

Nazi "Proof" That Jews Possessed the Worst Humor in the World"

Mel Gordon*

The humor industry of pre-Nazi Weimar Berlin (1919-1933) was almost exclusively Jewish. In fact, it was more demographically Semitic than the Borscht Belt during its heyday. Ethnic Jews of all stripes – nominally defined Judaic-Berliners; Yiddish-speaking East European immigrants; thoroughly-assimilated German patriots; tentative half-Jewish *Mischlings*; and baptized converts (who frequently cloaked their non-Christian bloodlines with altered surnames and genetic imprints with cosmetic plastic surgeries) -- comprised less than 10% of the city's four million populace. Although a fractious and more-or-less unaffiliated minority community, they completely dominated the metropolis' popular entertainment venues. In 1932, for instance, all twelve of Berlin's leading cabaret conférenciers were heralded as members of the Hebrew persuasion. In allied fields, like comic publishing and revue writing, the percentage of Jewish participation was well above 90%.

This created a conundrum for Nazi cultural bureaucrats and academics. It was one thing to savage the Jews for their defilement of Aryan culture in all matters related to politics, medicine, social science, law, physics, finance, high art, and literature. The itinerant Israelites were inundated with master tricksters, confidence men, and cheats. (This would account for the nearly one-third of Germany's 38 Nobel Prize laureates in the Weimar era who came from lowly Jewish backgrounds.) But disparaging the Hebraic ability to generate laughs was a tough row to plow.

Additionally, native Germans were thought to be staid and humorless. The stereotypical image of an adult German male on Parisian music-hall stages and in Hollywood shorts was universally portrayed as an unfashionably attired, mustached buffoon. What could be more emblematic of the Central European Fatherland than an unsmiling, pudgy-faced, rigid, and constantly bellowing autocrat?

A new Nationalist Socialist definition of comedy and its social function was required. Maybe the ultimate goal of elevated Nordic humor was not mirth or even simple amusement but

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the acknowledgement of shared Aryan values. That was the ticket. No snarky retorts; no chortle-evoking, anti-establishment or anti-clerical tirades; no subversive political asides; no evocations of pompous authority figures; and certainly no flop sweat.

Even before the implementation of Hitler's Third Reich in the spring of 1933, Nazi ideologues attempted to explicate and condemn the Jewish propensity for nonstop mockery and invective self-parody. In the pro-Hitler satirical political weekly of 1931, *Die Zeitlupe*, most of the traditional Germanic humor fell flatly on the page. One feature column, however, appeared repeatedly, "Zion Looks in the Mirror." It was an account of Berlin Jewish jokes told by the Jews themselves. Typical gag: "Markus Löwenberg is lying on his deathbed. His final request to his wife, Rosalie, is for her to don a revealing lilac dress. Rosalie can't comprehend the dying man's plea. That was her flashy wardrobe for the Jewish Sabbath. Markus insists that she change outfits. After Rosalie returns to his room all dolled up, again she questions her husband's last wish. Markus sits up and explains that when the Grim Reaper appears, who will he rationally choose – a pathetic, shriveled up tailor or a busty old broad?"

Siegfried Kadner went much further. In his ever-popular treatise, *Race and Humor* (Munich: J. Lehmanns Verlag, 1930), which was reprinted in expanded versions in 1936 and 1939, he ranked various racial groups according to the printed documentation of their homespun jesting and professional comedy. Unsurprisingly, the Germans came out as the comic superstars of the civilized world and the Jews the most inferior. Scandinavians and British placed pretty high; the French and Italian were either too sex-addled or childish to trade in dexterous wit; barely literate American blacks possessed, at best, an adroit feral jocularity. Sadly, even Berlin and Viennese banter was mortally contaminated with toxic doses of uncouth Jewish irony and astringent insults.

Genuine Nordic jokes defended and championed the *volkish* ethic of communal labor, common sense, virtuous deeds, and social cohesion. Semitic humor was invariably twisted, cruel, bitterly derisive, and solipsistic. The Chosen Nation even mocked their Creator and Protector. In shtetl chapbooks, they presented a beady-eyed Moses on Mount Sinai staring skeptically at heaven: "Let me get this straight! We cut off the tips of our dicks and you promise to take care of us until the end of time! Would it be possible to put that on some parchment?"

