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Kafka’s “Schakale und Araber” and the Question of Genre

Gleichnis, Tiergeschichte, or dialektisches Bild?

Ninety-five years after its composition and publication in Martin Buber’s journal Der Jude, Franz Kafka’s story of contemporary (1917) Zionism (?), Palestine (?), colonialism (?), Diaspora (?), and orientalist (?) representations of Jews (?), Arabs (?), and Gentile Europeans (?), “Schakale und Araber”/“Jackals and Arabs” has recently been interpellated by Jens Hanssen into cultural-political contestations over contemporary (2012) Zionism, Palestine, colonialism, Diaspora, and orientalist representations of Jews, Arabs, and Gentile Europeans. With its publication this past autumn by one of the foremost American journals of academic cultural criticism and analysis, *Critical Inquiry,* Hanssen’s “Kafka and Arabs” joins Judith Butler’s 2011 British Museum lecture “Who Owns Kafka?” in engaging “Franz Kafka” as an institutionally sanctioned participant in the debates among European and American academics over Israel/Palestine. But can the symbolic authority of this Prague-born, German-speaking, Jewish-identified writer be invoked when the use and analysis of sources of that authority, that is, of his writings, are seriously flawed? As I have elsewhere addressed infelicities in Butler’s appropriation of “Kafka” and his words to decry Israel’s legal efforts to appropriate them as a Jewish cultural asset, this chapter examines Hanssen’s enlisting them to decry so-called settler-colonialist Zionism in 1917 and today.

Though Hanssen makes a number of contestable apodictic assertions about Israel and Zionism and proleptically wraps himself in an apotropaic defense against accusations of antisemitism by “Israel-right-or-wrong-circles,” it is his

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1 Page references to the article will appear in the text preceded by KA. The journal gave added prominence to Hanssen’s article by the issue’s cover art – a drawing of a lone jackal.
3 First, Hanssen aligns his work with “Judith Butler and other Jewish critics [...] in particular [with] the many dissident Jewish voices” (KA 168); second, he asserts that Kafka’s “jackals” contained neither the common German, Austrian, and Czech anti-Semitism nor that [i.e., the antisemitism] of dogmatic Zionists who felt that the Eastern Jews were parasites [...] who needed to be civilized” (KA 187); and, third, even if the “jackals” are seen as wearing antisemitic clothing, Hanssen never explicitly identifies the “jackals” as “the Jews” (see below). It appears that Hanssen’s disavowal of both antisemitism and Islamophobia is interwoven with a projection of both antisemitism and Islamophobia onto Jews.
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equivocal genre claims, tendentious readings, and lax literary scholarship that undermine his instrumentalization of Kafka and his animal (both human and nonhuman) figures for cultural-political polemics. After a discussion of the Gattungfrage of “Jackals and Arabs” – the problems surrounding the determination of its genre – this chapter will turn to an analysis of Hanssen’s characterizations of the story’s protagonists and conclude with a suggestion about the role of Kafka’s work in the contestation over Jewish identification.

Before examining Hanssen’s reading of “Jackals and Arabs” a brief synopsis of its plot may be helpful for those unfamiliar or no longer familiar with Kafka’s story: His Arab-manned caravan camped at an oasis, the first-person narrator, a self-described traveler from the North, kept awake by the plaintive howling [Klagegeheul] of jackals, finds himself surrounded by the beasts. The oldest jackal initiates a conversation with him. The jackal relates the ages-old quarrel between his kind and their despised enemies, the Arabs, and informs the narrator of his portended role in its end – cutting the throats of his Arab traveling companions with an ancient pair of rusty sewing shears. Before the rather discomfited narrator can respond, the whip-wielding Arab leader of the caravan intervenes to provide his dismissive take of the aboriginal bond between Arab and jackal. To corroborate his depreciation of “our dogs,” the carcass of a recently deceased camel is thrown before the jackals. They pounce upon the carriion until driven back by the leader’s whip. When the jackals try to return to the carcass, the narrator stays the Arab’s arm and the leader accedes to “leave them to their business [ihrem Beruf]” (JA 411).

Or as Hanssen sums it up: “To this day, ‘Jackals and Arabs’ represents a rare European account – fictional or nonfictional – in which the violent nature of Zionism’s designs on Palestine is countered by an Arab protagonist whose narrative of resistance, I will argue, Kafka renders empathetically” (KA 169).

What Species of Gattung?

