



Friedrich Wolf: Beyond the Jewish/Communist Divide

By Dr. Henning Müller

Only since the first International Friedrich Wolf Symposium in 1988 has the attempt been undertaken to grasp the author Friedrich Wolf in a holistic manner, instead of in a one-sided, ideological fashion that reduces him to either “the Communist” or “the Jew.” Although Friedrich Wolf formally renounced his membership in the Jewish community in 1913, he always felt very connected to Jewish tradition. His outlook was based on a particular sociopolitical Jewish identity, whose value system and traditions account for his journey from the ideals of the German Enlightenment to the emancipatory claims that accompanied socialism.

The late “discovery” of Wolf’s Jewish side is all the more astonishing given that his play “Professor Mamlock” was staged around the world soon after it was penned in 1933. Only a German Jew could have written this drama about the persecution of Jews, which was already being openly waged in Germany in 1932-33, with such authenticity and command. In this piece, Wolf brought his deep experience of German Jewish life to bear artistically in the creation of an ensemble of Jewish characters, which clearly reflected the political spectrum represented within this oppressed minority, and linked it to his knowledge of the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of his non-Jewish German compatriots.

Whether persecuted as a Jew, a Communist or an author, at several junctures Wolf’s life was punctuated by changes in domicile and the need to flee. He experienced two World Wars and the historical catastrophes of the twentieth century, along with their soul-wounding repercussions. “Life drove me through the times enough, Life drove me through the world enough,” wrote Wolf in his poem “Knabenträume” [lit. boy’s dreams], thus describing a turbulent life full of commotion, privation and affronts. And yet, in 1935 wild applause greeted his lecture, delivered in English, to the First American Writers’ Congress in New York. Wolf, for his part, was enthusiastic about the American philosophy of freedom and the tempo and vitality of American democracy. What would have happened had a version of “Professor Mamlock” been shot in Hollywood, as Wolf wished? What would have happened if he had gotten the US visa that he sought in 1939-40?

The author Wolf must thus be understood in his entirety. A place must be made for his continual drive for social revolutionary action, which motivated him all his life to work for global change founded upon human dignity and justice—in equal parts as a Jew and Communist, a doctor and playwright, a journalist and speaker, an antifascist and cultural political figure, and a German and citizen of the world. Unlike two-dimensional treatments, a holistic account of Wolf’s multi-faceted and multi-talented personality, biography and philosophical development urgently require examination of the root motives of his social agency—of the socially and ethically imprinted core identity of Friedrich Wolf, a German Communist of Jewish descent, who from a young age was open to the new, the avant-garde and the future-oriented, and who all his life was militant and non-conformist in his views, his actions and his artistic work.

Judaism and Origins

Two letters sent by Wolf to his hometown of Neuwied, 36 years apart, show in a great historical arc that Wolf never forgot his Jewish roots and repeatedly acknowledged his debt to Jewish history, traditions and values. In a letter dated July 31, 1915, which he wrote to his mother, Ida, as a 27-year-old soldier, Wolf offers a preview of his 1917 drama “Mohammed” in comments on his reading of *Die Welt des Islams* (1915), by the German assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch. “God! There is no God but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Supporter of All,² which represents the so-called sacred Throne Verse of the Qur’an (2:255), is a paraphrase of our *Sh’ma Yisrael*....”³ On February 5, 1951, the nearly 63-year-old Wolf wrote to his former family doctor in Neuwied, Dr. Lichtenstein, in reference to the Jewish calendar: „I hope that you will still help us populate this ‚best of all worlds‘ for a while longer; as 6,000 years could not destroy us, I hope that you will last for at least another twenty.”⁴

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In the intervening years as well, Wolf's Jewish heritage is repeatedly reflected in his artistic work, lectures, letters and biographical notes—even in difficult times and in the face of historical and personal upheavals. But it would be false to understand Friedrich Wolf's relationship to Jewish tradition as linear. The consistency of the inner connection becomes evident only in reference to a letter written on December 18, 1915, in which Wolf comments upon some verses by Goethe in a letter to his first—Jewish—wife, Kaethe Gumpold: "It's all right if we don't achieve the greatest thing, as long as we achieve something tied to eternity. This thought, transferred into the moral realm, is the foundation of every religion."⁵ If we see this from a philosophical perspective, Wolf is getting at the same thing that the young Marx argued in 1844—namely, "that philosophy is nothing other than religion brought into thought and consciously realized."⁶

The early influence on Wolf of family members, on both the maternal and paternal sides, as well as of his Jewish school and his membership in the local Jewish congregation can be documented as reliably as the influence of cultural and social values that he would later draw from the wealth of Jewish folk traditions. This short article does not permit me to enter into the ongoing debate about the meaning of the word "Jewish." But I would argue that the way in which I see the "non-religious Jew" Friedrich Wolf has clear advantages, in that he was someone who retained—as a social value system—a sense of a positive inheritance and the adaptive potential of secular forms of Jewish folk traditions and Jewish cultural achievements that are thousands of years old. As a definition that is both positive about Jewish contributions to German culture, and critical of the general phenomenon of German anti-Semitism, it is the one most able to account for things—psychological and social psychological, historical, ideological, intellectual, cultural and emotional, as well as religiously based things—that German Jews have always experienced within the nation.

