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## *Education and Antisemitism in Elias Canetti's Autobiography*

ABSTRACT. This article examines the textual discourse on antisemitism and education in Elias Canetti's autobiography, in the passages set in his childhood and youth, thereby challenging approaches in Canetti research which risk masking the autobiographical presentation of antisemitism in Manchester, Vienna, Frankfurt and Zurich. Through these episodes the textual discourse promotes approaches to fighting antisemitism through education, both in terms of personal interventions and through institutions such as schools, so that citizens, and above all youth, do not fall prey to forms of hatred such as antisemitism.

This article examines the depiction of several encounters with antisemitism<sup>1</sup> in Elias Canetti's autobiography as a textual discourse that proposes ways to fight antisemitism through education. This approach to the text as discourse shares Flemming Finn Hansen's view, to cite just one critic in this vein, of Canetti's autobiography as one that does not easily bridge the differences between what is a humanistic approach to the genre (and which includes an insistence on the truth of his memories of himself and others), and the discursive nature of his memories (87); in other words, the way in which the memories are ordered and/or constructed. Thus, rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Silverman has pointed, in «Beyond Antisemitism...», to the lack of a term analogous to «gender» to describe the «inherently hierarchical relationship between the socially constructed ideals of Jew and non-Jew» (28) and argues that antisemitism does not function well as representative of the non-Jewish. She suggests instead the use of the term «Jewish difference», which though thought-provoking, will itself leave out, in any consideration of what is Jewish, that which is in-common with the non-Jew. For the episodes discussed here, the term antisemitism is the correct one, as the discourse on antisemitism and education in the text suggests how to fight this hatred of Jews.

try and discern the truth value of the autobiography, this article focuses on those episodes clearly set in Canetti's youth and during his schooling, from his first years in school in Manchester, England, and from Vienna, Austria, and Zurich, Switzerland, to the end of high-school (or *Gymnasium*) in Frankfurt, Germany, as discourse. This focus brackets off a discussion which would go well beyond the scope of this article if it were expanded to include the complete autobiography or Canetti's other works. The analysis of these episodes as a discourse reveals that they not only tie solutions to antisemitism to education, but also are, at times, inherently educational. The message this discourse provides is thus one which readers must discern. This is particularly apparent in the long passage discussing Canetti's encounter with antisemitism in Zurich, and to a lesser extent in the depiction of Canetti's show of solidarity with refugees in Vienna, as well as in the episodes set in Manchester; all of which have their contrast in Canetti's failure to effectively fight antisemitism in the Frankfurt episode. This contrasting example further highlights how the Zurich, Vienna and Manchester episodes offer key insights into how to fight antisemitism through education writ large<sup>2</sup>, as displayed in the interventions of schools, of Canetti's mother and father, and of Canetti himself.

The episodes discussed below also illustrate various aspects of antisemitism, as is made clear by how the three main strands of European antisemitism are generally represented in the episodes narrated by Canetti<sup>3</sup>. Uncan-

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<sup>2</sup> A note in a letter perhaps offers further insight into the author Canetti's desire to have readers determine what is taking place in these episodes, because it mentions words that have been stricken from the draft, though no precise indication is given of where in the first volume of the autobiography. In a letter dated October 6, 1976 to his editor at the Hanser Verlag, Fritz Arnold, Canetti comments about things he has removed from the draft: «Drei Sachen, gegen die ich Bedenken hatte, habe ich gestrichen («orthodox», «antisemitisch», usw.). Der Text liest sich genauso gut ohne sie», *Ich erwarte von Ihnen viel*, 543. It is possible that Canetti realized, through his knowledge of Karl Kraus, that by using terms such as «antisemitic» he might be like «the Jewish feuilleton writers who criticized antisemitic stereotypes and in doing so, Kraus believed, internalized and reified them», Lisa Silverman, «Beyond Antisemitism...» (40).

<sup>3</sup> All of the episodes except the Frankfurt episode take place in the first volume of the

nily, the episodes portrayed mirror, to a considerable extent, what could be termed the “development” of European antisemitism from the early discrimination based on religion, to the 19th century political movement and ideology, to the «the irrational, psychologically pathological ethnocentric and religiocentric anti-Judaism», both of the later which are key components of the National Socialist genocide, the «evil apogee of the Holocaust» (Beller, 1)<sup>4</sup>. As Beller makes clear, these types of antisemitism were, at times, intertwined and/or concurrent, as is the case in the episodes from the autobiography examined below. Did the author Canetti purposely order his episodes on antisemitism this way? Despite overlapping, the answer to this question here is a cautious yes, given the constructed nature of the text and its discourse on antisemitism and education.

While focusing on the definition of antisemitism, it is essential to note that in this article when antisemitism is mentioned, the discussion is about a process whereby real Jews, in all their diversity as individual human beings, are reduced to a stereotype. Or as Dina Porat defines it, in citing Brian Klug, antisemitism is the distinction between real and imaginary Jews, «the process of turning Jews into “Jews”, that re-emphasizes the gulf between reality and the antisemitic imagination» (134)<sup>5</sup>. In other words, antisemitism is a problem that belongs, at its essence or origins, to the holder of such views, even when it is real Jews who suffer such hatred.

In addition to demonstrating the existence of a textual discourse on education and antisemitism, and what it says about combatting antisemitism and hatred, this article is important because it contributes to discussions of Elias Canetti's Jewish identity. More recent and dominant approaches to

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autobiography, *Die gerettete Zunge* (1977, *The Tongue Set Free*). The Frankfurt episode is the only one depicted in the second volume of the autobiography, *Die Fackel im Ohr* (1980, *The Torch in my Ear*).

<sup>4</sup> Illusions to the Shoah, in my opinion, are not made, and though the autobiography was written after WWII, the episodes dealt with here predate 1933, the year the National-Socialists gained power in Germany, by many years. Elias Canetti received his Abitur from the Wöhler-Realgymnasium in Frankfurt a.M. in 1924.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Klug (cited in Porat), «The Collective Jew», 122.

