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## Contents

KATHRIN WITTLER Von Autorschaft, Freundschaft und anderen Hasardspielen. Mendelssohns Zueignung seiner <i>Philosophischen Schriften</i> (1761) an Lessing . . . . .	7
CHRISTOPH SCHMITT-MAASS Verstehen statt vernichten. Der Literaturkritiker als Anatomist bei Gotthold Ephraim Lessing . . . . .	29
SUSAN GUSTAFSON The Free Play of Imagination in Lessing's <i>Laokoon</i> . . . . .	53
MICHAEL MULTHAMMER Gegen wen richtet sich die Polemik in Lessings Freimaurergesprächen <i>Ernst und Falk?</i> Zur Funktion der Dialogform . . . . .	71
JAN KÜHNE A Parable of Three Languages. <i>Nathan der Weise</i> in Arabic, Hebrew, and German . . . . .	91
WOLFGANG JANSEN Theatralische Gedächtnisfeiern nach Lessings Tod 1781. Protagonisten – Spielstätten – Kontexte . . . . .	111
REINHARD G. MÜLLER Perspektivischer Kosmopolitismus. Lessing und Nietzsche . . . . . Lessing's Laughter / Lessings Gelächter	133

## A Parable of Three Languages

Nathan der Weise *in Arabic, Hebrew, and German*

JAN KÜHNE

»A safeguard for wisdom is silence.«  
Mishna Avot 3:13

Which of the three religions – Judaism, Christianity, or Islam – is the most sensible and, therefore, convincing? This question is at the heart of *Nathan der Weise*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's humanist play. As a representative of the generation prior to Goethe and Schiller, Lessing is one of the quintessential representatives of the Enlightenment. His play inaugurated a critical discourse that prevails to this day,<sup>1</sup> and has undergone a revival on German stages during the past two decades. While being relevant to our concerns today, Lessing's play also perpetuates a specific tradition through its enlightened interpretation of an ancient literary trope – the so-called ring parable – which is meant to address and answer the polemic question, whose religion is supreme?

This paper addresses questions pertaining to the theatrical reception of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* (1779) in non-German and non-Christian contexts. Through an analysis of what we assume to be its first professional trilingual performance – by Ofira Henig in Israel (2016) – this paper points to the potential obstacles and possibilities regarding the play's aesthetical stageability and ideological adaptability for today's audiences. I intend to highlight the relevance of the Israeli reception for a yet-to-be-conducted research project on the Arabic response to the play, while criticizing a recent German trend to adapt *Nathan* to the context of encounters between the Western and the Muslim world. My thoughts aim to provide an incipient contribution to the developing discourse on multilingualism in contemporary theatre.

In *Nathan der Weise*, Lessing set his version of the ring parable in Jerusalem around 1187–1188, shortly after the relatively non-violent Muslim conquest of this religious megalopolis. Its new ruler, Sultan Salah ad-Din, interrogates the Jewish merchant Nathan, intending to intimidate him and, thus, render him submissive to Muslim rule, as well as to take possession of his wealth.<sup>2</sup> Nathan avoids giving a direct answer to the Sultan's trick question, as to which religion he would give preference, and responds, instead, with the famous ring parable, the story of a father bequeathing to

his three sons, briefly before his death, three rings, leaving them to grapple with the question which of these rings is the original one. A judge, brought in to decide on the issue, refuses to identify the original ring and tells the sons that it is through their deeds alone that they will attract God's and mankind's favor.<sup>3</sup>

The historically unprecedented fact that in eighteenth-century Germany a Christian author had chosen to present a Jew as a wise and positive figure on stage<sup>4</sup> had an indelible impact on the shaping of modern German Judaism. George L. Mosse has argued that »Lessing's play *Nathan* was and remained the Magna Charta of German Jewry, the popularization of *Bildung* and the Enlightenment.«<sup>5</sup> According to Mosse, »[t]he play was thought to provide a clear statement of Lessing's love for humanity regardless of religion, a love exemplified by his close friendship with Moses Mendelssohn«<sup>6</sup> (after whom Lessing had modeled the figure of Nathan the Wise). Hannah Arendt sought to reestablish this paradigm for post-1945 German-Jewish discourses in 1959, upon receiving the Lessing Prize in Hamburg. Depicting Lessing as the classical writer on friendship, which, in her eyes, kept humanity alive in dark times, Arendt defines Lessing's dramatic poem as »the classic play of friendship« and regards it as a model for post-World War II political discourses.<sup>7</sup>