Hanssen proclaims the timeliness of his intervention by early on invoking Butler’s lecture on the juridical fight over the ownership of Kafka’s Nachlaß (KA 168). He concludes his article by returning to that trial:

> Israeli attempts to claim the last unapprop sed manuscripts […] are bound to gloss over the distinction between settler-Zionism with the precolonial Zionism’s emancipatory contributions to Jewish consciousness in Europe. As the binationalist solution to the Israeli-Palestinian

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conflict is beginning to gain ground again internationally [...] Kafka’s allegorical illuminations are important reminders that the roots of binationalism, also, need to be decolonized [...]. Rereading "Jackals and Arabs" can direct us to where this process of decolonization may need to begin: in the recognition of the other as equal and constitutive of the self. (KA 196)

In words implicitly recalling Walter Benjamin’s notions of “dialectical image” and “dialectics at a standstill,” Hanssen characterizes his approach to Kafka as “recuperating and redeeming the past in order to reconstitute [...] a dystopian present” (KA 196). While treating the story as a dialectical image Hanssen also repeatedly categorizes it as an allegory (KA 170, 172, 174, 178–179, 196). To that end Hanssen explicitly draws upon the authority – without direct quotation – of Benjamin (KA 172), specifically the two Kafka pieces collected in Illuminations (“Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death”; “Some Reflections on Kafka”). Since Hanssen’s interpellation of Kafka into contemporary debates relies, in part, upon his claim for “Jackals and Arabs” as would-be dialektisches Bild and “postcolonial allegory,” the Gattungsfraue needs to be addressed.

First, it should be noted that Benjamin never characterizes Kafka’s works as Allegorien, but only as Gleichnisse, which English translators have rendered as “parables”. Moreover, Benjamin never directly refers to “Jackals and Arabs” in either work. For his part, Kafka abhorred the category of “Allegorie.” The only use of “Allegorie” in his extant writings is in a letter to Grete Bloch (June 6, 1914) in which, commenting on her brother Hans’s play about Theodor Herzl, “Die Legende von Theodor Herzl,” he writes: “But I can’t get over the dryness of the entire allegory, which is nothing but an allegory which says all there is to say without ever delving deeper or drawing one deeper into it.” Further, in response to Buber’s intention of labeling “Jackals and Arabs” (as well as its fraternal twin “Ein Bericht für eine Akademie”/“A Report to an Academy”) a Gleichnis, whether translated as “allegory” or “parable,” Kafka’s suggested instead that it be identified as a Tiergeschichte, an “animal story.”

Given this exchange between Kafka and Buber, interpreters, especially those of a historicist bent (old or new), have engaged in serious verbal contortions in order

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6 Benjamin elaborated his notion in Konvolut N (Nz 2a, 3 [dialectical image]; N3, 1 [dialectics at a standstill]) of the Passagenwerk (Arcades Project), 1999, pp. 462–463; for variants see his fifth and seventeenth "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 1969, pp. 256, 262–263.
7 In Benjamin, Illuminations, 1969, pp. 111–140, 141–166.
9 "Franz Kafka to Martin Buber" (May 12, 1917), in Kafka, Letters to Friends, 1977, p. 132: "May I ask you not to call the pieces parables; they are not really parables. If they have to have any overall title at all, the best might be: ‘Two Animal Stories’."
to identify the genre of “Jackals and Arabs.” For example, Dimitry Shumsky focused on Kafka’s phrase “not really parables” (nicht eigentlich Gleichnisse) in the letter:

the resistance to Kafka’s part, accompanied by an assertion that rejected a priori any sweeping allegorical interpretation of the two stories tells us that some of the figures he created in them represented no more and no less themselves, as they existed only in the reality of the author’s imagination. And as far as ‘Jackals and Arabs’ is concerned, both the ‘Arab’ and the ‘European traveler’ are precisely this type of figure. 30

Hanssen also mentions Kafka’s letter to Buber in the body of his article, but does not indicate that Gleichnisse is the term employed in the letter; instead, in an attached note he absurdly adds: “It is important to note that Kafka chose not to use the technical term Fabel. The literal term animal story appears to avoid the moralist baggage of fables” (KA 180 and n.53). 11 Hanssen then goes on to say that “Kafka’s rejection of the category of parable for his first [sic] two stories with animal protagonists suggests that he did really care about animals as animals — not just as masks...” (KA 180). 12 Clearly Kafka’s “animal story” depicts the jackals acting like jackals — right down to their loquaciousness and scissor schlepping. Moreover, the Arabs stand for Arabs, and the traveler from the far North stands for Europeans.