Friedrich Wolf's personality, biography, his work and his intellectual attitudes cannot be understood without considering his hometown of Neuwied. The author reflects his Rhenish homeland in positive ways throughout his oeuvre. Memories of childhood and youth in Neuwied appear from his earliest works to his last official statements on October 1, 1953, and document how his early environment endured in his consciousness. Wolf's memories of the first twenty years of his life are expressed in poetry and prose, in autobiographical sketches and lectures, in his cultural political work and in many letters. In addition, the people in the Neuwied of his youth are reflected in his dramatic works, where the characters exhibit clearly recognizable idiosyncracies, attitudes and personality traits, primarily of family members, but also of teachers, friends and others. Wolf's parental home, scholastic socialization and social environment indelibly shaped his initially bourgeois, liberal political ideals. These ideals included the achievements of Jewish culture, the progressive traditions of Hellenism and the European Enlightenment, the ideals of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, fraternity—and those of the German democratic Revolution of 1848. They were also linked to the hopes of the Wolf family for the political and civil emancipation of German Jewry. These emancipatory demands remained constituent throughout Friedrich Wolf's personal development, his orientation toward and talent for action, his values as an individual and the breadth and wealth of his ideals, founded upon the positive achievements of all cultures and religions. His awareness of the almost 2000-year-old diaspora of his repeatedly persecuted community of belief and fate formed both the potency of Wolf's emancipatory claims, and his concept of human dignity. In 1948, the author Lion Feuchtwanger identified the social revolutionary core of Wolf's personality, his "well-nigh boyish, vehement will" "to make the world that exists, into what it should be," and "the author's biblically fierce fervor for justice." In the same article, Feuchtwanger noted that "there is only one hero in all Friedrich Wolf's works: the disenfranchised person in the struggle against his oppressor."⁷

His socialization, both within and outside the family, exerted a great influence on Friedrich Wolf. First, in the 1890s Rabbi Julius Ransenberg, his teacher at the Jewish primary school, who also led the Jewish community in Neuwied, played an important part in developing Wolf's bourgeois ideals and his fundamental claim to emancipation as a German of Jewish descent.⁸ Second, the intellectual and philosophical influence on Wolf's worldview of his Jewish maternal uncle, Dr. Moritz Meyer—with whom he conversed throughout

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his youth, school and university years until the outbreak of WWI—was far greater than Wolf already admitted in his 1944 story “Das Öhmchen” [lit. the dear uncle], written for the “friend, helper and teacher in the decisive days of my youth.”⁹ In addition to the homeopathic influences upon his chosen profession as a doctor, which Wolf describes, there are, for example, substantial artistic parallels between Moritz Meyer’s play “Der Fremdling” [lit. the stranger] and Wolf’s drama “Tamar,” which both treat ancient Jewish material from the Tanakh’s first book of Moses. Two philosophical works, written by Moritz Meyer in 1910 and 1914, show his efforts to redirect his nephew onto the correct path of Judaic observances after Wolf, already influenced by the German and European Enlightenment, began to distance himself from religious Judaism and the Jewish community.

Friedrich Wolf’s early intellectual development and its complicated transitions and upheavals emerge from Judaic monotheism and an early universal image of God as the embodiment of inner moral laws in the universe. Wolf comes to the humanizing of the divine, the secularization of moral codes and the goal of realizing God’s realm on earth through philosophical universalism and the pantheism of an eternal moral universe, with which he became acquainted through the work of the Jewish humanist and Enlightenment thinker Baruch Spinoza, and the adaptation of his thought by Goethe. Descartes’ human self-awareness—“cogito, ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am)—and Spinoza’s rational pantheism and its basic substance—“deus sive natura” (God or nature)—join in Wolf’s worldview, in which both appearance and human nature are God. Wolf’s pantheism, modeled on Goethe, is evidenced by early poems celebrating the creation, for example “Berglied” [lit. mountain song] (1904), in which God reveals himself through natural events or the presence of God in humans is confirmed. In a letter to a friend in 1918, the 30-year-old author explained his new understanding of religion, which still clung to pantheism: “How this personal happiness melts into the magic of the whole, the great, universal force of life in nature; that is where the essence of the “holy,” godly, religious, as I understand it, begins for me.”¹⁰ Thirty-five years later, in March 1953, Friedrich Wolf still distinguishes this high ethos as a respect for creation, by reference to the benchmark offered by Maxim Gorki’s phrase: “The most holy is humankind!”¹¹

Aside from the childhood influences of a Jewish family environment, Wolf also attended the Jewish primary school in Neuwied and there met Rabbi Julius Ransenberg, both of which were formative for Wolf’s worldview. His early aspiration to become a rabbi developed in school, where they focused on Bible lessons, reading and translating Hebrew, an introduction to the Jewish Written Law of the Torah, the Talmud, the Mishna and Haggadah—which are particularly suited to school lessons, with their many Jewish life stories, myths and legends. This is where Wolf’s first educational experiences outside the family took place; for his entire life he kept the understanding of Jewish hero figures and legends as a progressive folk tradition.¹²