More than two centuries of critical literature on Lessing's enlightened paradigm – spanning from the dawn of the French Revolution to these days – are too large a corpus to be reviewed here. I will, thus, limit the focus of my discussion to the world-changing attacks of September 11, 2001, in whose aftermath a resurgence of Lessing's play as a viable stage for furthering conversations with Islam and with Arabic cultures at large can be traced. In the first part of this paper, I seek to problematize such a revival trend and question the adaptability of Lessing's play to present-day reality. I am interested in assessing the play in the context of its reception history, with the aim of delineating its discursive and dramaturgical limits. Since the original dramatic frame of *Nathan der Weise* mediates the parable for Lessing's Christian contemporaries, it is difficult to realize how it would be of value to Muslim audiences. In the second part I confront these theoretical reflections with empirical evidence gleaned from two recent theater productions featuring Arab actors: a) the first contemporary Arabic adaptation in Cairo, Egypt (2005), and b) the first professional trilingual production in Israel (2016). My research and interviews record for the first time Arabic actors' and audiences' reactions to Lessing's Muslim characters on the theatrical stage. These voices attest to the limits of the adaptability of Lessing's play – and its orientalist bias – and, thus, its inability to reach non-Christian and non-German cultures and audiences.

Inspired by Ofira Henig's multi-lingual and multi-ethnic production of *Nathan der Weise* (Israel 2016), I offer, in the third part of my paper, a dramaturgical solution to this problem by suggesting the possibility of cross-casting, which foregoes the biases underscored by Lessing's play. Rather than a lateral casting, which would assign an actor to a specific character of his or her own ethnic belonging, I argue in favor of assigning characters foreign or, ideally, of opposed ethnic identities in comparison to the actor's own ethnic background. This shift is aimed at fostering dialectical empathy – to enable actors and audiences, as it were, to step into the shoes of the respective other/s. Finally, I present some thoughts based on my performance analysis of the above mentioned production by Henig, which focus on the possibilities entailed in multi-lingual theatrical performances. I describe a performative space rendered accessible by the introduction of different languages into dialogue with each other, which I deem pertinent to the content of Lessing's ring-parable, its reception, and to any theory on multilingualism in theater as well. By way of applying insights gained from these practical experiences, I return to Lessing's literary text and propose a new reading. The paper concludes with dramaturgical suggestions for the staging of Lessing's version of the ring-parable adapted to contemporary audiences. I close with an outlook on a still prevailing research lacuna in regard to the theatrical reception of Lessing's play in non-German and non-Christian contexts. However, I am less concerned with the judiciousness of Lessing's ring-parable than with the feasibility of a meaningful dramatic adaptation that would meet the multireligious and multilingual challenges that contemporary societies and inter-human performances are confronted with today. Central to my analysis is a reading which positions Lessing's play in the context of the oral and literary tradition of the ring-parable (and not vice versa).

### I. Remarks on the Reception of Lessing's Ring Parable

In her revision of the history of the ring parable, Iris Shagrir allocates the literary archetype of this wisdom tale within the Muslim culture of tenth-century Persia. Shagrir emphasizes the fact that »it was Islam, with its teachings from the Koran and from other authorities that originally permitted the expression of such openness.«<sup>8</sup> Lessing had studied Islam,<sup>9</sup> and this is manifest in his interpretation of the ring parable. For example, the idea of a friendly competition between different religions for the good of mankind is already expressed, albeit differently, in the Quran (5th Sura, Vers 48).<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Lessing appears to have been the first one to transpose the ring parable to the genre of dramatic poetry has passed inadvertently. However, only owing to Friedrich Schiller's edited version (1801) did Lessing's