Yet why shouldn’t an “animal story” include both human and nonhuman animals? And need the protagonists of an animal story conform to standards of zoological correctness? After all, neither the European nor the Arab is surprised by jackals’ possessing a capacity, speech, the lack of which has historically been a primary emblem of (nonhuman) animals’ diacritical difference from humans. 13 Nor do the jackals situate the Arabs, the traveler, or themselves on opposing sides of the human-animal divide. The allegory for Hanssen, we can only assume, lies in the relationship between the jackals and the Arabs and, perhaps, in the relationship between the jackals and the narrator. In these relationships, the jackals are unmasked — although never officially identified — as the Jews bzw. Zionists.

11 The term Fabel appears only once in any of Kafka’s extant writings, in an April 16, 1914 letter to Grete Bloch: “To this day I still maintain that I don’t want any strangers around, but in the same breath I maintain that I shall be delighted with every moment you spend with us (today, however, this ‘us’ [i.e., Kafka and Felice Bauer] is little more than a fable)” (Letters to Felice, 1973, p. 387). Kafka’s use here of Fabel is neither technical nor moralistic. Most would also argue that Kafka’s terse narrative “Kleine Fabel” — given its title by Max Brod, and not Kafka, it should be noted — also avoids such baggage.
12 In his usual move, Hanssen shifts from suggesting that they are masks of Jewish identifications and instead refers to Sokel’s reading of Kafka’s texts as examinations of Kafka’s “own character traits” (KA 179–180).
the third of the historical groups, along with Arabs and Europeans, that form the referential context for Hanssen’s analysis of the story.\footnote{Actually, Hanssen plays an insidious game of naming names: e.g., he erases “Israel” when he writes “at the heart of their [i.e., binationalist theorists’] arguments is that the relationship between Palestinians, [European? – J. G.] Jews, and Arab Jews ought to be based on the recognition of their equality and affinity” (KA 170). The Gentile European also disappears (as well as cementing the identity of Jew and Zionist) when he describes one of the principal aims of his article: “to illuminate the dialectic in ‘Jackals and Arabs’ and affiliated texts between Jewish and non-European meanings” (KA 173).}

In Imperial Messages, Robert Lemon pinpoints one crucial justification for those who would read “Jackals and Arabs” as allegory against Kafka’s claim: “paradoxically, the very absence of the word ‘Jew’ supports the allegorical interpretation, since allegory depends on the absolute separation of the diegetic sign from its extra-diegetic referent.” Yet rather than view any or all of the characters as allegorical substitutes, Lemon makes a second observation: “One aspect of the text, however, militates against the allocation of fixed identities. The triangulation in this story between the jackals, the Arabs, and the narrator prevents the establishment of clear subject-object relations, since every connection, is impinged upon by a third party or the other Other as it were.”\footnote{Lemon, Imperial Messages, 2011, pp. 92, 95.} So if we are witnessing à la Benjamin the dialectic at a standstill, the image is clearly moving in place. And the disruptive, if not necessarily redemptive, force of the Third (des Dritten) is compounded by Kafka’s choice of Gattung: for an animal story, like the Third, dislodges our familiar identifications of subjects, objects, and their interrelations.\footnote{See the contrasting depictions of the Third by Holz, “Figur des Dritten,” 2001 (as threat); and Fischer, “Der Dritte,” 2000 (as opening); see also Effinger/Schlechter/Effinger/Schweitzer/Zonn (eds.), Figur des Dritten, 2010.}

A Ménagerie à trois

The only one called a Fremder in the story, the only explicitly nonnative character, is the narrator. Rather than indigenous resident Arabs threatened by invading genocidal settler-colonists that, Hanssen repeatedly implies, are allegorically illuminated in the figure of the jackals, Kafka depicts two groups already and always intrinsically bound together “in a quarrel that divides the world” (IA 409). But it is not a simple pas de deux; it is a ménage à trois, for this traveler is not the first to have engaged jackal and Arab; he is but one of a series. In Hanssen’s posited “triangular observer-tortmentor-tormented plot” the traveler-narrator would seem to be the observer; he is not “master[] of the narrative […] neither […]
omniscient [n]ot beyond reproach” (KA 184). Yet, as will be seen, he functions in Hanssen’s reading as the adjudicator of claims. Where does the narrator-traveler come from? He himself indicates that he comes from “the far North” (JA 408). The jackal indicates that he already knew that and refers to him as a Northerner – one of a series. Only the Arab refers to him as a European – also one of a series.