Also at the Neuwied Jewish school Wolf met, in Rabbi Ransenberg, a teacher who was simultaneously a pious rabbi and a monarchist and member of the German National Party—a Prussian Jew true to the Kaiser. Ransenberg not only participated in the chauvinistic delirium at victories during the first months of WWI, but also shaped the general outlook of the Jewish community of Neuwied. As his son later wrote, “The entire community, at least 340 of 400 Jews, were behind my father and true to the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith.”¹³ The traits of this Jewish teacher were definitely incorporated into the title figure of “Professor Mamlock,” who is a representative of Germanophile “assimilated” Jews—that not insignificant part of German Jewry before 1933, which not only organized the right wing of the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith, but also, as part of the Reich Alliance of Jewish Front Soldiers, helped elect Hindenburg ... which, in turn, at least abetted the transfer of power to Hitler. Friedrich Wolf accepted this part of his teacher Ransenberg only to a limited extent. In 1916, he did write “Deutsches Eisen” [lit. German iron], a nationalistic war poem in which “Love of country from Germanic blood” countered the “foreign dwarf;” but in the same year he also wrote his first anti-war poem “Wie oft noch?” [lit. how many more times?]. Nevertheless, the “nationalist” education of teacher Ransenberg contributed to making Friedrich Wolf a German patriot throughout his life, although not because of its exaggerated chauvinism.

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Friedrich Wolf and National Socialism

The period of systematic persecution of Friedrich Wolf by the National Socialists latest from 1931 to 1944, and thus began before Hitler came to power in early 1933. Examples span almost fourteen years: from February 17, 1931, when the *Völkischer Beobachter* railed against the Rhinelander, calling him “one of the most publicly dangerous representatives of eastern Jewish Bolshevism,” to October 18, 1944, when Heinrich Himmler, in a speech he was giving to members of the Volkssturm, agitated against “the Jew Wolf” for supposedly leading German prisoners of war astray. Throughout the Nazi reign of terror, the prominent antifascist author, Jew and Communist Friedrich Wolf seemed the perfect embodiment of the Nazi’s paranoid hallucination of a “Jewish-Bolshevik world conspiracy.”

A planned assassination of Friedrich Wolf followed upon the 1933 book burning, his expatriation in 1935 and the embargo on his “collected works” in 1938. Page 203 of the “Special Manhunt List, USSR” of 1941—a 316-page list with the names of 5,256 people to be assassinated, which was carried by German paramilitary units (*Einsatzgruppen*) during the invasion of the USSR—reads: “Wolf, Friedrich, Dr. med., 12/23/88 Neuwied, author, Moscow, Nishnikislovsky per 8.” Heydrich and Himmler, Hitler and Goebbels, and later the German Army’s Chief of the General Staff, Heinz Guderian, were personally involved in Friedrich Wolf’s case; his persecution spanned the entire world, with seamless reports from spies everywhere.¹⁴

“Professor Mamlock” and the Identity Discourse of German Jews

Set between May 1932 and April 1933, the atmospherically dense drama “Professor Mamlock” represents the start of the anti-Semitic persecutions of the Third Reich through the fate of Clinic Director Professor Hans Mamlock, whom they drive from office and to his death. Wolf staged what everyone who did not look away could see: that, already in 1933, German Jews were being squeezed out of public life through campaigns to boycott Jewish businesses (“Don’t buy from Jews!”) and the Reich Civil Service Law—and that this accompanied the persecution of workers’ and union movement representatives. Wolf conceived of “Professor Mamlock” as a call for a resistance movement, but not as a “proletarian revolutionary” play. According to Wolf, with his play he wanted to reach “the army of millions of the ‘middling classes’,” upon whom “Hitler’s mass base rests.”¹⁵

The debate about whether it was possible to live as a Jew in Germany at that time is conducted on two levels in “Professor Mamlock”: in the dialogue between the German National, law-abiding Mamlock and his son Rolf, who is in the organized socialist workers’ movement; and in the acrimonious debate about whether to remain in Germany or emigrate to Palestine, which takes place between Mamlock and Simon, the Jewish male nurse. This second, intra-Jewish debate is unfortunately only retained in truncated form in the version of “Mamlock” that appeared in Friedrich Wolf’s collected works (published in the GDR by Aufbau Verlag in 1960). In contrast, arguments about the perspectives for Jewish life and survival still engaged a significant portion of the English-language version used by The Theatre Union in New York in 1933-34 and the Hebrew version that premiered at the Habimah Theater in Tel Aviv on July 25, 1934.¹⁶ This is of interest because, in 1934, Jewish audiences and reviewers in Tel Aviv saw as viable both the alternatives that Wolf presents: Simon’s emigration to Palestine, and Rolf’s decision to remain in Germany and work in the socialist resistance movement against fascism. Without its being intentional on Wolf’s part, the play’s great impact was in part due to its topicality in Palestine at the time, as all three groups of Jews that had come from Germany were competing for intellectual hegemony: the conservative Jews (represented by the tragically stranded Mamlock), Zionist Jews (represented by the male nurse Simon) and socialist Jews (represented by Rolf and his communist friend Ernst).¹⁷

The earliest surviving version of “Mamlock” from 1933-34—which I found in 1991 in the former East German Central Party Archive of the SED¹⁸—would be worth a monograph of its own. Comparisons to the Hebrew version in Tel Aviv and contemporary letters from Wolf to The Theatre Union troupe in New York indicate that this is most probably the version that provided the basis for translations for productions in