»dramatic poem« become an ongoing success on the theatrical stage,<sup>11</sup> and it was only a quarter of a century after the publication of Lessing's *Nathan* that G. W. F. Hegel would advocate scenic representations of dramatic poetry on the theatrical stage.<sup>12</sup> Until then, the widespread genre of the »Buchoder Lesedrama,« to which Lessing's *Nathan* belongs, had entailed readings primarily outside the theater, often as a social event in the bourgeois setting of the salon.<sup>13</sup> Lessing resorted to the medium of dramatic poetry in order to circumvent censorship on the part of the Prussian authorities, following his controversy with Pastor Melchior Goeze – the inner-Christian theological debate of the so-called *Fragmentenstreit*.<sup>14</sup> By inverting the negative connotations associated with stereotypes of Jews and, to a lesser degree, also of Muslims, Lessing challenged in *Nathan der Weise* a Christian self-exclusivist dogma and missionary imperative. For this reason, too, his long dramatic poem takes issue primarily with, and in nuanced ways, Christian positions.

This is reflected in the play's asymmetric ratio of religious identities: five characters are Christians, four Muslims, and only one is Jewish. The Muslims (who impersonate Christian contemporaries of Lessing, as will be explained later) and the Jew in the play are minorities, introduced solely as antagonistic critics to their Christian counterparts.<sup>15</sup> Neither did Lessing have any intention of writing a »Muslim Lehrstück« – that is, a didactical play, as Navid Kermani put it<sup>16</sup> – nor did he foresee any collective future for the Jewish people, as Jakob Hessing has noted.<sup>17</sup> Schiller's footnote in *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, therefore, regarding the comic character of *Nathan der Weise*, which supposedly rendered it unsuitable for tragic interpretations, readily confirms a Christian perspective.<sup>18</sup> Yet, from a Jewish perspective, the outlook of this play is tragic.<sup>19</sup> Surprising, therefore, is the enthusiastic Jewish reception of the play. Naama Sheffi's study reveals that the majority of works by German authors translated into Hebrew during the nineteenth century were those of Lessing.<sup>20</sup> Enlightened and German-speaking Jews in particular had perceived Lessing and *Nathan* as foreseeing significant historic changes, at times even attaching messianic hopes to it,<sup>21</sup> shaping, thereby, a paradigm of modern Jewish identity. This utopian euphoria comes to a tragic closure with the 1933 Berlin production of the *Jüdischer Kulturbund*, which excluded *Nathan* from the final scene of mutual embraces, and left him isolated on stage after the curtain had fallen.<sup>22</sup>

In her study *Wiedergutmachung im Programm*, Anat Feinberg describes transformation processes in post-war Germany through her analysis of stage depictions of *Nathan*. From a romanticized figure, *Nathan* became subject to more ambiguous depictions during the sixties and seventies. Followed by harshly critical interpretations in the eighties, which sought to deconstruct idealized, at times philo-semitic representations of the Jew (*Nathan*), the

nineties witnessed an exhaustion of the subject, illustrated by performances such as George Tabori's *Nathans Tod*.<sup>23</sup>

## II. Notes on the Arabic Reception of *Nathan*

Before delving into the background of this change, it is important to pay attention to the dramaturgical emphasis lent to Lessing's Muslim characters in the past two decades. It is questionable, however, whether, without the 9/11-attacks, *Nathan der Weise* would have undergone a revival on German stages. A small debate ensued in the aftermath of Claus Peymann's 2002 production, which picked up on the attacks.<sup>24</sup> Navid Kermani deplored the fact that Lessing's poem had been reduced to a paradigm of coexistence, by way of presenting tolerance as indifference.<sup>25</sup> Theologian Karl-Josef Kuschel, conversely, criticized Peyman's negative depictions of Muslims, while advocating *Nathan* as a kind of panacea to the challenges which confront contemporary Muslim societies.<sup>26</sup> Michael Bohlander even regarded Lessing as a kind of potential reformer of Islam, in the context of the Arab Spring.<sup>27</sup> Here, Lessing's poem is turned into myth, and the dialectics of Enlightenment become visible in the history of the ring parable, accompanied by a shift from orientalist to militaristic depictions of Lessing's Muslim characters on stage.<sup>28</sup>