The Northern reference has been correlated in a number of readings with the soteriological role that the jackals ascribe to the narrator. Several Jewish messianic traditions associate the Messiah with the North – as the location of his throne (e.g., Isaiah 14) or as the location of the evil forces that the Messiah will overcome (Magog, the land of Gog, in Ezekiel 38–39). Hanssen never refers to the traveler’s own characterization of his geographical origins; he does, however, bring up Kafka’s near contemporaneously written, but only posthumously published, story of China and Northern nomads, “The Great Wall of China,” to indicate that Kafka’s critical relationship to orientalism and European stereotypes of non-Europeans, apparent in “Jackals and Arabs,” was not a one-time endeavor. Still Hanssen makes no connection between the traveler from the North and the more Magogic than messianic “eternal nomadic enemies to the north,” “the Chinese imperial myth” of which, Hanssen notes, Kafka’s Chinese narrator “dispels” (KA 183). Nor does he mention “Great Wall”‘s companion piece, “An Old Manuscript,” an even briefer story, written between “Jackals” and “Report” and published with both in Kafka’s 1919 short-story collection A Country Doctor. There Kafka also depicts travelers from the North, who have entered the space in which the story is set. These nomadic barbarians “hardly have a language of their own. They communicate with each other much as jackdaws [Dohlen – in Czech, kavka] do” and, recalling the jackals’ piling on the camel carcass tossed to them by the Arabs, leap on an ox, “tearing morsels out of its living flesh with their teeth.”

According to the Arab, the jackals seek salvation via visiting Europeans. This can be correlated on the one hand, historically, with the (failed) efforts of Theodor Herzl to enlist both Kaiser Wilhelm and Pope Pius X to support Jewish settlement in Ottoman Palestine as well as with the attempts, then ongoing, by Chaim

17 See Rubinstein, “Kafka’s ‘Jackals and Arabs,’” 1967, pp. 14–15. This is not the only possible role he may play, since the head jackal rather appetizingly addresses him as “O noble heart and kindly bowels [edles Herz und sißes Eingeweide]” – edel and siß are the predicates awarded to the most select of white wines.
18 “An Old Manuscript,” pp. 416, 417. Also pace Hanssen, the Chinese scholar of “Great Wall” is not the “only non-European human narrator” (KA 183), a Chinese cobbler narrates “An Old Manuscript.”
Weizmann and other Zionists in wartime London to secure British support. Then again, it is not surprising that the Arab would employ an ethnonym to characterize the foreigner from the North, given the intentional use, according to Hanssen, of the ethnonym Arab. For Hanssen wishes to make much of Kafka having crossed out "Bedouin" in his original draft and replaced it with "Arab" when the traveler's companions are first mentioned. He argues: "Kafka's non-Bedouin Arab, however, evoked a sense of land entitlement that the label 'Bedouin' would have denied" (KA 185). No doubt, that opening label of "Bedouin" would have tainted the ten subsequent occasions in which they were already ethnically denominated as "Arabs." Yet the Arabs of the story are not native to the ethnicity; their caravan is only camped there for the night. As for the narrator: unlike the doubly misleading English translation in which the traveler from the North informs the oldest jackal that he is taking "only a short tour of your country" (JA 408), the original reads that he is taking a "kurze Reise" but never indicates a destination or territorial boundaries. Moreover, the Arab leader tells the narrator that the "pair of scissors goes wandering through the desert and will wander with us to the end of our days" (JA 410). That a story includes "Arabs" and desert might well have lead readers of Der Jude to think of Palestine and some of its inhabitants; yet no articles on Jew-Arab interaction in Palestine had appeared in the journal prior to the story's publication. Further if the setting is Palestine and the jackals are settler-colonizing Zionists, why do they characterize their location as one of exile? This does not disprove any claim for an association between the jackals and that species of Zionist, but it does call attention to how Kafka is destabilizing any attempt to set up one-to-one identifications.

