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0521856302 - Jewish Identities in German Popular Entertainment, 1890-1933

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Jewish Identities in German Popular Entertainment, 1890–1933

At the turn of the twentieth century, German popular entertainment was a realm of unprecedented opportunity for Jewish performers. This study explores the terms of their engagement and pays homage to the many ways in which German Jews were instrumental in the birth of an incomparably rich world of popular culture. It traces the kaleidoscope of challenges, opportunities, and paradoxes Jewish men and women faced in their interactions with predominantly Gentile audiences. Modern Germany was a society riddled by conflicts and contradictory impulses, continuously torn between desires to reject, control, or celebrate individual and collective difference. Otte's book demonstrates that an analysis of popular entertainment can be one of the most innovative ways to trace this complicated negotiation throughout a period of great social and political turmoil.

Marline Otte is an assistant professor of history at Tulane University. She received her doctorate from the University of Toronto in 1999. Otte is the recipient of an Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellowship, and she is an active member of the German Studies Association. She specializes in modern European history, focusing on Germany and cultural history.

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For my parents,

Michael and Maria Otte

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At length I bought a ticket for the Waterloo Panorama, housed in an immense domed rotunda, where from a raised platform in the middle one can view the battle – a favorite subject with panorama artists – in every direction. It is like being at the center of events. On a sort of landscaped proscenium, immediately below the wooden rail amidst tree stumps and undergrowth in the blood-stained sand, lie life-size horses, and cut-down infantrymen, hussars and chevaux-legers, eyes rolling in pain or already extinguished. Their faces are molded from wax but the boots, the leather belts, the weapons, the cuirasses, and the splendidly colored uniforms, probably stuffed with eelgrass, rags and the like, are to all appearances authentic. Across this horrific three-dimensional scene, on which the cold dust of time has settled, one's gaze is drawn to the horizon, to the enormous mural, one hundred and ten yards by twelve, painted in 1912 by the French marine artist Louis Dumontin on the inner wall of the circus-like structure. This then, I thought, as I looked round about me, is the representation of history. It requires a falsification of perspective. We, the survivors, see everything from above, see everything at once, and still we do not know how it was. The desolate fields extend all around where once fifty thousand soldiers and ten thousand horses met their end within a few hours. The night after the battle, the air must have been filled with death rattles and groans. Now there is nothing but the brown silent soil. Whatever became of the corpses and mortal remains? Are they buried under the memorial? Are we standing on a mountain of death? Is that our ultimate vantage point? Does one really have the much-vaunted historical overview from such a position?

W. G. Sebald, *Rings of Saturn* (translated from W. G. Sebald, *Die Ringe des Saturn. Eine englische Wallfahrt* [Frankfurt a. M., 2001], 157–58).

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Preface

Writing this book has been a rewarding challenge. Now it is my great pleasure to thank all those who have helped me over the past decade. My first debt is to James Retallack, who supervised my dissertation on which this book is based. As he will know best, his unfailing confidence, mentoring, and friendship have helped me immeasurably in my fierce battles with languages, ideas, and academic cultures. For all of that I would like to thank him with all my heart. I was equally fortunate to have worked with Jacques Kornberg and Modris Eksteins at the University of Toronto, who have been abiding listeners and readers, always willing to share their insight and to provide moral support. All three of my advisors made my years as a graduate student at the University of Toronto a very enjoyable experience.

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Finally, I could not have written this book without the encouragement, warmth, and good humor of my entire family. My sister Caroline's friendship has touched me throughout my life, while my parents Michael and Maria's curiosity and creativity remain a formidable challenge and inspiration to me. They have always been my greatest champions and I want to dedicate this book to them.

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