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different countries in 1934. The 86-page typewritten document, entitled “Doctor Mamlock’s Way Out. A Play from Germany 1934, by Friedrich Wolf,”¹⁹ is radically different, with respect to the treatment of the Jewish problem, from the published English, Russian and German versions of 1935. In addition to the surviving dramatis personae, the early version—which still includes epic interludes, modern inter-medial elements and stage projections—includes a much more socially differentiated ensemble of German Jewish figures, who step to the front of the stage and out of character to discuss what they, personally, have suffered at the hands of the Nazis. In this first version of the play, which is set in the Reich capital, Berlin, we see the poor Jew Salomon, who has been beaten by SA men, as well as the Jewish bank directors Rosenthal and Loeb, who still insist that things will not get so bad for them, given their wealth. In a key scene of the early version that is missing from later published versions, Professor Mamlock’s son Rolf calls on the Jewish bankers to show solidarity with their poorer fellow sufferers in Germany, and asks: “Bank Director Loeb, did you not see the Jewish shopkeeper on Linien Street, whom the SA was driving through the streets with other prisoners and shouts of ‘Hands up!’?”²⁰

Stalin and the Soviet Union

Wolf presumably deleted extensive intra-Jewish discussions and the figures of Salomon, Loeb and Rosenthal from later print versions in response to pressure from the highest Party authorities in Moscow. An undated and unlabeled evaluation for the leadership of the German Communist Party (KPD) in Moscow and the “Office of Arthur Pieck” includes the following comment about the early sketched-out version of “Mamlock”: “In the present version, the race question is predominant, and class struggle is in the background. The role of the Communist Party is not shown enough.” The same document patronizingly attests, “The author of the play is a doctor, Jew, Communist. He wrote the play based on his personal impressions during the period of Hitler’s power grab. He is still too depressed, doesn’t yet have the necessary optimism, which the workers need in their struggle.”²¹ In retrospect, it is hard to believe that the Party’s highest guardians of art are discussing “Professor Mamlock,” a play that later became world-famous, and its author Friedrich Wolf. That this was so, however, is illustrated by the “idea of the director” (who in the document remains unnamed) about how he wants to handle the text: “I’ve decided to make the role of the Party more prominent. The play is not about racial struggle, but rather the class struggle.”²²

The debate outlined here was only the beginning of growing difficulties faced by Friedrich Wolf in Soviet exile,²³ which he left for France at the end of 1937 with the words: “I’m not waiting here until they imprison me.”²⁴ Further Party controversies over Wolf’s plays after 1935, as well as the cancelation of his play “Matrosen von Cattaro” [“The Sailors of Cattaro”] in Leningrad in 1937, on the grounds that it was “defeatist and politically dangerous,” had been precursors to this step, but especially the hefty political accusations that were leveled at him at the “Closed Party Meeting of the German Commission of the Soviet Writers’ Association,” which took place September 4-8, 1936, in Moscow; this meeting was imbued with mutual suspicions of “enmity against the Party” and revealed a shocking denunciation-mentality among exiled German writers.²⁵ Although Wolf survived his hearing passably well, the evaluation that the leadership of the German Commission of the Writers’ Association submitted to the Party leadership at the end of September 1936 still hints at personal critiques and further established suspicion: “Friedrich Wolf feels like a Communist. His goal is to always give the Party what it needs through his literary work. Nevertheless, he is inadequately trained and has little inner Party discipline and, as a result, often misses the mark....”²⁶ As a German Jew, Wolf survived the 1930s in Moscow only because of his close friendship, going back to before 1933, with the dramatist Vsevolod Vischnevski, who was highly respected in the Soviet Union, and because he took on no responsibilities as a functionary in the KPD, but rather insisted on fulfilling his role as an author.

His critical reflex in the face of insufficient regard for his specific insights as a Jewish Communist is reflected in what appears to be an almost suicidal letter of complaint, addressed on July 24, 1945 to the highest leader of the Soviet Union, Josef Stalin. Regarding the withholding of permission for him to return home

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after the war, the author inquires into the “reason for my rejection.” In this letter he poses Stalin three decisive questions: 1) “Is it because I’m a Jew?” 2) “Is there no trust in me and my work?” 3) “Or have I had too much exposure in Germany and abroad as an antifascist?”²⁷ Wolf emphatically refutes that anyone could have reasons to answer yes to any of these questions. Nevertheless, an answer in the affirmative to all three questions is not excluded. Wolf did not, in fact, enjoy the trust of all members of his Party’s leadership—because of the imminent second wave of anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic campaigns in the USSR—and had been crossed off the list for permission to return to Germany.²⁸ And his unconditional political and moral stance with respect to antifascism was, in fact, too extreme in comparison to the alliance concept soon favored by his Party for postwar Germany.