Within Hanssen's "triangular observer-tormentor-tormented plot" (KA 184), the jackals would seem to be the tormentor, the Arabs the tormented. The jackals "defam[e]" the Arabs and "attempt to instrumentalize the European in order to cleanse Arabs from the land," whereas the Arab in his "perspicacity [...] explains the situation" (KA 185). In contrast to the "tirades, lamentations, and flatteries" of the "blood-thirsty" jackals (KA 179), "Kafka's Arab protagonist is characterized by a certain generosity and a good deal of Kafkaesque gallows humor" (KA 185). Against the jackals' "murderous scheme" and "inhumane cause" the Arab acts in self-defense: "[T]he native [...] who talks back to the jackals" – actually he never addresses the jackals; he only speaks to the European traveler – "is actually the one exerting corporal violence in self-defense against the jackals’ threat of murder, which would today be considered ethnic cleansing" (KA 184). It must

19 The published version does leave out an intensification (the italicized phrase) of the Arabs as eternal desert wanderers: "will wander with us until we leave the desert at the end of days"; Kafka, Nachgelassene, 1.2, 278.
be an example of the Arab’s “Kafkaesque gallows humor” when he (i.e., the Arab) characterizes the grave threat posed by the jackals as “they have the most lunatic hopes, these beasts; they’re just fools, utter fools” (JA 410). And, the “great” “cutting whip” with which the Arab “lashes crisscross over [the jackals’] backs” (JA 411) is a well-known weapon of self-defense. So perhaps it is a parapraxis when, in the only specific labeling of either tormentor or tormented, Hansen describes the Arabs as “naughty tormentors” (KA 184).

The inventory of denigrating Arab qualities, which, Hansen asserts, resembles Herzl’s descriptions of Palestinians as a “dirty,” poor and “sick people” in Altneuland (KA 183–184), principally comes from the mouth of the oldest jackal. Hansen’s citation practice, however, obscures a much more complicated picture. In the English translation of Altneuland from which Hansen apparently draws, “dirty” qualifies the colors (unreiner Farben) of Jerusalem’s narrow lanes crowded with trades people, and “sick people” translates the German adjective noun Kranke, one of the many varieties of street dweller: including beggars, hungry children, screeching women, and howling (heulende) merchants. Their ethnicity is left unnoted, unlike the repellent (widlerlich) Jewish beggars at prayer subsequently encountered on the way to the Wailing Wall. That Herzl harbors orientalist attitudes and prejudices towards the residents of Palestine cannot be doubted; however, these sentiments appear to be as much geographically as ethnically based. This can be seen in the dismissive characterization of the various local ethnics encountered by the Prussian aristocrat Kingscourt and Herzl’s chief protagonist, the Viennese Jewish doctor Friedrich Loewenberg, when they first set foot in “the old land of the Jews”: “poor Turks, dirty [schmutzige] Arabs, and timid Jews lounging about [1902 Jaffa] – indolent, beggarly, hopeless.”

21 Not only those toward the residents of Palestine, since his descriptions of abject Palestinian life prior to the New Society reproduce Western Jewish representations of the Austro-Hungarian and German empires’ internal colonized populations of Eastern Jews. See Peck, Im Labor der Utopie, 2012, esp. pp. 293–297.
22 Herzl, Old-New Land, 1960, p. 42; also cited by Khalidi, “Utopian Zionism,” 2001, p. 57. Similarly, Hansen seeks to render Herzl’s vision of the Jewish-immigrant-shaped Palestine to which his protagonists return in 1923 as, aside from “the token Arab Reschid Bey” “Herzl had inserted [...] merely to validate Zionist colonization,” as typical of “the way Zionists in and outside Palestine treated its native inhabitants.” There is another group tied to Palestine that Herzl mentions: the wealthy landowners, whom one assumes to be Arab or Turk but are never identified as such, and who, as Kingscourt and Loewenberg learn when they return to Palestine twenty years later, had very willingly at great profit or very willy at greater profit sold their property to the Jewish immigrants of the New Society. (Had Hansen mentioned them, they too would probably have been dismissed as one more attempt to “validate Zionist colonization.”) Indeed, by citing Pflie-
Because of its source—the jackal—Hanssen maintains that Kafka is subverting the validity of the defamatory characterization of Arabs; to support his claim Hanssen asserts—without textual corroboration—that the vilification of the Arabs is “one of the reasons the traveler-narrator is ultimately turned off by the jackals’ murderous scheme.” Hanssen also emphasizes that “Kafka’s Arab stands—problematically ‘high [or tall; hoch—J.G.] and white’—in the literary centre of a leading Zionist journal” (KA 184).23 The prominent placement of the only physical description of an Arab may indeed portend a subtle inversion of racial stereotype; however, Hanssen’s claim for Kafka’s exceptionality should be tempered. For example, the noted Jewish physician and anthropologist Samuel Weisenberg in 1905 approvingly cited French anthropologist Paul Topinard’s characterization of the “Arab type [as] one of the most beautiful in the world […] His complexion remains perfectly white when it has been subjected to the effects of the atmosphere.”24 Further, given that the scene takes place at night, the context suggests that the Arab would most likely have been entirely cloaked in white robe (rahwb) and headcloth (kufiya); hence the description may simply be phenomenological rather than ideological.