Elias Canetti's Jewish identity in scholarship are biographical; see, for instance, Sven Hanuschek and Lisa Silverman, to name just a few authors in that vein. Otherwise, there has been much work on Jewish themes as relating to: *Masse und Macht* (1960), which Michael Mack reads as a response to the Shoah; on Canetti's only novel, *Die Blendung* (1935) and the Fischerle character, discussed by William Collins Donahue at length in *The End of Modernism: Elias Canetti's Auto-da-Fe*; on Canetti's travel report *Die Stimmen von Marrakesch* (1967), along with some very critical appraisals of the autobiographical portrayal of Dr. Sonne (Avraham ben Yitzak) by authors such as Bernd Witte and Mark H. Gelber<sup>6</sup>. By contrast, there has been relatively little work on the autobiographical discourse(s) on this theme of antisemitism, and to my knowledge none that examines the textual discourse on education as presenting methods to fight antisemitism.

More specifically, in terms of the autobiographical discourse on antisemitism and education examined here, there has been a lack of attention to this discourse. For instance, Hanuschek argues that Canetti's memories of school are thoroughly positive, and that he basically was exposed to relatively little antisemitism before his later school years in Zurich and Frankfurt: «seine Erinnerungen an die Schule sind fast durchweg positiv [...] von antisemitischen Anfeindungen war er bis auf die letzten Jahre in Zürich und Frankfurt weitgehend verschont geblieben» (46). Though Hanuschek's statement is correct, there are nonetheless at least three antisemitic episodes that are noteworthy prior to the Zurich and Frankfurt episodes. These episodes are important, even if the autobiographical narrator either states that he did not feel personally attacked, or if we as readers consider that he was too young to understand the deep and troubling antisemitic attitudes he encountered in his earlier youth. What makes a view like Hanuschek's more understandable is how, in a chapter describing Canetti's life in Zurich, the

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<sup>6</sup> Witte criticizes Canetti's use of power in his narrative, while his portrait of Sonne is of someone who embodies the opposite, «Der einzelne und seine Literatur: Elias Canettis Auffassung vom Dichters», 24-5. Mark H. Gelber contends that Canetti distorts Sonne's political and educational ties to Zionism and the Hebrew language in order to promote his own cosmopolitan Jewishness, «Abraham Sonne und *Das Augenspiel...*», 69-70.

narrative claims, contrary to fact, that he had never experienced antisemitism in Bulgaria or England, and that even in Vienna he had not sensed that this was directed against him: «In den Jahren der Kindheit hatte ich persönlich nie Animosität als Jude zu spüren bekommen» (*dgZ*, 252)<sup>7</sup>. Perhaps this memory error is due to Canetti experiencing, for the first time in his life, antisemitism directed at him with rancor in Zurich.

A position that carries a similar risk of undermining the textual discourse on antisemitism and education takes place in Lisa Silverman's reduction, in an article on the influence of Sephardic traditions on Elias and Veza Canetti's writing, of (Elias) Canetti's writing about antisemitism to the Fischerle character in his novel *Die Blendung* (1935), stating that in terms of dealing «explicitly with Jewish issues or antisemitism [...] both Canettis [Veza and Elias] remain difficult cases» (152)<sup>8</sup>. The autobiographical discourse on education and antisemitism examined here presents a very different light on this subject matter, without, however, seeking to deliver a final commentary on Elias (and Veza) Canetti's attitudes towards Jewish issues and antisemitism as a whole.

Two episodes of antisemitism encountered by Canetti and his family while in Manchester, England demonstrate that religious-based discrimination, and an ethno-centric anti-Judaism, with inflections of England's considerable colonial past, are present in British society; Canetti's parents present two different approaches to fighting this antisemitism. These two episodes mark the beginning of the textual discourse on education and antisemitism, and though one instance takes place outside of school, it still involves education in the wider sense.

The first of these antisemitic episodes tied to education centers on Canetti's infatuation with the red cheeks of a girl in his class, Mary Handsome, which brings out the teacher's prejudice. As described in the first volume of the autobiography (*dgZ*, 58-61), the six-year old Canetti and the young

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<sup>7</sup> All references to the Manchester, Vienna and Zurich episodes are found in the first volume of the autobiography, *Die gerettete Zunge* (1977, henceforth *dgZ*).

<sup>8</sup> The rest of Silverman's article focuses on the impact of their Sephardic heritage on Elias and Veza Canetti in a more nuanced fashion, "Elias and Veza Canetti...".

Mary Handsome walk part of the way home together, and before their ways part Canetti kisses the girl on her red cheeks as they are «sweethearts» (59). One day, Canetti cannot control his desire to kiss her red cheeks, and because he kisses her many times, Mary tells her mother. As a result, the two are separated in class, they no longer walk home together. Canetti claims to not even look at the girl anymore, as she disappears behind the figure of her imposing mother (60).

The reasons Canetti, as the mature narrator, presents for his obsession with kissing Mary's red cheeks are that various people in his life model the actions of kissing one's sweetheart. Thus, the family's governess kisses his young brother George's red cheeks and calls him her «sweetheart», while Edith, the hired help kisses her sweetheart (59-60). Finally, as a two-year old Canetti, in Bulgaria, was regularly subjected to women in the house poking at his cheeks and singing a Sephardic song, «“manzanicas colorados, las que viene de Stambol”, – “Äpfelchen rote, die kommen von Stambol”» (61), where «Stambol» is present-day Istanbul. The narrative sets up readers' recognition of this connection to the song by mentioning, at the very beginning of this story, how Canetti is infatuated with Mary's red cheeks because they are like little apples, «wie Äpfelchen» (58).

The teacher's colonial thinking comes to the fore when she suggests that Canetti, as a result of this incident, leave the school, stating that «“orientalische” Kinder viel früher reif werden als englische» (60). “Oriental” is, in the context of Manchester at the time, code for Sephardic Jews, many of whom were merchants living there, in a usage that recalls Said's definition of Orientalism as «a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient» (11). Thus, though she uses the word “Oriental” in this specific context, the teacher's thinking fits Lara Trubowitz's definition of «civil antisemitism» (9), as the teacher can maintain her belief in British values (such as the defense of liberty), and still harbor her sentiments against Jews; just as British values were the excuse for colonization of other nations. Thus, though it shares many commonalities with (Central) European 19th century antisemitism in terms of nationalism and ethno-centric (and cultural) anti-Judaism, English antisemitism has long been differentiated from that of the European continent.