In his letter to Stalin, Wolf uses many arguments to defend himself from the possibility that someone might answer “Yes!” to the question “Is it because I’m a Jew?” The author denounces any retreat before anti-Semitism and chauvinistic racism as opportunistic and, in closing, concludes: “I therefore will not and cannot believe that my racial affiliation is the reason for my rejection.”²⁹ Explicitly addressed in the letter are the achievements of German Jewish humanism, which are proven to reach back to the beginnings of the German nation and German national culture. In addition, Wolf proudly presents the fact that, as a German Jew, he is the well respected and famous author of the antifascist drama “Professor Mamlock”—which is about the tragedy of a Jewish doctor in Hitler’s Germany and has played all over the world. Such remarks be seen as Friedrich Wolf’s critique of Stalin’s anti-Semitism, as well as a polemic against the mistreatment of Jews in the USSR and the growing anti-Semitism in the communist world movement and among its Party functionaries.

Wolf’s conscious praise of himself as the author of “Professor Mamlock” was moreover made in full knowledge of the fact that, between 1938 and 1945, the 1938 Soviet film adaptation [by Rappaport and Minkin, Lenfilm] of the play had twice been banned for longer periods in the USSR. On the evening of August 23, 1939—the day Hitler and Stalin signed the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact—the film, along with other antifascist films, had been removed from movie theaters, in order to avoid agitating Hitler fascism. Although the *Professor Mamlok* film was screened for a short period after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, already in July it was again removed from circulation. From a political point of view, the highest Soviet authorities found the film too negative (for allied Hitler) in the first case, and too positive with respect to Wolf’s image of an antifascist “other” Germany in the second. In Germany too the film was banned in early 1940; on January 29, Propaganda Minister Goebbels himself gave the following secret directive: “The film *Professor Mamlok* should no longer be shown to anyone except the Führer.”³⁰ Goebbels even removed the film from internal circulation for training purposes of the NSDAP.

Wolf considered racism and anti-Semitism to be antithetical to Marxism. Despite his negative experiences with anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, his pride in his own Jewish heritage carried into his letter to Stalin. Heinrich Graf von Einsiedel, his companion on the National Committee for a Free Germany, told me that “Friedrich Wolf suffered under anti-Semitism a great deal back then.” Of course, anti-Semitism had always been part of Wolf’s life, and he had encountered it in his work with prisoners of war who were German officers. But the prevalent anti-Semitism he found in the Soviet Union was new and especially painful for him. According to von Einsiedel, Wolf suffered in particular from the anti-Semitism that existed within his own Party and from anti-Semitic comments made by Soviet comrades and superiors working in the National Committee. He cited the example of Wolf’s wincing shock at the anti-Semitic comments made by Colonel Sergei Tulpanov about Soviet Jewish officers³¹—and Tulpanov was chief of the Seventh Department of the political central political administration of the Red Army during the Fourth Ukrainian Front and then, from 1945 to 1949, the influential chief of the Information Department of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany.

Friedrich Wolf always worked against the anti-Semitism that came along with “anti-imperialism” and “anti-Zionism” in the communist world movement, countering it with works that expressed pride in his Jewish heritage. A few examples are short stories such as “Jules” (1941), “Die Juden von Marseille” [lit. the

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Jews of Marseille] (1942), "Das Öhmchen" (1944) and "Der Aufstand des Warschauer Ghettos" [lit. the Warsaw ghetto uprising] (1948). The fundamental importance of "Professor Mamlock" with respect to Jewish aspects of Wolf's oeuvre is thus unmistakable.

Concluding Thoughts

Friedrich Wolf's preoccupation with his own Jewish identity occurred in two basic phases of his development, each of which was determined by general political events in Germany. In the first phase, which lasted until the end of the 1920s, he exhibited an upward swing in the productive implementation of the liberal Jewish heritage that was an integral part of his value system and cultural understanding. As he evolved from a religious Jew to a member of the Communist Party, Wolf held a German-Jewish symbiosis for possible—despite the knowledge that his paternal grandparents had been murdered in an anti-Jewish pogrom in Nordeck-Giessen in the nineteenth century,³² despite his own experience of anti-Semitism at the university, even despite cumulative anti-Semitic incidents during the Weimar Republic. At the end of 1924, Wolf did three things. He developed sympathies for leftwing Zionist concepts of Socialism—"basic cultural-religious principles," according to him. He observed with interest the decision made by "the last Frankfurt meeting of the Zionist Association" to support the development of Palestine both spiritually and through "industrial ideology." And he promoted "distance from Europe," insofar as he felt that "western life ... was back at square one." Wolf looked forward to "the new, evolving eastern synthesis of three realms": "Young Palestine, Angora, Russia."³³

This is when Wolf composed his adaptation of parts of the original Hebrew Bible with its ancient Jewish songs and heroic epics—„Das Heldenepos des Alten Bundes. Aufgespürt und in deutschen Worten von Friedrich Wolf" [lit. the heroic epic of the ancient tribe, retrieved and in German words by Friedrich Wolf] (1925)—with which he „stood up for the historical traditions and cultural values, which the Jewish people had introduced to world culture." After completing this work at the end of December 1924, the author notes: „Debt of gratitude paid, the hand disengages itself from the trusted pressure"³⁴—though it is not clear whether by this he means his parental home in Neuwied, or Europe, which at this point he wanted to leave. With the „Heldenepos des Alten Bundes" Wolf wanted in particular to communicate the importance of Jewish roots for human culture as a whole to his non-Jewish readers. „The heroic stories and kingly battles of a people that loved the harp and the sword; their treetops—a cloud of prophesy, warning cry, prisoner's lament and divine vision—rustle into the core of the spiritual storm of our days."³⁵ With great sympathy, Wolf commemorates the story of his Jewish fathers and forefathers over thousands of years: „Our efforts were led by respect for the material, awe of the heroic past of the ancient desert nomads, veneration of the preeminent literary text."³⁶ He sought out the sources of his own Jewish tradition in order to formulate with this—in his words, „Edda of the Old Testament"³⁷—an overture for Christian-Jewish compromise and tolerance, and to work against the German anti-Semitism that had been spreading via pseudo-scientific popular literature throughout the German Reich since the mid-1920s.