To refer to an Arabic reception of *Nathan der Weise* seems to be an overstatement in light of the following facts: Up to date only two Arabic translations are known to exist<sup>29</sup> – the Palestinian Christian-Arab German teacher Elias Nasr-Allah Haddad translated and published *Nathan Al-Hakeem* along with an introduction in 1932, along with a separate German-Arabic dictionary specific to the vocabulary used in his translation.<sup>30</sup> Both books were printed by the Syrian Orphanage Press in Jerusalem, probably as study material for Haddad's German courses at the Talitha Kumi School. However, to date we have no indications regarding any theatrical performances there.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, Egyptian-Muslim translator Fauziya Hassan translated *Nathan* for the first documented Arabic production, directed by Hany Ghanem featuring at the 2004 inauguration ceremony of the German University in Cairo, in 2004.<sup>32</sup> Both the translation and the production had been commissioned by the Egyptian branch of the Goethe-Institute, whose director at the time – Enzo Wetzel – described an unusually long and problematic production process which spanned over two years. In a first attempt to produce the play, his actors had left director Ghanem, since »no one dared to play *Nathan*,« according to Wetzel, who explained that »a »good Jew« is not anticipated in the world view of the Egyptians.«<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, Ghanem – a film-director by profession – shortened and changed the play

considerably: Unlike the original text, that presented the Jew as wise and at the focal point of events, according to Egyptian critic Nelly Yusuf, the production aimed at allotting the three characters symbolizing the three religions equal importance, as well as redesigning the scope of their roles accordingly, in order to reach »the Egyptian public without causing discomfort (حساسية).«<sup>34</sup> However, when Ghanem chose to stage Salah ad-Din not as »a visible figure on stage, but turned him into a mere voice,« he approximated conventional depictions of the prophet Mohammad,<sup>35</sup> or even suggested a place reserved for an intangible God, decisively above the Jew Nathan; his intentions were, according to Yusuf, to »restore« Salah ad-Din as a symbol of inter-religious tolerance and justice for the Egyptian public, »which adores him.«<sup>36</sup>

Audience reactions ranged from »cautious to benign,« according to Wetzell, who could have been among those voices reported by Yusuf to have criticized the short duration of the play, since with the omission of central parts from Lessing's play – and, accordingly, from Hassan's comprehensive translation – it lasted only an hour.<sup>37</sup> A full-length translation was published in 2009, in Egypt and in Germany, featuring the title – *The Three Rings [Khawatim al-thalatha]* instead of *Nathan der Weise*.<sup>38</sup> This shift of emphasis in the title from the Jewish protagonist to the ring parable is noteworthy not only because of what it tells about Ghanem's Egyptian adaptation, but also in the context of the critical debate that ensued as part of the reception of this translation in Germany.<sup>39</sup>

So far, only few Muslim voices have joined this German debate: Silvia Horsch, a German Muslim convert, emphasizes the influence of Islam upon Lessing<sup>40</sup> – a topic, to which also Zahim Mohammed Muslim had devoted his Ph.D. dissertation at the Humboldt University.<sup>41</sup> Both seek to underscore the influence of Islamic scriptures, and especially the Quran, on Lessing's writings, including his Enlightenment interpretation of the ring parable. Similarly, philosopher and scholar Ahmad Milad Karimi depicts the critical stance of Islam towards its sister religions as a reflection of Lessing's ring parable, while presenting its very essence as dialogical.<sup>42</sup> It seems to be too early, however, to assess whether these Muslim voices might have had any impact on dramaturgical choices in German-speaking theaters.