Throughout his article, Hanssen situates Zionist writings as the only source from which Kafka could have drawn negative, respectively, orientalist Arab stereotyping, Returns of Zionism, p. 39, on the “disappearance of the Arabs in the novel” Hanssen would lead the reader unfamiliar with Almeiland to imagine that its utopian Palestine was ethnically cleansed of non-Jews (KA 186). What is elided is how for Herzl poverty and class oppression, not ethnicity, generated those negative qualities he ascribed to the indigenous population. When asked “what happened to the old inhabitants of the land who possessed nothing,” that is, to the disenfranchised tenant farmers who had worked the property the wealthy land-owners had sold, Rechid Bey responds: “Those who had nothing could only gain. And gain they did: employment, better food, welfare. There was nothing more wretched than an Arab village of fellahaen at the end of the nineteenth century. The tenants lived in buildings not fit for cattle. The children were naked and uncared for, their playground the street. Today things are changed indeed […] people are far better off than before; they are healthy, they have better food, their children go to school. Nothing has been done to interfere with their customs or their faith— they have only gained by welfare…” (Almeiland, p. 100). Although Herzl is referring to Arab, specifically Arab Muslim, tenant farmers, that is, to fellahaen, their characterization as such is by the English translator not Herzl.

23 I assume it is “problematic” in so far as the phrase is in, as Hanssen notes (KA 190), a Zionist journal. However, at the time Der Jude was not primarily a Palestine-oriented Zionist journal but one concerned with bringing together the varieties of German-speaking Jewry, especially, during that time of world war.

24 Weisenberg, “Jewish Racial Problem,” 2011, p. 77. Although committed to a viable Diasporic Jewry—whether in Eastern Europe or in Palestine—Weisenberg was sympathetic to Zionism and held it to have been “a catalyst in the rise of Jewish national feeling”; see Eriton, Defenders of the Race, 1994, p. 110.
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reo types: e.g., “the complexity of his Arab character stands in stark contrast to the way Zionists in and outside of Palestine treated its native inhabitants” (KA 186). 25 He does not consider, for example, travel literature, of which Kafka was quite fond, 26 or Karl May’s extremely popular Orient Cycle (1881–1888), the Wild East adventures of Kara Ben Nemsı (Karl, son of the Germans). 27

A Jackal of All Trades

Hanssen punningly characterizes Kafka as “Champion of Underdogs” (KA 194), whose illuminating “exceptionalism,” unlike the most “self-congratulating[ly] tolerant” (KA 196) of his Prague Zionist friends, allowed him to “recognize the Arabs on their own terms” (KA 191); on the other hand, Hanssen concedes, “The animal figure of the jackal invokes the objectionable dog metaphor in European anti-Semitism” (KA 187). It is the Arab’s characterization of the jackals as “our dogs” that I assume led Hanssen to situate the “jackals” within the history of canine representation. 28 He also somewhat nonsensically suggests that the Arab’s “smug compa-