In the second phase, starting at the end of the 1920s, the author's preoccupation with his Jewish heritage increasingly blends into the struggle against fascist, racial anti-Semitism. While in exile from 1933 to 1945, Wolf's entire artistic output and other work signals a skillful and courageous dedication to fight the fascist racial delusion and its anti-Semitic seed. After 1945 Friedrich Wolf continued this fight. Upon returning to Berlin in September 1945, after almost 13 years in exile, he immediately set to work, helping to restore radio and the DEFA Film Studio, co-founding the Cultural Society for the Democratic Renewal of Germany and restoring the Association of German People's Theaters, of which he became the director after the death of his friend Karl-Heinz Martin. In addition, from the start Wolf cared for organizing German authors and helping exiled artists find their often difficult way home. On January 9, 1946, Wolf's „Professor Mamlock" had its German premiere in Berlin's Hebbel Theater; with Lessing's „Nathan the Wise," it was one of the most memorable events in postwar theater in Berlin with respect to the attempt to cleanse Germans of the poison

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of fascism and win back civilization and humanity. Friedrich Wolf, the man who had written „Professor Mamlock”—from 1933 to 1945 the most famous and effective German anti-Nazi drama, played on the stages and theaters of the free world on four continents—became the best known and most performed antifascist German playwright. But this Friedrich Wolf never quite fit in after his return to Germany and the GDR. And in the West, he was boycotted and silenced for decades in the context of the Cold War.

In the GDR after 1945, Wolf's works, which fought the mentalities and roots of anti-Semitism that prevailed in both German states, effectively denounced renewed threats of racism and neofascism. That he was conscious of the Jewish traditions expressed in his work is clear in letters exchanged with Hermann Lewy, the editor of the West Berlin newspaper *Der Weg—Zeitschrift für Fragen des Judentums*, in 1948-49. In the December 1948 issue, Lewy published an article in the form of a personal letter in congratulation of Wolf's 60th birthday, in which he emphasized the story „Jules” and, especially, „Professor Mamlock.” He had seen the *Mamlok* film while in exile and noted that many German refugees were crying, gripped by the story that had been captured in such a human and insightful way; Lewy wrote, „The Jewish problem seized your innermost self and you tried to approach it from your political standpoint.”³⁸ The article closes with Lewy's birthday wishes for Wolf's 60th: „Allow us, dear Doctor, to give you a heartfelt *L'chaim!* Here's to your health and happiness! And to the health and happiness of humanity and humanness, for which you always took a stand....”³⁹

Under the leadership of Soviet government agencies in the early 1950s, anti-Zionist—that is, anti-Semitic—campaigns put East Bloc Jews under suspicion of being „enemy elements.” This included Jews in the GDR, including SED party members of Jewish heritage. Already in 1950, many Jewish Communists who had held positions of responsibility were thrown out of the Party in a first wave of purges. Many of them were accused of belonging to a „Jewish-Trotskyite movement.” The second wave followed at the end of 1952 after the Slansky trial in Prague, in which eleven of the fourteen accused were Jewish. In the wake of show trials in Prague, Moscow and Budapest, the central Party control commission of the SED's Central Committee drew the implications and purged the Party leadership of allegedly „Trotskyite and Zionist forces.” As a resistance fighter who had been raised Jewish, Friedrich Wolf suffered from these developments in the GDR. He was also aware that hundreds of Jews had fled the country in early 1953, because the climate of mistrust hit them hard and because the suspicion that, as a „Jewish nationalist,” one belonged to a western or Israeli espionage agency led to political repression, which made massive use of anti-Jewish imagery.

At the memorial service for Friedrich Wolf, who died on October 5, 1953, Bertolt Brecht announced: „An indefatigable fighter for a new humanism is gone from us.”⁴⁰ And, in fact, throughout his life Wolf was an active humanist; he stood in his life, his works and his actions for the fight against racism, anti-Semitism and degradation of human beings. Through some of his masterpieces, he inscribed himself in the literary history of Germany, which he enriched with true-to-life, humanistic German and European Jewish characters. Wolf's 1933 play „Professor Mamlock,” in particular, deserves a privileged place in the literary history of German and international drama. Throughout the world, this play was understood as an early and prophetic denunciation of the murderous National Socialist persecution of Jews. It has remained relevant as a great human drama of our era and a warning for the „diaspora of Jews and [other] peoples.”⁴¹ Only a man such as the doctor and playwright Friedrich Wolf could have brought this epoch-making drama out of his personal biography as a German Jew, Communist and humanist.

Translated by Skyler J. Arndt-Briggs, DEFA Film Library.

