisible, as you say. Yet we are still rigidly confined to a moral ghetto. Woe unto him who would desert! (*Walks away.*) (I.8.)

Friedheimer's Assimilationism comes across in many ways. He expresses a strong allegiance to Vienna—calling it their “homeland”—, and he attempts to justify it throughout his speech. First, he says, it has granted them rights (“We enjoy the protection of the law”) and that has allowed them some sense of integration (“the ghetto walls have come down”). As for the barriers that still stood—he recognizes the bright side and gives a surprising ‘thanks’ to Antisemitism for the “return to religion” that it has motivated. This silver-lining-mentality recurs in the Rabbi's speech: “True, the ghetto was crowded and dirty, *but* the virtues of family life flourished there,” and, “It's true, we are looked down upon (...) *But* the ghetto walls have come down” (my emphasis). The Rabbi constantly shows his willingness to forgive many aspects of the diaspora in return for sufficient peace and safety. This is a central component of Assimilationism, and one that contrasts with Zionism: the acknowledgment that Jews in Europe had it bad, paired with the conviction that, anywhere else, they would have it worse. Indeed, Assimilationists' attraction to Europe often did not trace back to nationalism or liberalism, but to the perception that they should stay wherever they were safe enough. Meanwhile, Zionists believed in a better future elsewhere.

It would seem that it is this Assimilationist pessimism that Rabbi Friedheimer is alluding to when he responds to Jacob’s ambition to leave the ghetto with the exclamation: “And I tell you we cannot do it!” Yet as he goes on, he shows he has granted the ‘invisible ghetto walls’ a new meaning. The Rabbi claims that Jews are still enclosed within a “moral ghetto”—and, more surprisingly— “Woe unto him who would desert!” This reading gives a fascinating twist to the metaphor because it denotes the religious tradition that would rather Jews stayed within a ghetto, than leave it and sacrifice their Jewish identity. In a way, this argument recalls the Rabbi’s Moses of Mainz story—indeed, he dies because he steps out of the ghetto. With this speech, Rabbi Friedheimer concludes his complex approach to post-emancipation politics: he strives to reconcile a religious Jewish identity with a strong European allegiance—as long as that grants Jews some of the protection and freedom that the emancipation had promised.

Continuing with the central, broader question of whether Jews can, in fact, assimilate into European society while maintaining some form of Jewishness, it is relevant to discuss the fate of Dr. Bichler. Although he stays in the margins of the plot, he also represents an important trend of Assimilationist Jews; in a way, he might be considered among the most ‘successful’ at the task of integrating. As is discovered at the very beginning of the play, Dr. Bichler was baptized apparently in an attempt to advance his professional career (after all, if he sought excommunication from the Jewish community, he would not participate in the celebrations of a Jewish wedding). What is significant about his character is that Herzl seems to use him, almost explicitly, as a way to delegitimize those who chose conversion to Christianity as a method of assimilation. As the dialogue shows:

WASSERSTEIN: Tell me, why did you have yourself baptized anyway?

DR. BICHLER: It’s really none of your business, my good fellow. But I won’t evade the question. Mine was the solution of the problem on an individual basis.

WASSERSTEIN: Indivi—I don’t quite follow you.

DR. BICHLER: (*Sighs.*) Let’s say it was an attempt at a solution... For, between you and me, it solves nothing. (I. 3.)

In addition to his baptism, Dr. Bichler shows his Assimilationist ideologies when he explains he had sought integration “on an individual basis” (rather than the communal integration promoted by Zionists). Having declared him an obvious Assimilationist, Herzl then has him admit the futility of his efforts: as the doctor recognizes: “it was an attempt at a solution (...) it solves nothing.”

With Dr. Bichler’s integration failure, as well as his pariah status within the Jewish community (he is continuously given reproving looks by the Rabbi), Herzl hints to his own disapproval of baptized Jews, or those who assimilated by renouncing their Jewish identity. This attitude recurs in his writings; for instance, when he says: “I referred previously to our “assimilation”; I do not for a moment wish to imply that I desire such an end. Our national character is too historically famous, and, in spite of every degradation, too fine, to make its annihilation desirable” (Herzl, 1967: 27)⁶. In his diaries, Herzl is even harsher: “The cowardly, assimilated, baptized Jews may remain [in Europe] (...) But we, the faithful Jews, will again become great” (Herzl, 1966: 12-13). Here, Herzl goes so far as to insult and exclude baptized Jews from his vision of the future for the Jewish people in their own state.