Canetti's father reacts to the teacher's antisemitism by not giving the comment any validity, an approach that can be deemed problematic because of how it avoids the issue. He states, acting on the knowledge of his child, that the kissing will stop, and Canetti stays in the school. The father's approach achieves the end result, from the teacher's point of view; Canetti stays in school because he no longer exhibits "Oriental" behavior<sup>9</sup>. The teacher's expression of Canetti's achieving maturity (in the phrase «reif werden»), unambiguously stands for physical and sexuality maturity (the supposedly overdeveloped part of an undeveloped, or underdeveloped nation or people), and is threatening behavior that is restrained, or at least should be, in a supposedly developed nation such as England. Canetti, as the dangerously mature body, behaves. That is, when Canetti behaves and follows British values, he can thus be- (among those who) have and share in the spoils of the British Empire. In the classic moment of Oriental desire, the "other" is the body made for the English space of indoctrination and domination. The narrative suggests the link between this colonial fantasy and two British attempts to rule the world by joining them in the section title: «Little Mary. Untergang der Titanic. Captain Scott» (57). All three attempts to conquer, as it were, fail, and cause, to varying degrees, trauma. Moreover, behind the teacher's «civil antisemitism» lies a more troubling construct of antisemitism, which the text hints, because of how the multi-valent term "Oriental" functions in the colonizing space, as creating links to eugenics (via the explorer Captain Scott, albeit he is a different kind of explorer than Darwin), and given the allusion to sexuality with the choice

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<sup>9</sup> The young Canetti is subjected to a one-week trial period where no further kissing takes place. The narrator Canetti does not leave readers with only this negative impression of his teacher, for when his father dies, the teacher does not, as the narrative states, treat him like an orphan (as his paternal grandfather does), but rather makes him feel respected because he is now the «man» of the family: «She showed me something like respect, and once she even told me that I was now the man in the family, and that was the best thing a person could be» (63; «das Beste, was ein Mensch sein könne» [81]). The use of Said's definition of «Orientalism» here stands in contrast to Canetti's use of the term «Oriental» as a geographic-cultural marker, for his paternal grandfather from Bulgaria.

of the word “maturity” to Freud’s psychology. All this worry about the foreign other, it should again be noted, involves an incident between two six-year-olds; children.

While Canetti, as a child, understandably accepts these events rather uncritically, the question can be raised why the author Canetti does not expand critically on this event. Beyond considerations of readership, and their willingness to have the author Canetti dwell and expound on numerous antisemitic incidences, this uncritical approach could also further support the argument that the text encourages readers to draw out the textual discourse on antisemitism and education.

The young Canetti also experiences antisemitism shortly after his father’s death in England, when the Welsh governess, Miss Bray, tries to convert him, his brothers, and ultimately his mother to Christianity. During this period, when his mother is having difficulties managing her life, Canetti and his brothers, all children, seek out various ways of dealing with their personal tragedy<sup>10</sup>. At first, Canetti, who keeps his mother from committing suicide in the period right after the father’s death (!), develops discussions with the wallpaper, which he conceives to be people; these are curtailed by Miss Bray (51). After a move to a new residence, with more space, Miss Bray, and Edith, the housemaid, get the children to sing English (Protestant) hymns<sup>11</sup>. The children are most enthusiastic about the song «Heavenly Jerusalem», and Miss Bray tells them that their father will hear them, if they sing “correctly”: «wenn wir das Lied richtig sängen, werde er [Canetti’s father] unsere Stimmen erkennen und sich über uns freuen» (81). Just as with his teacher, the mark of assimilation (and thus erasure of Jewish culture) is that the Canetti children should sing “correctly”, the right way. In this context, this right way is indefinite, but likely tied to expressing one’s belief.

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<sup>10</sup> Canetti and his brothers were not allowed to attend their father’s burial, and Canetti describes imagining seeing the procession from a window in the house of friends, *dgZ*, 73-74. For a child his age, attending the funeral, but not lead by his grieving mother, would likely have aided him in dealing with his father’s death; see Dora Black, «Coping with Loss...» 933.

<sup>11</sup> Protestants and religious non-conformists are the largest religious group in Wales.



Canetti, upon coming to the line «Jerusalem, Jerusalem, hark how the angels sing!» (81)<sup>12</sup>, sings ardently, so as to communicate with his father, and Miss Bray uses this as an excuse to lock the door so as to not disturb others in the household, «es könne vielleicht die anderen Leute im Hause stören» (82). In the course of her missionizing («missionarische Tätigkeit» 82), as the text describes it, Miss Bray teaches the children about Jesus. Canetti's reaction as a child is described as fairly innocent, as he is oblivious to this attempt to convert him to Christianity. This lack of awareness is best expressed by his comment about not understanding how Jesus died: «ich wollte über ihn hören, ich hatte nie genug davon und begriff nicht, daß die Juden ihn gekreuzigt hatten» (82). By reiterating one of the antisemitic taunts of Jews as Christ-haters, or more precisely as the murderers of Christ, which uses the classic mode of prejudice in impugning a whole (ethnic) group for the actions of one or a few, the narrator is nonetheless, despite the young Canetti's obliviousness, pointing to the problematic aspect of Miss Bray's actions; it places in question Canetti's very existence as a Jew.

Canetti's mother, when she discovers that her children are singing Christian hymns, is extremely upset, particularly with how Miss Bray and Edith have betrayed her confidence. Miss Bray, clearly not understanding the gravity of the matter, and/or too blinded by her faith to realize her error, tells Canetti's mother that Jesus «auch für uns gestorben sei» (83). The “uns”, in this case, are the Canettis, and thus, by correlation, all Jews. Canetti's mother fires both Miss Bray and Edith, but because she needs someone to take care of her youngest son during their move to Vienna, she ends up keeping Miss Bray in her service (83). Though the mature narrator does not comment negatively on this event, the whole scenario is clearly an attempt,

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<sup>12</sup> It appears that Canetti's memory is faulty here, as the song «O Heavenly Jerusalem», translated from the *Paris Breviary* by Isaac Williams in 1839, from the song «Coelstis o Jerusalem»), does not contain anything close to the line «Jerusalem, Jerusalem, hark how the angels sing!» (81), given in English in the German text. For instance, the word «Jerusalem» is never repeated in the «O Heavenly Jerusalem» song. However, the lines quoted in the autobiography in English are found in the song «The Holy City» by Michael Maybrick and F.E. Weatherly.

whether one consider it feeble or evil, at conversion, which is expressed not just to the children, but to Canetti's mother as well. Canetti's mother's response is to categorically reject this attempt at conversion, and Miss Bray, as a condition of re-employment, must promise to never engage in such activities again.