27 Indeed, in a line left out of the published version of the story, just prior to his making the crucial distinction between Arab and Jackal, “They kill animals for food, and carry them despise” (JA 408), the head jackal observed that the Arabs immediately insult anyone of their own who overvalue gluttony as “son of a Jackal”: Kafka, Nachgelassene, I.2, 276. This phrase was actually popularized by Karl May in several of his Wild East novels: in Durch die Wüste, 1892, in which Kara Ben Nemsı is called by his Arab opponent Abu el Nassı/Hamdi il Amasat “Du Sohn eines Schakals” (http://Gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/23293); and in Ein Gardeleutevant, 1902-1903, to the guard of the Arab official Harrar’s residence by the annoyed Graf (http://Gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/6564/28). Although there is no extant Kafka reference to Karl May the recognition of certain affinities between the two was imagined in the 1994 novel Henisch, Vom Wunsch Indianer zu Werden. Kinship with jackals does appear in the Book of Job when the noted eponymous biblical Gentile refers to himself in his desolate plight as having “become a brother to jackals” (30:29).
28 Leaving aside the problem of “metaphor” and his reference to Andrew Benjamin’s work, Of Jews and Animals, which, in fact, does not address the “objectionable dog metaphor in European anti-Semitism.” In his conclusion, Hanssen inverts the jackals’ allusion to dogs when he gratuitously and infelicitously invokes “Ari Folman’s recent [2008], award-winning animated documentary Waltz with Bashir, which comes to terms with the atrocities committed by the Israeli army in Lebanon during the summer of 1982, [that] opens with jackal-like dogs scampering through the nocturnal streets of Tel Aviv” (KA 195). The accompanying still actually shows a dog pack composed of a number of canine varieties, perhaps one of which may be identified as
son” that his dogs are “finer [schöner] than [the Europeans!]” (IA 410) distinguishes them from “the more docile” European ones. I doubt that it is canine “docility” that motivated the European antisemitic use of the “dog metaphor.”

Moreover, Hanssen does not explore the implications of a story about jackals. Perhaps he assumes the jackal’s bad reputation speaks for itself. Jackals[29] are opportunistic and feed on carrion (though not only or even primarily; these omnivores also hunt); they also patrol the margins of human communities and can be pests. He could have, as others have,[30] made reference to Heinrich Heine’s poem “The Disputation,” in which the Franciscan Friar Jose castigates Jews as “jackals,” among many other abject beasts, or to Franz Grillparzer’s poem “Miscarriage”/“Fehlgeburt” in which the Devil combines bits of jackal, other savage canid predators, and the Jew to birth the literary critic.[31] Hanssen also could have invoked the extensive depictions of jackals haunting the desolate ruins of onetime Jewish abodes from the biblical books of the prophets (Isaiah 13:22, 34:13, 35:7; Jeremiah 9:10, 10:22, 49:33, 50:39, 51:37; Ezekiel 13:4; Micah 1:8; Maleachi 1:3; Lamentations 5:18) to Heine, again, and Adalbert Stifter’s Arabion.[32] But he doesn’t, thereby saving the well-read Kafka from the taint of antisemitism while, perhaps, assuming that readers (Kafka’s? Hanssen’s?) presume the association of Jews and jackals that the few[33] and far from unequivocal intertexts generate.

While Kafka may be “invoking” metaphors employed by European antisemitism, for Hanssen he is certainly not promoting Jewish stereotypes. Without giving any specific examples of stereotypes qua stereotypes, he does quickly note “Sander

“Jackal-like.” Moreover, the 26 dogs in the filmed dream represent the 26 dogs that were guarding the homes of a Lebanese village that his IDF platoon was entering during the First Lebanese War and that the dreamer had shot.

29 Given the description of their eyes as “gleaming dull gold,” one might conclude that, rather than an allusion to Jewish stereotype, Kafka is drawing upon another German appellation for jackals: Geldwölfe. That designation led Moses Hess in his 1845 “Über das Geldwesen,” p. 346, to situate them alongside the Jews, predatory beasts, and bloodsuckers that make up the cruel, exploitative animal world (Thierwelt) of civil society – it points, natural historically, to golden jackals (Canis aureus), which are indigenous to North Africa and the Middle East.


31 In “Liebe Fackel,” 1902, pp. 29–30, Karl Kraus recalls Grillparzer’s “epigram” and offers a supplement; he suggests that had the devil included the shamelessness (Unverschämtheit) of the ape to his concoction, he would have produced a literary historian (Literaturhistoriker) rather than a mere literary reviewer – and a suggestive bridge between the protagonists of Kafka’s two Tiersgeschichten: the jackals and the ape Red Peter.

32 Helfer has recently analyzed Stifter’s novella as antisemitic in The Word Unheard, 2011.

33 For example, in the hundreds of proverbs and sayings, more than seventy of which drawing connections between Jews and animals, that make up Der Sturmer’s leading antisemitic publicist, Fritz Hiemer’s collection Der Jude im Sprichwort, 1942, not a single one associates Jews with jackals.
Gilman saw in the animal story a parody of Jewish stereotypes” (KA 180). Then again Hanssen does invoke non-parodically the jackals’ “tirades, lamentations, and flatteries” as well as their efforts to “incite” the traveler whom they “ensnared” (KA 179); he describes them as “blood-thirsty” (KA 179) and “inhumane” (KA 184), and on several occasions he quotes Kafka on their need to “cleanse” the land (KA 179, 184–185) – after having asserted the Zionists’ same need (KA 169–170).