Herzl’s disapproval of some Assimilationist techniques eventually spread onto his negation of the ideology in general, and he came to endorse and promote Zionism instead. Interestingly, Beller addresses this transition by interpreting Herzl’s pre-Zionist background as *necessary* for him to eventually embrace Zionism. He argues:

Herzl could recognize the ways in which the emancipation and assimilation of Jewry had failed, because all he needed to do was call on his own experience (...) Herzl came to see the world of emancipated and assimilated Jewry in which he had grown up, and in which he so successfully operated, as a new ghetto with now invisible walls, which, for the sake of their self-esteem and sense of honour, the Jews had to escape. Zionism was the attempt to break down the ghetto walls once and for all. (Beller, 1991: 1-2)

⁶ This analysis is complicated by the fact that Herzl does not always distinguish between the times he refers to the assimilation that produces the integration into European society that he sought, as opposed to the assimilation that rids one of Jewishness; yet the context is usually clear enough for the reader to make that distinction.

This passage also shows the tight connection between Herzl’s political evolution and theories to *The New Ghetto*, which centers on the metaphor of the ghetto with the invisible walls. It is also crucial to note that some of Herzl’s writings show he came to Zionism not necessarily out of principle, but out of the realization that Assimilationism—if better in theory—did not function pragmatically. He introduces his Zionist manifesto with this analysis:

We have honestly endeavoured everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life of surrounding communities and to preserve only the faith of our fathers. We are not permitted to do so. In vain are we loyal patriots, our loyalty in some places running to extremes; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow-citizens (...) In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers, and often by those whose ancestors were not yet domiciled in the land where Jews had already made experience of suffering. The majority may decide which are the strangers; for this, as indeed every point which arises in the relations between nations, is a question of might. (Herzl, 1967: 15)

The tone in this passage shows Herzl’s resentment and frustration at the unjust situation of the Jews; he decries the irrationality of Antisemitism and, potentially, the futility of combating it (in the diaspora). His note that Jews’ loyalty is sometimes run to extremes is connected to Jacob’s approach, who sacrifices his wellbeing to tend to a cry for help from ‘outside of the ghetto.’ Moreover, he expresses what Neumann’s analysis corroborates—that Jews’ status as “strangers” or “aliens” was apparently definitive, disconnected from any efforts of Jews to integrate.

The reason that noting how Herzl’s transition to Zionism was forced out of pragmatism rather than ideology (at first, at least) is valuable, is because it is then easy to justify how some Assimilationist-like ideas made their way into his Zionist theories. Primarily, his initial Zionist motivator was not—like it was for Ahad Ha’am or Moshe Hess—the will to create a specifically Jewish state. Rather, the Assimilationist in Herzl still sought a way to integrate into Europe but, confronted with

the failures of individual assimilation, he became convinced that the optimal integration method would be as a community—indeed, as a state. Shumsky elaborates on this:

Herzl consistently adhered to his basic approach to the purpose and essence of modern Jewish existence: the integration of Jews into European civilization, even if it would be through a kind of back door in the form of a social-political entity established by Jews far from the European environment. In other words, Herzl’s intention in proposing his national-political solution was to make Jews a modern European nation. This was no different from his agenda during his explicitly assimilationist period... (Shumsky, 2018: 57-58)

In fact, Herzl’s indirect path to Zionism was criticized by contemporary Zionists, who condemned that his approach de-emphasized the Jewishness of what was meant to become the Jewish state (Idem, 70). Still, Herzl’s vision of a Jewish state with a European character is implicit in many of his Zionist writings (Idem, 62); like when he dreams that “the contemptuous epithet “Jew” will become a term of honour, like “Englishman,” “Frenchman,” “German,” in short, like the names of all civilized peoples” (Herzl, 1966: 17). At some point, Herzl refutes the accusation, saying that the notion of Jews ‘appropriating’ enlightened European values was nonsensical, for these ideals belonged to Jewish Europeans as much as they did to their non-Jewish compatriots (Shumsky, 2018: 71). Another way to interpret Herzl’s Western ambitions for the Jewish state was to realize there the unfinished potential of the emancipation in Europe. In fact, Beller describes ‘Herzlian Zionism’ as “the attempt to fulfill the promise of Jewish emancipation, if not in Europe, then in a state of Jews of their own” (Beller, 1991: xiii)—which is why he calls Herzl a “super-emancipationist.”