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Literary scholar **Henning Müller** earned his PhD from the Freie Universität in West Berlin in 1976, and completed his habilitation on Friedrich Wolf in East Berlin in 1989. His published volumes include: *Theater der Restauration* (1981) and *EXIL-ASYL: Tatort Deutschland. Texte von 1933 bis heute* (1994). At the end of 1988, he was the director of the first International Friedrich Wolf Symposium, which took place in Neuwied on the Rhine. His most important publications on Friedrich Wolf include: *Friedrich Wolf – Weltbürger aus Neuwied* (1988); *Der jüdische Arzt und Kommunist Dr. Friedrich Wolf. Dokumente des Terrors und der Verfolgung 1931-1944. Ein Memorial*. (1988); „*Ich warte nicht, bis man mich hier verhaftet*“. *Das Moskauer Exil der Familie Friedrich Wolf*,“ in *TEL AVIVER JAHRBUCH für deutsche Geschichte* (1995); „*Ist es, weil ich Jude bin?*“ *Jüdische Traditionslinien bei Friedrich Wolf*,“ in *Friedrich-Wolf-Kulturtag* in Neuwied (1998); „*Friedrich Wolf (1888-1953): Deutscher Jude – Schriftsteller – Sozialist*.“ *Jüdische Miniaturen, Volume 78* (2009). Müller is currently researching the relationship of Wolf and Lotte Rayß, his long-term companion and mother of his daughter Lena, who spent many years, innocent, in Stalin's labor camps.

- 1 See Friedrich Wolf's Feb. 23, 1939 letter to Curt Trepte.
- 2 <http://islam.about.com/od/quran/p/ayatalkursi.htm>, accessed 11/27/2013.
- 3 Wolf, Friedrich. "Brief an die Mutter Ida Wolf in Neuwied vom 31. 7. 1915." *Friedrich Wolf: Briefe. Eine Auswahl*. Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1969. p 8.
- 4 Wolf, Friedrich. "Brief an Dr. med. Lichtenstein vom 5. 2. 1951." *Friedrich Wolf–Weltbürger aus Neuwied*. Edited by Henning Müller. Neuwied: Peter Kehrein Verlag, 1988. p 127.
- 5 Wolf, Friedrich. "Brief an Käthe Wolf-Gumpold vom 18. 12. 1915." *Friedrich Wolf: Briefe. Eine Auswahl*. Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1969. p 18.
- 6 Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844." *Marx-Engels-Werke*. Supplement to Vo. 1. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968. p 569. See also: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *Über Religion*. 4th ed. Berlin, 1987. p 42.
- 7 Feuchtwanger, Lion. "Ein literarischer Nachfahre Friedrich Schillers. Friedrich Wolf zu seinem 60. Geburtstag. Pacific Palisades, California, USA, September 1948." *WER WAR WOLF? Friedrich Wolf (1888-1953) in Selbstzeugnissen, Bilddokumenten und Erinnerungen*. Edited by Henning Müller. Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1988. p 250.
- 8 See Ransenberg, Juan Gunter. "Letter to Henning Müller, 3/13/1989, from Pueblo, Mexico.
- 9 Wolf, Friedrich. "Das Öhmchen." *Gesammelte Werke in 16 Bänden*. Vol. 13. Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1960. p 376.
- 10 Wolf, Friedrich. "Brief an Gustav Gerstenberger (1918)." *Auf wieviel Pferden ich geritten: Der junge Friedrich Wolf. Eine Dokumentation*. Edited by Emmi Wolf and Brigitte Strzyk. Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1988. p 150.
- 11 Wolf, Friedrich. "Maxim Gorki: Revolutionärer Romantiker und sozialistischer Realist. Festrede zum 85. Geburtstag Maxim Gorkis" *Gesammelte Werke in 16 Bänden*. Vol. 5. Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1960. p 470.
- 12 Müller, Henning. *Ist es, weil ich Jude bin. Jüdische Traditionslinien bei Friedrich Wolf*. Berlin: Friedrich Wolf Gesellschaft, 1998. See also Franz Regnery. *Jüdische Gemeinde Neuwied*. Neuwied: Deutsch-Israelischer Freundeskreis Neuwied, 1988.
- 13 See Ransenberg. "Letter to Henning Müller."
- 14 Müller, Henning. *Der jüdische Arzt und Kommunist Dr. Friedrich Wolf. Dokumente des Terrors und der Verfolgung 1931–1944. Ein Memorial anlässlich des Jahres der 50. Wiederkehr der Reichspogromnacht vom 9. November 1938*. Neuwied: Stadtverwaltung, 1988.
- 15 Wolf, Friedrich. *Briefwechsel. Eine Auswahl*. Edited by Else Wolf and Walther Pollatschek. Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1968. p 251.
- 16 This version appeared under Wolf's pseudonym, Hans Scheer, and the title "Professor Mannheim;" it was translated by G. Hanoch.
- 17 Stern, Frank. "Professor Mannheim in Tel Aviv im Juli 1934." *PROTOKOLLBAND des 1. Internationalen Wissenschaftlichen Friedrich-Wolf-Symposiums in Neuwied am Rhein vom 2.-4. Dezember 1988*. Neuwied: Peter Kehrein Verlag, 1989. p 229.
- 18 The communist SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands) was the ruling party in the GDR.
- 19 Wolf, Friedrich. *Doktor Mamlocks Ausweg - Ein Schauspiel aus Deutschland*. Moskau. This 86-page manuscript—typewritten and mimeographed—has no indication of when it was written and was not accessible until 1991. The manuscript was archived at the Institut für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung/Zentrales Parteiarchiv Berlin (IfGA/ZPA) and is available now at SAPMO/Federal Archive, Arthur Pieck Estate 130/66.