Though some might not want to conceive attempts at conversion as antisemitism, such attempts are expressive of a sense of (false) superiority that is inherent to antisemitism and racism<sup>13</sup>. Both antisemitic acts in England express a desire to assimilate Canetti by erasing his Jewish identity or behavior, as they conceive or project it. In both cases, any attempt to determine the underlying causes of such attitudes would be conjecture; but at some level, because these two individuals express these things as factual, it is plausible to say that they are socially accepted in the mainstream. Canetti's parents' reactions are only partially effective, likely because their actions, no matter how they influence the behavior of the teacher and Miss Bray, don't necessarily change their basic world view. In the episodes that follow, the autobiographical discourse on antisemitism and education gives examples of more effective interventions, which though they adopt the parents' attitudes in some ways, are shown to be more effective, likely because of the audience they are addressing: youth.

From the Vienna school period (from 1913-16), two episodes will be discussed, the first that shows how antisemitism functions as a cipher for unresolved conflicts, rather than being about real Jews, while the second episode shows how the beginnings of prejudice, the root source of antisemitism, can be fought through a personal intervention.

In the first episode, an antisemitic taunt is uttered while Canetti walks home with a classmate named Paul Kornfeld; they both live in the Viennese *Schüttel* area of the Leopoldstadt district. The text frames the taunt through the teacher's discrimination against Kornfeld, which is based either on

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<sup>13</sup> In the famous case of Luther, we also have an indication of what happens when the attempt to convert is rejected: the persons or ethnic groups unwilling to convert are then treated as enemies. See Dean Bell, «Martin Luther and the Jews...», 215-224.

Kornfeld's disability (if that is what it is), or his physical and/or mental immaturity; either of these could also be a cover for antisemitism<sup>14</sup>. Kornfeld is described as very tall, not very coordinated, not a good student, and as having a constant friendly grin: «ein freundliches Grinsen» (*dgZ*, 102). Because he almost always answers wrong, and grins while doing so, the teacher does not appreciate the student: «Der Lehrer war ihm aufsässig» (102). The teacher even goes so far as to tell Canetti that he is disappointing his teacher by walking home with Kornfeld: «“Mit dem gehst du?” sagte der Herr Lehrer Tegel zu mir, als er uns zusammen vor der Schule sah. “Du kränkst deinen Lehrer”» (102). The teacher, therefore, though he does not say anything antisemitic, clearly discriminates against Kornfeld because of his difference, be it either his disability or his lack of coordination and academic skills (or his being Jewish). This could be an expression of the teacher's ignorance and/or of his inability to deal with his sense of inadequacy in dealing with a student who is not doing well in his class.

The verb “kränken” suggests this and can be seen as the teacher's own Freudian slip. For even if we do not follow this word back etymologically, where it comes from the Middle High German “kranc”, with various meanings including weak, small, bad; in the verb “kränken” there is the sense of psychological hurt or pain. Seeing someone not discriminate against Kornfeld makes the teacher sick, or causes him psychological pain, that is, forces him to question his own behavior. In what could be imagined as the teacher's harrowing phantasy world, Canetti and others would discriminate against Kornfeld, as he does, thereby not causing him the psychological pain of seeing people interact with Kornfeld differently than he<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> The difficulty in determining exactly what is Kornfeld's difference is perhaps narrative intent, but maybe also results from the author Canetti's general opposition to naming disability. This point has been discussed at length in relation to Veza Canetti's disability, very critically by Eva Meidl, who argues that the autobiography hides Veza's disability as Canetti hides her writing, 13-21, while Angelika Schedel argues, on this point, that the autobiography fulfills literary goals, rather than any standards of truthfulness (15).

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, when in the later episode involving his Latin teacher Billeter, Canetti is called a «Wiener Juden», his feeling, which leads him to call for a meeting on the Rigiblick

The presentation of the teacher's prejudice against Kornfeld, and not against Canetti, frames the insult that Canetti and Kornfeld experience while walking home. Interestingly, when Canetti hears the word "Jüdelach", he does not feel he is being targeted<sup>16</sup>. As if to underline that the antisemitic taunt is simply a cipher for something else, the text states that Canetti thinks that Kornfeld is targeted because he walks in a conspicuous manner: «Er bekam es immer zu hören, vielleicht lag es an seiner auffälligen Art zu gehen» (102). This suggests that Kornfeld is being targeted in this case because of his difference, and the teacher's discrimination is perhaps a further reason for such attacks; readers are not told if the young man who shouts the insult is a schoolmate. The teacher, and the student who taunts Kornfeld, both have difficulties accepting his "difference". Whatever their issues, they are projected outward and expressed negatively through prejudicial, and apparently societally acceptable acts.

That Canetti, it should be noted (and hence pace Hanuschek on this point), does not see the antisemitic slur as directed at him, is underlined in a number of ways: by the fact that he does not know what the word means at first, which surprises Kornfeld; by the narrative statement that he, Canetti, had never encountered racial slurs before; and by how his mother tells him that the words were directed at Kornfeld, not at him: «"Das galt dem Kornfeld. Dir gilt es nicht"» (102). In her (Sephardic) pride, the mother refuses to accept the slur and is not trying to console Canetti: «Es war nicht etwa so, daß sie mich trösten wollte. Aber sie nahm das Schimpfwort nicht an. Wir waren für sie etwas Besseres, nämlich Spaniolen» (102).

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in Zurich, and to write a petition (that ultimately is thrown in the garbage (see the argument on page 13 below), is also described with the verb «kränken», 252.

<sup>16</sup> This term is simply Viennese dialect for the English «Jew», or German «Jude», which was used as a form of derision in this period. Surprisingly, or perhaps not, a number of Yiddish words were used to denigrate Jews in Austria at the time. The term «Jüdelach» likely comes from Yiddish «yidishlekh», the adjective for «Jewish manner, the traditional Jewish manner». It is a specific characteristic of Viennese dialect that words and terms taken from Yiddish were often given a negative meaning, see Elisabeth Klamper, «Bilder einer (schwierigen) Ausstellung...», 265.