In any case, some of Herzl’s literature and politics does come to embrace the ideal of Jewish self-determination (indeed, his political and literary paths were fluctuating). In his introduction to *The Jewish State*, his frustration at European governments translates into a will to become independent from them. He writes: “even Jews faithfully repeat the cry of the Anti-Semites: ‘We depend for sustenance on the nations who are our hosts, and if we had no hosts to support us we should die of starvation.’” (Herzl, 1967: 13). Here, Herzl condemns the Jews who think this way to the point of

blaming them for promoting the will of antisemites. This fundamental disagreement with Jewish dependency, then, shows his belief in the potential of Jewish self-determination. Moreover, Herzl begins to show a preference towards communal rather than individual integration: “we’re not concerned with *individual* protection which we have already in all civilized countries—but with *national* protection” (Herzl, 1966: 90, my emphasis). Additionally, Herzl’s embracement of Zionism is also sustained, to a large extent, by the fervent desire to combat Antisemitism—a goal he started to deem impossible to accomplish, as time went on, while in the diaspora. He declares this priority directly: “Everything depends on our propelling force. And what is our propelling force? The misery of the Jews” (Herzl, 1967: 8). To this end, Herzl conjures a beautiful, if shrilling, metaphor:

So, they will drive us out of these countries and kill us in the others, where we take refuge.

Is there then no salvation?

Yes, gentleman, there is a way which was tried out before. We must repeat a very old, very famous, and thoroughly tested experiment (...) This simple, ancient experiment is the Exodus from Mitzraim. (Herzl, 1966: 16)

Herzl’s depiction of the emigration from Europe as a second Exodus is perhaps the clearest example of a will to promote Jewish self-determination.

In the play, Jacob exemplifies a trajectory from Assimilationist to Zionist that replicates some aspects of Herzl’s own political evolution. Significant parallels between the two are that both are deeply sensitive to the function and effects of Antisemitism, that they seek immersion into European society, and that they conclude that the way to integrate properly—and safely—is in a home of their own, where the invisible ghetto walls cannot restrict them any longer. Throughout the play, Jacob is the main advocate of both recognizing the invisible walls that still confined the Jews, and then, of finding a way to break through them. He first shows his stance in the back-and-forth with the Rabbi, when he insists that their stay in Europe is conditioned “on sufferance”; that only the “*visible* walls” have come down since the emancipation; and that, while he can appreciate

that their situation in Europe has improved—“we must get out” (I.8.). Jacob’s argument evolves until it concludes in a direct cry for self-determination:

JACOB: ... Rabbi, these new barriers we must break down after some other fashion that we did the old ones. Outward barriers had to be cleared away from without, but *the inner barriers we must clear away ourselves. We ourselves, on our own!* (Ibid., my emphasis)

Having rebutted the Rabbi’s Assimilationist arguments, Jacob ends by proposing what he sees as the only solution to Antisemitism and to Jews’ lack of freedom in Europe: taking action “ourselves.” And this is an allusion to the self-emancipatory attraction of Zionism.

Jacob ends the play on his deathbed for having lost an (overdue) pistol duel with Schramm. In this climactic scene, he asks to have a message delivered to Rabbi Friedheimer: “Tell the Rabbi... like Moses of Mainz!” (IV.7.). At first glance, this sentence seems to signal repentance; that he finally concedes that the Rabbi’s warning had been legitimate. Had Jacob not helped the Socialist workers, his conflict with the Count would not have reached this end. Yet Jacob has still a few more lines left and he exclaims, in his dying breath: “O Jews, my brethren, they won’t let you live again—until you... (...) I want to—get—out! (*Louder.*) Out—of—the—Ghetto! (*Flails both arms, falls back, and dies*)” (IV.8.). Jacob’s final lines end up fundamentally refuting the Rabbi’s allegorical message. It is not deadly to step outside of the ghetto walls, it is deadly to stay. Nonetheless, the only potential for Jewish life lies not right outside the ghetto walls either—there, it is true, awaits mortal danger for anyone with Mainz-like good intentions or with the will to assimilate as an individual (and lose one’s Jewishness in the process). Rather, Jews must step *entirely* out of the ghetto—they must flee to a new land. Only in their own Jewish state can they accomplish safety and independence.

The last lines of the play, following Jacob’s death, provide a fascinating conclusion to the way each symbolic character reacts to this proposal of Zionistic self-determination. Following Jacob’s last lines, the play follows:

DR. BICHLER: (*To the others.*) Dead!

HERR SAMUEL: (*Erect, in a firm voice.*) The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord!

WURZCLECHER: Amen! (*Ibid.*)

First, Dr. Bichler, the baptized Jew, declares death, echoing the loss of his Jewish identity, sacrificed in the process of assimilation. Then, Jacob’s father declares what is, in fact, a quote from the Biblical book of Job (1:21). This verse comes after Job has learned about all of the misfortunes that have overturned his life within minutes; and it represents the faith that, despite pain and anguish, believers trust that God will eventually deliver redemption. Following Dr. Bichler’s evoking of the risks of diaspora: Jewish mortal victims and the loss of Jewish identity, the transition to Herr Samuel could allude to the hope of emigration, to find a land where Judaism does not need to perish. And who would welcome this initiative of Jews departing from Europe, more than the symbol of political Antisemitism itself, Franz Wurzelechner. Thus, he concludes the play with a resounding “Amen!”

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