Indeed most have argued that Kafka had drawn rather extensively from the noisome reservoir of stereotypes that have been ascribed to Jews (if not only to Jews). Kafka, however, has distributed them in his characterizations of both Arabs and jackals. Both are characterized by fetid odors. The narrator comments about the “rank smell [that] streamed out of [the jackals’] mouths” (JA 408), while the jackal’s description of how “when [Arabs] lift their arm, the murk of hell yawns in the armpit” (JA 410) seems to be confirmed by Kafka’s narrative: the Arab is described as having “crept upwind toward” (JA 410) the narrator, which suggests that the Arab’s smell would have betrayed his approach. Similarly, another “Jewish” quality, “cold arrogance” (JA 410), ascribed to the Arabs by the jackal, appears to be confirmed later in the story by, in Hanssen’s words, the Arab’s “smug comparison” (KA 187) of his dogs to those of Europeans. Both Arabs and jackals are described as eternal wanderers. And the objectification and ill-treatment of animals that had been touted by Arthur Schopenhauer, among many, as intrinsic to judentum is exemplified by the Arabs’ behavior – indeed, much of the animus of the jackals toward the Arabs is directed at their slaughter of animals. Hence, if we wish to perceive Kafka’s “Jackals and Arabs” as dialectical image and allegorical illumination we must recognize that what is illuminated is the necessary indeterminacy of those seemingly determinate figures.

From Animadversions to Animal Versions

I will conclude by way of a return to the opening question of the genre of “Jackals and Arabs.” Complexifying the “Jewish jackal” supplements the anti-“analogue

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34 But even in this one example Hanssen frees Kafka from the onus of affirming such stereotypes by having Gilman separating their deployment from a commentary on the Jews: they are both self-descriptions of Kafka’s singular personhood and symptomatic expressions of European anti-Semitism: “He also considered it indicative of both Kafka’s self-hatred and his projection of European anti-Semitism onto his Arab protagonist” (KA 180).

parable” readings of Kafka’s animal story by Scott Spector and others that call attention, inter alia, to
- the multivalence of Judentum (e.g., Western assimilated, Eastern Hasidic, Sephardic/Mizrah).
- the multiple oppositions (German/Jew, German/Czech, Czech/Jew) and triangulations (German/[German-speaking/Czech-speaking]Jew/Czech) of Kafka’s Prague,
- the shifting triangle of relations among jackal, Arab, and Northerner,
- the mix of Jewish and Gentile stereotypical and/or customary attributes in Kafka’s characterization of both jackal and Arab.

Kafka, Spector concludes, “jumbled the identification [of his human and nonhuman animal protagonists] to a degree that rendered them mutually inseparable and cryptically insoluble.” Like Spector I would draw upon a different Benjaminian insight into Kafka’s work than does Hanssen: that “all Kafka’s short pieces,” “the ‘ever-changing contexts and experimental groupings’ [he] engineered,” were “acts in [Kafka’s] Amerika’s ‘Nature Theater of Oklahoma,’ and therefore ‘a code of gestures which surely had no definite symbolic meaning for the author from the outset.’” I wish to invoke Benjamin’s “early (and unheeded) alternative to the setting of the stories into a grid of fixed correspondences” not just to put in question Hanssen’s “determining which of the myriad possible analogical assignments [of Kafka’s players] is the most plausible” for corroborating his own cultural-political positions. Rather, I would also suggest that Kafka’s “Jackals and Arabs,” like his other animal stories, sought to undermine the authority of the dominant Gentile society’s demeaning and dehumanizing Jewish identifications by uncannily rendering their purported Jewish referent indefinite— as both human (animal) and (nonhuman) animal and neither, as both Jew and Gentile and neither. For Kafka, such a strategy would neither negate the demeaning identifications nor render them benign; nor would it lead to a reversal of the hierarchical power relations, but it might mitigate the murderous affect aroused by contact with the monstrous animal-object constructed by the dominant society’s own fears, hatreds, and identification practices, as well as defer the deadly transformation of analogy into identity— to render the Jew as animal and therefore killable.

Orientalism, Gender, and the Jews

Literary and Artistic Transformations of European National Discourses

Edited by Ulrike Brunotte, Anna-Dorothea Ludewig, and Axel Stähler

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