The mother's words deliver an important commentary on the taunt itself, connecting it to the physical violence that she feels Kornfeld will suffer if left alone. Thus, she tells her son that he must walk Kornfeld home, against the teacher's wishes, so as to protect him: «“Du mußt immer mit ihm gehen”, sagte sie, “damit ihn keiner schlägt”» (102). She means this, we are told, in a chivalrous way («ritterlich»); here the reference to knights is obviously to their perceived role as protectors of the weak, rather than in their role as Christian warriors and Church agents. Though the narrative states that Canetti is smaller than Kornfeld, and that they are not strong, Canetti's mother does not believe anyone would dare hit her son: «Es war für sie unvorstellbar, daß es jemand wagen würde, mich zu schlagen» (102)<sup>17</sup>. Whether the mother is trying to give her son courage, or whether she feels her son did not fit the stereotypes for being Jewish in Vienna, is not explained. The two boys walking home together, though, seems to have protected them from any physical attack, if we are to go by the autobiographical narrative's silence about any further such incidents.

Apart from the adage “there is strength in numbers”, which can also be described as Canetti, on his mother's advice, showing solidarity with Kornfeld, in terms of fighting antisemitism this also mirrors the father's earlier lesson of not validating antisemitism. Of course, such a refusal to validate antisemitism is of limited value in working against gratuitous public antisemitic comments or attacks, but it could act as a form of psychological protection for victims of antisemitism; moreover, the refusal to validate antisemitism will come into play in a later episode as well.

Another episode set in Vienna that I feel has erroneously been discussed under the rubric of antisemitism, demonstrates how Canetti is able, at least momentarily, to draw his friend and classmate Max Schiebl into a show of solidarity by expressing solidarity with Galician Orthodox Jews fleeing pogroms in Russia. This episode shows how Schiebl's fear and loathing of the

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<sup>17</sup> This is likely part of her Sephardic pride, a topic which the autobiography discusses at length in the earlier section entitled «Familienstolz», *dgZ*, 10-13. The mother, moreover, does not mention the teacher's comments that make a difference between Canetti and Kornfeld, suggesting she might have appreciated this differentiation, *dgZ*, 103.

“other” is transformed, at least partially, by Canetti’s good example, and by their friendship.

My reading of this passage, it should be noted, runs counter to that proposed by Anne Peiter. Though she also sees Canetti’s freezing in place as a show of solidarity with the refugees, in a more complex argument than can be presented here Peiter interprets this act as Canetti’s not wanting the train to move forward. This, in turn, is symbolic of Canetti’s not wanting the trains of the Shoah to move forward. Though I appreciate the sentiment of wanting to stop the trains of the Shoah, I cannot agree with Peiter’s conclusion about this passage; particularly as it ignores what the text expressly states. No matter how refugees are maltreated, the comparison to the industrialized genocide of the Shoah, without making clear the differences, does a disservice both to those who perished in the Shoah, and to the refugees fleeing from pogroms in Russia during WWI<sup>18</sup>.

Canetti’s being frozen on the spot is the act through which he shows solidarity with the refugees, who are stuck on a train on a bridge. Canetti, from his perspective at the time, expressly states his desire that the train move: «Es war ein schrecklicher Anblick, weil der Zug stand. Solange wir hinstarrten, er bewegte sich nicht von der Stelle. ... Aber ich blieb wie festgewurzelt stehen... Aber es half nichts, ich starrte und starrte und nichts geschah. Ich wollte, daß der Zug sich in Bewegung setze, das Entsetzlichste war, daß der Zug auf der Brücke noch immer stand» (*dgZ*, 137). The fact that the men are stuck on the bridge is so terrible, because they need to cross over, physically and metaphorically. Caught between fleeing and arriving, the refugees suffer this waiting to find safe refuge, acceptance; Canetti stands in solidarity with them, not wanting to move before they do. This interpretation of the scene as Canetti’s show of solidarity is strengthened by how Canetti refuses to take the snack offered by Schiebl’s mother once they

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<sup>18</sup> It is possible that some who escaped the pogroms to Vienna later perished in the Shoah, but this is not the connection Peiter makes, «The Shoah before the Shoah...». Interestingly, Yoel Hoffmann’s *Katschen/The Book of Joseph*, (1999) portrays, in the latter novella, just such a situation; where a widowed tailor and his son, refugees from pogroms in Eastern Europe who move to Berlin, are murdered in the Shoah.

eventually get to his friend's home: «ich rührte die Jause nicht an» (137); he will not eat or drink unless the refugees do so.

Though Canetti's show of solidarity with the refugees is itself remarkable, what is even more notable is how his friend Schiebl is initiated into this solidarity, despite at first having negative feelings about the refugees; to the point that he actually acts in a way that approximates an independent show of solidarity. This process is fraught with ambiguity, which I would argue, makes it more believable. Though this is not education per-se, it does involve Schiebl learning from Canetti, and thus generally fits into the more widely conceived educative framework being used in examining this discourse.

At first, Schiebl takes on the role of the person who tries to console a friend who is in shock, while changing his language to not offend Canetti. He is even the first one to give a name to the scene they are watching, and rather than talking about Galician Jews, where the word "Jew" would be an insult, Schiebl suppresses the word "Jew" (which he likely hears as a curse in school, on the street, and perhaps at home), and instead uses the word "refugee(s)": «"Das sind galizische—" sagte Schiebl, unterdrückte das Wort "Juden" und ergänzte "Flüchtlinge"» (136). Rather than see this as suppressed antisemitism, or even othering, I interpret this as a first act that demonstrates Schiebl's ability to learn how to show solidarity because of his friendship with Canetti. Schiebl replaces his initial word choice with the word "refugees", which precisely describes the state of the men on the train; a first step to a more objective position. To Canetti's comment that the refugees are forced to stand as they are all squeezed together like cattle («"Wie Vieh", sagte ich, "so quetscht man sie zusammen und Viehwagons sind auch dabei"» 137), Schiebl first states the fact that there are so many of them («"es sind eben so viele"»), and then after a process of truly sensing Canetti's distress at the scene, replies that the soldiers are also being sent to the front in cattle cars. He then pronounces a saying of his father, who is a retired general («General außer Dienst» 135), responsible for inspecting Vienna's defense fortifications and described as a very calm man (135), that war is war: «"Weißt du", sagte Schiebl, "unsere Soldaten werden in solchen Waggons an die Front geschickt. Krieg ist Krieg, sagt mein Vater"» (137). Rather than interpret these last sentences about the soldiers and the "war is

war” slogan only as an attempt to lessen Canetti’s shock, or as an effort to excuse any and all acts of war<sup>19</sup>, it is important to note what transpires between Schiebl’s first comment about there being so many refugees, and his comment about the soldiers, in order to recognize this as Schiebl’s move towards solidarity with the refugees.