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20 Ibid.

21 Ibid, p 146.

22 Ibid, p 147.

23 See Müller, Henning. „Friedrich Wolf.“ *Jüdische Miniaturen*. Vol. 87. Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2009. As new research shows, in 1937-38 alone there were 70,000 people arrested in the Soviet Union under the category „German.“ Among other discussions of the xenophobic paranoia that reigned, is an officious excerpt from the *Journal de Moscou*, dated April 12, 1938: „...every Japanese person who lives outside Japan is a spy, just as every German citizen who lives in a foreign country is a spy for the Nazis.“ This view, which was shared by the Politbureau of the Soviet Communist Party, resulted in mass arrests of German communists. From very close up, Friedrich Wolf and his family experienced the Chistkas, the Moscow show trials, Stalin’s terror and the climate of fear generated by the generalized suspicion that all German immigrants were spies.

24 See: Siao, Eva. Interview 1986. *Friedrich Wolf. Bilder einer deutschen Biographie*. Edited by Lew Hohmann. Berlin: Henschel-Verlag, 1988. p 211. Also published in: Eva Siao. *China. Mein Traum, mein Leben*. Bergisch-Gladbach: Lübbe Verlagsgruppe, 1990. p 59. See also: Müller, Henning. „Ich warte nicht, bis man mich hier verhaftet. Das Moskauer Exil der Familie Wolf.“ *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*. Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, Institut für Deutsche Geschichte, 1995. p 193.

25 See Müller, Reinhard, ed. *Die Säuberung. Moskau 1936: Stenogramm einer geschlossenen Parteiversammlung*. Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1991. See also: Henning Müller. „Antifaschismus und Stalinismus. Zum Beispiel Friedrich Wolf.“ *EINSPRUCH. Mitteilungen für die Mitglieder und Freunde der Friedrich-Wolf-Gesellschaft*, Vol. 3. 1 (1995). p 12.

26 German Committee of Soviet Writers Association “Einschätzung der deutschen Schriftsteller in Moskau.” A confidential letter evaluating German writers in Moscow, written by the administration of the GCSWA, represented by Comrades Apletin and Bata, and sent to W. Pieck, W. Florin and the Personnel Department. Moscow, Sept. 27, 1936. Letter in possession of the author.

27 Wolf, Friedrich. “Brief an J. W. Stalin. Moskau, 24. Juli 1945.” First published in: Henning Müller. *WER WAR WOLF?* p 212.

28 The author received personal information confirming that Walter Ulbricht was responsible for taking Friedrich Wolf’s name off of the list of returnees to Germany in 1945.

29 Wolf. “Brief an Stalin. ” p 212.

30 First published in: Henning Müller. *Der jüdische Arzt und Kommunist Dr. Friedrich Wolf*. p 37.

31 Heinrich Graf von Einsiedel shared this personal information with the author in November 1996.

32 In his notes for his lecture on “Jewrei” Friedrich Wolf wrote: “Before the war my grandfather and grandmother were murdered in Nordeck/Giessen by epileptics, anti-Semitic period, 1887, first crisis since the Gründerzeit, ban of SPD - 1889/90.”

33 Wolf, Friedrich. *JERUSALEM - ANGORA - MOSKAU. Entwurf einer Reise längs der vorderöstlichen Europascheide*. Hechingen, Dec. 23, 1924. Friedrich Wolf Archive, Folder 167, Draft 2.

34 Compare to Friedrich Wolf, “Tagebucheintragung vom 23. 12. 1924,” “Tagebuch-eintragung vom 28. 12. 1924,” and *JERUSALEM - ANGORA – MOSKAU*. Friedrich Wolf Archive, Folder 167, Draft 2.

35 Wolf, Friedrich. *Das Heldenepos des Alten Bundes. Aufgespürt und in deutschen Worten*. Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1925. p 9.

36 Ibid, p 33.

37 Ibid, p 10.

38 Lewy, Hermann. “Friedrich Wolf zum 60. Geburtstag.” *Der Weg. Zeitschrift für Fragen des Judentums*. Vol. 3 (52). Dec 24, 1948. p 11. Lewy’s article starts with the salutation: “Dear doctor” and closes with “Your Hermann Lewy.”

39 Ibid, p 12.

40 Brecht’s speech, held at the event entitled “In Memory of Friedrich Wolf” on Oct.18, 1953, was published in Theater der Zeit. Berlin: Verlag *Theater der Zeit*, Nov. 11, 1953. p 4.

41 This wording was taken from a press article entitled *Professor Mamlock* about the premiere of Friedrich Wolf’s play in Hebrew in Tel Aviv on July 25, 1934 under the title “Professor Mannheim”. See Frank Stern, “Professor Mannheim 1934 in Tel Aviv.” In: *Protokollband 1. Internationales Friedrich-Wolf-Symposium 1988 in Neuwied*. Neuwied 1989. p 235.