In fact, the Jews cynically upended any criticism of their race by parading their own criminalities and weaknesses as laugh-out-loud sendups. It was virtually impossible for anti-

Semites to scorn malicious *Ostjuden* folkways or vain Judaic endeavors to assimilate into high society better than the Jews themselves. That accursed people had a monopoly on self-deprecation, topsy-turvy storytelling, indelicate hi-jinks, aggressive wordplay, illogic, and obscene denigration. Sure, Berliners adored Jewish comedians; their routines never followed the dictates of superior Aryan jollity. And some Jewish MCs delivered German jokes even better than sketch artists born to the Master Race. That was anthropological proof of their ancestral perfidy.

Another tendentious analysis of Jewish humor appeared in J. Keller and Hanns Andersen's, *The Jew as Criminal* (Berlin and Leipzig: Nibelungen-Verlag, 1937). Here, Julius Streicher, the Reich's most flagrant anti-Semite and publisher of the notorious weekly hate-sheet, *Der Stürmer*, introduced and endorsed Kelly and Andersen's quasi-sociological examination of Jewish criminality. Hebrews, in their objective Aryan assessment, were genetically predisposed to engage in vile and illicit activities. Moreover, all Jewish culture was poisonously tainted with racial treachery and deleterious legerdemain.

Bizarrely, Keller and Andersen conflated Jewish drollness and joking with lethal anti-German brutality. After surveying the history of Jewish political deception, the Israelite predilection to petty crime, illegal gambling, white slavery, sexual molestation, and pornography, the Nazi criminologists began their chapter on Jewish Murderers with a breakdown of Jewish humor. Their self-deprecating repartee and the ability to evoke laughter was one of the Jews' most effective weapons because it obscured and camouflaged their most evil intentions and made them appear to be physically harmless.

"The image of the Jew propagated in the Jewish joke – one of a bow-legged, haggling pest, peddler or shopkeeper -- has become one of the greatest successes of the Jewish Nation. It is difficult not to laugh at Jewish jokes. Laughter ameliorates hate and fear, and disdain cripples the will to fight. Their ultimate goal is therefore achieved. The Jew as an outlandish character and petty thief conceals his most destructive quality: his avarice for economic, political and cultural power in the host nation and the subordination of its people under the thumb and the interests of international Jewry. The Jew is not a ridiculous, but a dangerous, creature.

"That image of the hook-nosed, wildly gesticulating, toady, untrustworthy, and dishonest Jew is even accepted by many opponents of Jewry. They do not doubt that the Jew can accomplish any swindle, any fraud, any trick, but they deny him the aptitude for physical violence. The response to the question: 'Do Jewish hooligans or even murderers exist?' is almost

always: 'No!' The reality is something quite different: the Jew is capable of any act, if his own interests or those of his race are served."

For Germans living in the expanding Reich, especially those far from Berlin, Jewish Humor was unveiled as yet another tool in the Jews unending quest for world domination. These were a clever and duplicitous folk. They could even pilfer an anti-Semitic appellative like "kike" or "heeb" and transform it into a self-mocking honorific.

Across Europe, the New World, throughout the British Commonwealth, and even in faraway climes where few Jews resided, Hebrew monologists and entertainers produced shrieks of giddy laughter and brought indigenous audiences to their feet. Something had to be done to halt this. The honor of the Reich and its Führer was at stake.

Ultimately, the Nazi war against the Jews exacted a precipitous toll on much of Germany's once celebrated rostrum of popular entertainment. Aryan comics and humorists, to be sure, quickly replaced the fleeing, incarcerated, or murdered Jewish merrymakers but, for the most part, they lacked the cosmopolitan flare and uniquely sardonic appeal that characterized their contemporary Semitic counterparts. To outsiders, the formerly vaulted German commerce in sophisticated stage and screen farce had utterly collapsed and reverted to its insular classical or provincial roots.

Even today, two generations after the destruction of Hitler's ethnically cleansing regime, it would be difficult to identify very many German comedians or comic writers who have attained international renown. On the other hand, an ever expanding spectrum of Jewish comedians continues to enthuse millions of clubgoers, television spectators, and film viewers worldwide. If anything, Kadner's 1930 racist thesis linking humor appreciation to specific national or cultural groups has been turned upside down.

Jewish-All Too Jewish: The Chosen People Reflected in Satire by Wieland der Schmied (Stuttgart: Drei Eichen Verlag, 1934)

One Galitzianer to the other: "Vat do you mean I got fleas? Dummy, I'm no dog! Can't you see I got legs?" *Simplizismus*, 1907

S. Felix Mendelsohn, *The Jew Laughs* (Chicago: L.M. Stein Publisher, 1935)