First, when talking about the number of refugees, Schiebl is purposely controlling his repulsion at the sight of the refugees, out of consideration for Canetti: «sein Abscheu vor ihnen [the refugees] war mit Rücksicht auf mich temperiert, er hätte nichts über die Lippen gebracht, was mich kränken konnte» (137). From this feeling of repulsion that is not expressed out of consideration for his friend, Schiebl then feels Canetti’s sense of horror at the sight of the refugees stranded on the bridge. The way Schiebl joins Canetti is expressed in a sentence that goes from the first person singular, to describe Canetti’s being frozen in place due to his sense of horror or dismay at the refugee’s plight, to Schiebl’s standing with him and feeling his horror, thereby implying (passive) solidarity: «Aber ich blieb wie festgewurzelt stehen, und während er mit mir stand, fühlte er mein Entsetzen» (137). There is no interaction between the refugees and Canetti and Schiebl; the refugees are aware that they are not particularly welcome in 1916 Vienna, which is having trouble feedings its residents, and has already received many refugees.

As Schiebl feels Canetti’s horror, his mentions of soldiers, though a way of lessening the shock for Canetti (and possibly himself as well), can also be seen as his making a connection between the refugees and “our soldiers” («unsere Soldaten» 137); even if he is only trying to make the experience fathomable, relatable, or appear less terrible and horrifying. The narrative even excuses or explains Schiebl’s comment about “war is war” (which can also be read as a comment about the brutality or senselessness of war) and the soldiers by stating it is an attempt by Schiebl to tear Canetti away from the scene: «Es war der einzige Satz seines Vater, den er je vor mir zitierte,

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<sup>19</sup> See Peiter, 98 for such a view of Schiebl, a young boy (!), as antisemitic, pulling Canetti away from his act of solidarity, and pronouncing the sort of platitudes that were used after the war to excuse the crimes of the past.



und ich wußte, daß er es tat, um mich aus meinem Schrecken zu reißen» (137). By creating a link between the terrible things that go on during war, and in particular the way the life of civilians is most often destroyed, and how soldiers fight and die (even if just in order to get his friend Canetti out of his shock), Schiebl also links the refugees and “our soldiers” as those suffering in the war; and by the possessive pronoun “our” creates (unknowingly?) a link to Viennese citizenry and the Austrian nation as well.

When the boys actually do go (when Schiebl physically pulls Canetti away from the scene), and they walk to Schiebl’s home, Schiebl’s demonstration of solidarity becomes active, even if just momentarily. When they arrive, Canetti does not eat the snack offered by Schiebl’s mother, and Schiebl also refuses to eat; here too, Schiebl is following Canetti’s example, or possibly Canetti actually feels sick after experiencing trauma. But when Schiebl, who the narrative describes as a sensitive young man, does not offer to play “war” with his toy soldiers, he finally actively engages in a sort of solidarity, even if simply through respect for his friend Canetti: «denn ich rührte die Jause nicht an und Schiebl, der einfühlende Bursche, hatte auch keinen Hunger. Er ließ die Soldaten stehen, wir spielten nicht» (137).

Lest anyone think these little acts of solidarity are lasting, or able to completely transform someone, Schiebl’s closing comment to Canetti is that they will play “war” the next day, as he has some new artillery toy soldiers: «“Aber morgen, wenn du kommst, zeig ich dir was. Ich habe neue Artillerie bekommen”» (137). Is Schiebl’s temporary show of solidarity with the refugees simply respect for his friend Canetti, or something more? Is he simply trying to cheer Canetti up, or, given that playing “war” makes Schiebl happy (Canetti often lets him win), is it also possible that the events, and their effect on Canetti, and on him, give Schiebl a need, at that moment, to gain assurance about their friendship.

Given that Canetti and Schiebl are eleven-year-old boys, living in a war-time Vienna that has trouble feeding its citizens, the whole scene is quite a remarkable example of how prejudice, or the fear of others, can be undone. Schiebl’s process of coming to show solidarity is not an easy one, it is not without its ambiguity, but his momentary independent act of not playing “war”, if understood as a sort of solidarity, a sort of understanding, if not

of the refugees, then at least of Canetti's feelings about the refugee's conditions, points to another way to fight prejudice and antisemitism. Through his friendship with Canetti, and through the example of Canetti's display of solidarity with the refugees, Schiebl goes from his initial negative feelings to a show of solidarity, and thus to a place far removed from hatred and antisemitism.

A further report from Canetti's time in Vienna during WWI, though not expressly tied to antisemitism, nonetheless shows how children are given a negative education and taught to hate via songs they sing and war slogans. The narrator Canetti discusses these experiences while in Zurich (as of fall 1916, with Switzerland as the place where, the narrator states, the war does not impact people's every thought), mentioning how he resisted some of the songs he heard at school, but liked to sing the sadder songs: «Die unbedachten, rohen Reden mancher Mitschüler [in Vienna] lernte ich abzuwehren, aber die Lieder über Krieg und Kaiser sang ich täglich mit, unter wachsenden Widerständen, nur zwei von ihnen, die traurig waren, sang ich gern» (*dqZ*, 170). In other words, even if Canetti can resist certain songs, he cannot disengage completely from the various modes of fomenting the war and patriotism. The connection to Kornfeld, and the Jewish refugees, is all the more harrowing in this context, as the war slogans preach hatred and murder, seeking to dehumanize the "other": «"Serbien muss sterbien!" "Jeder Schuss ein Russ". "Jeder Stoß ein Franzos!" "Jeder tritt ein Britt"» (114). The mother, by telling her son to not repeat such hateful words, talks about her best friend Olga, who is a Russian (114)<sup>20</sup>. Just as with her insisting that her son walk with Kornfeld, so that he is not attacked, so she underlines the ties of friendship to undo the harm of hateful war slogans and instead promote solidarity with those that society seeks to exclude and harm. In this context, the episode with the refugees on the train becomes even more remarkable as a statement of the potential for human solidarity with those that prejudice, apparently condoned in schools and society, seeks to harm and kill.

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<sup>20</sup> See page 127, *dqZ*, for the mother's later trip to Bulgaria (with her son Elias) and visit with her friend Olga.

In the Zurich episodes dealing with antisemitism, a good education is shown to be one which teaches young people to deal with their actual problems rather than to become servants to the hatred of antisemitism, and those that exploit such hatred<sup>21</sup>. This good example of how to fight antisemitism is contrasted with one teacher's antisemitism, which is even possibly the spark for the antisemitic comments directed at Canetti and his classmates, and that the school administration deals with in an unusual fashion.

The antisemitism, tinged with Swiss nationalism, that creates a contrast to the good educators in Canetti's Zurich school is the Latin teacher Billeter's comment, which links the antisemitism to Canetti's putting up his hand and thereby intimidating other students: «“Denk nur nach, Erni, du kommst schon drauf. Wir lassen uns nicht alles von einem Wiener Juden wegnehmen”» (*dgZ*, 252). Rather than addressing Canetti's over-eagerness, the teacher resorts to antisemitism, and adds a nationalist tone with the mention of Vienna, Austria (as opposed to Switzerland or Zurich) to demean Canetti. Though the mature narrator goes on to explain that the teacher wants to protect the weaker, slower student against Canetti's rash answering, it is perhaps from this teacher that students take the cue to use antisemitism to attack Canetti for not letting other students have a chance to answer; and expand the comments to all Jewish students, perhaps in order to demonstrate their power over the school's affairs.

The good example of how to deal with antisemitism, and the way the Zurich episode is portrayed in the text leaves readers puzzling about what is going on, after Canetti and other Jewish students (17 from five classes) create a petition demanding action be taken to fight antisemitism in their school. After six weeks, Canetti is called to the school vice-principal (Prorektor) Paul Usteri's office, alone. After Usteri confirms that Canetti wrote the petition, the vice-principal rips it apart, and throws it in the garbage. Usteri then tells Canetti that he answers too much in class: «“Du

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<sup>21</sup> Canetti's own ambiguity about the depiction of the Zurich episode is expressed in his letters, *Ich erwarte von Ihnen viel*, where he states that they are the worst parts of the first volume of the autobiography, because of a number of reasons, and that he had considered leaving them out, except that it would have been a «Fälschung», 548.

streckst zuviel auf?») (260). The antisemitic comments worsen for a time, Canetti tries to reduce the number of times he answers in class, and four months after they began, the antisemitic barbs stop suddenly, and never are used again: «ließen die Sticheleien mit einem Schlag nach» (261). As Sven Hanuschek indicates, the text appears to be indicating that the school sought to find out the real reasons that are used to offer excuses for such antisemitic comments, and addressed them:

Das klingt so, als hätten die Lehrer langsam versucht, das ganze Beziehungsnetz der Klasse aufzurollen, im Hintergrund, sorgfältig alle Ursachen herauspräpariert und dann mit einer Reihe von Einzelmaßnahmen reagiert – zwei davon waren die an sich ganz unsinnig wirkende Mitteilung der Canettischen Überaktivität und das Zerreißen der Petition. Diese Maßnahmen wirkten sicher stärker gegen Antisemitismus als einzelne konfrontative Lehrvorträge in den Klassen. (69)

What Hanuschek could be seen as implying here, without expressly stating it, is that the school administrators rob the antisemitic comments of their power (and the attempt to gain power) by addressing the real issues.

Readers of the autobiography, without Hanuschek's explanation, are left wondering about the school's silence on these antisemitic comments. It is only when Canetti reacts to answering too much – the fact that he stops doing so, that in turn stops the comments –, that readers recognize the wisdom of the school. It teaches its students, by doing and not by telling, to deal with problems. By never recognizing the problem as one tied to some negative construct of "Jewishness" (the source of antisemitism, along with a certain type of nationalism), the school is able to resolve the problem, to respect students' concerns, but without ever accepting antisemitism (and the power that certain students are trying to exercise with the use of such hatred) as an acceptable debate or forum for addressing life's problems.

In contrast to the Zurich school situation, where wise educators are able to defuse the antisemitism, and teach their students to address life's real problems, the Frankfurt episode shows what happens when youth are not given the tools to deal with life's problems. Thus, Canetti's encounters with antisemitism in Frankfurt demonstrate how irrational antisemitism cannot be fought with rational arguments, while suggesting the link between irra-

tional antisemitism and religion-based antisemitism and also showing what happens when youth's concerns and problems are not addressed.

Canetti encounters religion-based antisemitism in Frankfurt through his classmate Rainer Friedrich (his actual name was Otheinrich Keller)<sup>22</sup>, who continually tries to convince Canetti on their walks home together to accept Christ into his life and to convert to Christianity. Unaware of Canetti's struggle against death (*Todesfeindschaft*), that is, Canetti's complete rejection of what he sees as death's control over and incursion into life, Rainer repeats often to Canetti that Christ died for him too: «“Christus ist auch für dich gestorben”» (*dFiO*, 26-27)<sup>23</sup>. Just as Canetti rejects Jewish narratives of Abraham's sacrifice of his son, so too he rejects the notion of someone dying for him (27), and thus Rainer's attempts to convert Canetti must fail.

The connection between this religious antisemitism and irrational antisemitism is made through Rainer's brother, and by the religious arguments the younger brother makes in his conflict with Canetti. Rainer conceives of himself as the mediator: «so mag er es als einen Vermittlungs- und Friedensversuch betrachtet haben» (28). For it is Rainer who relates to Canetti what his younger brother thinks about him. In contrast to Rainer as someone who is “vague and dreamy” (28), Rainer's younger brother, in a class two years below Canetti's, is someone who is so openly hostile to Canetti, that he (claims) to forget his name: «Sein Name [of the younger brother] ist mir entfallen, vielleicht weil er mir so scharf entgegen trat und mich mit unverhohlener Feindseligkeit behandelte» (28). The discussion, as it were, between the younger brother and Canetti goes on for several months, until the younger boy offers to fight him, to which Canetti replies that he does not fight with children. This puts an end to this matter, at least for Canetti, who gives up on trying to put an end to these absurd accusations for all time: his initial, and erroneous view that by replying to the absurd accusations he would end them: «Ich nahm mir vor, solche Beschuldigungen, die völlig absurd erschienen, durch meine Antworten aus der Welt

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<sup>22</sup> See Hanuschek, 81.

<sup>23</sup> All references to the Frankfurter episode are found in the second volume of the autobiography, *Die Fackel im Ohr* (1980, henceforth *dFiO*).

zu schaffen» (29). In other words, Canetti, and readers are forced to realize that against irrational antisemitism, reason is futile.

The views of the younger brother are too numerous to cite here, but the focus of his accusations against Jews is that they try and hide their identity; and he makes one Jew (Canetti) represent all Jews, just as a stereotype makes a whole group homogeneous in their bad qualities. Most telling is the exchange between the two regarding the fallacy of Jews poisoning wells in medieval times. When Canetti states that this is patently false, the younger brother says that they (the Jews) did it at the time of the plague, to which Canetti replies that Jews also died in the plague. To this the younger brother replies that Jews hated Christians so much, they caused their own deaths: «‘Ihr Haß gegen die Christen war so groß, daß sie an ihrem Haß selber mit zugrundegingen’» (29). Among all the hateful lies and stereotypes about Jews, this one points to another key component of the anti-Semite’s psyche, as the responsibility for the acts of hatred, including murder, is thrown back onto the victim, “absolving” those that hate and murder of any responsibility.

In the section that follows the one with Rainer’s conversion attempts and his little brother’s irrational antisemitism, readers are delivered with the reasons for the brothers’ antisemitism by Canetti’s friend Hans Baum. Baum finds out that the boys’ father had fallen on hard financial times in his business, and that his business competitors were Jews. Shortly thereafter, the boys’ father dies, and though Canetti does not have all the details, he begins to understand how hatred has developed in the family: «wie es in dieser Familie zu diesem blinden Haß gekommen war» (32). While the older Friedrich, Rainer, fills the personal and physic void left by the father’s death with religion, his younger brother, likely even more threatened by the loss, falls into irrational antisemitism. For readers, it is clear that not having the ability to deal with his father’s loss has made the younger boy susceptible to antisemitism. And his wanting to fight Canetti can be interpreted as an attempt to re-live, or live in place of his father, through a possible victory over Canetti, a victory over all the Jews he hates (including the ones he has blamed for his father’s death), because Canetti, as one Jew, represents all; this is the problematic thinking behind antisemitism and all such prejudice.

This episode points to the failures of an educational system, and a community that does not help young people address their real problems, rather than lose themselves in irrational phantasms that make them fall prey to demagogues. Thus, to properly fight antisemitism, families and communities must help young people in distress, help them deal with the meaning of loss, and as Jochen Müller writes in the *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, demonstrate that they are valued, respected and recognized:

Es geht dabei schlicht um das Bekunden von Interesse und Anerkennung, um Empathie, Wertschätzung und den Respekt, den viele Jugendliche in ihrem Umfeld vermissen. (103)

Not doing this, even though it is not mentioned in the autobiography, makes the boy easy prey for National-Socialist propaganda.

To summarize the results of this examination of the autobiographical discourse on autobiography, it is clear that this textual discourse makes the following arguments about how to fight antisemitism. First, any approach to antisemitism must be multi-pronged and in particular, should focus on youth and education. This finding is in keeping with findings on how to fight antisemitism, which argues that youth, whose world view has not yet solidified, are the best candidates to engage so as to combat antisemitism:

Bei den meisten Jugendlichen ist... nicht von einer umfassenden antisemitischen Weltanschauung auszugehen. Und dies eröffnet – im Unterschied zur vielfach konstatierten “Aufklärungsresistenz” bei “gestandenen Antisemiten” – Räume für die pädagogische Intervention. (Müller, 99-100)<sup>24</sup>

Both in the case of Rainer's younger brother, of the teacher in Manchester, as well as the governess Miss Bray, the text shows how antisemitism can

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<sup>24</sup> Though Müller's article focuses on Arabic youth in Germany, the paradigm for intervention before the solidification of such views makes sense for all youth. For a volume with a considerable section devoted to the themes of preventing and fighting antisemitism, see *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 2014; 23, which, given the specifics given in many of the articles, demonstrates the validity of the more general two-pronged approach suggested by the discourse on antisemitism and education.

otherwise solidify, as an ideology, and then be very resistant. In such cases, the discourse on antisemitism and education seems to be advocating both opposing antisemitism outright (Miss Bray's conversion attempts), and avoiding discussing the prejudice to focus on the real issue at hand (as Canetti's father does with the teacher, Miss Lancashire).

The autobiographical discourse on antisemitism and education also highlights displays of solidarity, and helping others go from xenophobia to solidarity with others, rather than to hatred. Canetti's displays of solidarity are both with the classmate Kornfeld, against his teacher's wishes and following his mother's wishes, and with the Orthodox Jewish refugees in Vienna. It is during this latter act of solidarity that Canetti, through his friendship with his classmate Schiebl, leads his friend to what can be seen as Schiebl's own independent act of solidarity.

Finally, in the Zurich episode, the text shows how schools, and by connection to the Frankfurt episode of Rainer's younger brother, communities, need to teach youth to address their real problems, rather than resort to antisemitism and hatred. In other words, as Müller states above, when youth are listened to, given the tools they need to deal with their problems, when their stories are valued, that is when we will start to truly effectively fight antisemitism in our youth, which will continue to reap benefits to our societies as they grow older. In this respect, the discourse on antisemitism and education, while not expressly criticizing anti-racism learning modules, is perhaps hinting that such learning needs to meet real, lived experience, and needs to be supplemented for recognizing students' own lived experiences. This does not, however, lessen antisemitism's reality, and the threat, including of physical violence, that it poses.

While doing all this, the discourse on antisemitism and education not only shows the development of antisemitism over time (while leaving out any discussion of the Shoah), but also the connection between religious and irrational antisemitism. By doing so, it emphasizes that knowledge of antisemitism's transmogrifications is also a necessary tool in fighting it and other prejudices.

The examination of the discourse on antisemitism and education deserves to play a part in any discussion of Canetti's Jewish identity. As with



the administrators and teachers of his Zurich school, so with Canetti, what he has done, has written, could be considered more important than what any categorization might say about his Jewish identity.

Humans have failed in the endeavor of not falling prey to hatred and discrimination many times before, with the direst of consequences, genocides, a reminder that this type of work must never end, as such acts of genocide continue into our day.

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