Discussions concerning the exclusion of women from the ring parable – as problematized and discussed by Elisabeth Schrattenholzer<sup>43</sup> – are still marginal in current debates. A recent, all-male colloquium regarding the potential relevance of the ring parable (as a »paradigm for inter-religious dialogue today«) lends itself to a buttressing of Schrattenholzer's critique.<sup>44</sup> Apparently, Lessing's dramatic poem continues to provide an arena for critical, theological, philosophical, and political, as well as polemic debates, but is over-interpreted by those who read it as a paradigm for present and fu-

ture Christian-Muslim encounters, also on account of its patriarchal design. This becomes clear, too, if we accept the view that Lessing had modeled the main Muslim character, the Sultan, after a Christian contemporary: Johann Caspar Lavater, who had publicly attempted to convert Moses Mendelssohn (after whom Lessing had modeled his Nathan).<sup>45</sup> Mendelssohn, however, responded like Lessing's Nathan: he diplomatically avoided a confrontation and elaborated in his answers on inter-religious tolerance.<sup>46</sup> This so-called Lavater-Affair informs Lessing's staging of the ring parable – the play's rationale<sup>47</sup> –, in the encounter between Nathan and the Sultan, who is to be read less as an Arab Muslim but rather as embodying the critical reflection of a Christian theologian.<sup>48</sup> Lessing employed such disguises in order to dodge the censorship following his debate with Johann Melchior Goeze, the chief-pastor of Hamburg (the so-called *Fragmentenstreit*), who informs the character of the fanatic Patriarch in *Nathan der Weise*.<sup>49</sup> Lessing had sidelined Lavater in his figure of Sultan Salach A-Din, as it were, along with the Patriarch, as dogmatic opponents of intellectual and spiritual progress, represented by the Jew Nathan. Inscribed in this Muslim character, therefore, is less a positive reevaluation of Islam than the critical depiction of a Christian theologian who betrayed the friendship he had forged with a Jewish philosopher.<sup>50</sup> Such tendency could not pass unnoticed, at least among professional Arab and Muslim actors, as demonstrated in the next section of this paper.

### III. Ofira Henig's Tri-Lingual Scenic Reading

Whereas most contemporary productions of *Nathan der Weise* bring to the fore encounters between the three monotheistic religions, Ofira Henig focused, in her scenic reading, on the creation of a space in which three languages – Arabic, German, and Hebrew – could be set into dialogue, »without waving the flag of coexistence.«<sup>51</sup> The production was launched – like most performances of *Nathan* that involve Arabic – from Germany.<sup>52</sup> However, this production by the Tel Aviv Goethe Institute involved professional actors.<sup>53</sup> Thereby, it is set apart from a series of multi-lingual, international theater youth projects using *Nathan*, beginning in the year 2000.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, despite Henig's axiom, »not to let God enter the rehearsal room,« his political shadow did: Initially, some Arab actors refused to participate in the production on account of the play's orientalism and its historical framework – the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of German-Israeli diplomatic relationships.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, those Christian- and Muslim-Arab actors who did participate for artistic reasons felt they could not endow Lessing's Muslim characters with verisimilitude. In our interviews, which for the first time record unmediated voices – in the

absence of a coherent study on the Arabic theatrical reception of *Nathan* – the actors agreed upon the fact that the Muslim aspect of the drama had been neglected.<sup>56</sup> The Muslim roles had fallen, as Sittah's actress put it, »in between the chairs« of Christian-Jewish relationships in Germany.<sup>57</sup> Whereas Sittah was portrayed by Salwah Nakkara as a domineering and witty woman, on the verge of becoming emancipated, Salah ad-Din did not match his historical model. According to Suheil Haddad, after the performances Arabic spectators in front of him expressed their disagreement over his and, essentially, over Lessing's unusual and slightly derogatory depiction of the famous Arab war hero – an observation already made by Friedrich Schiller.<sup>58</sup> For Haddad, nevertheless, these reactions mark an achievement, since theater ought to liberate audiences from prejudices.<sup>59</sup> However, Yara Elham-Jarrar, who had played Recha, remarked laughingly that Lessing's Salah ad-Din simply amounts to nothing but a »Cloomnik« (פּוֹלְטְנִיק) – a »nobody.«<sup>60</sup>

Elham-Jarrar's role exemplifies one of the two instances of cross-casting: as an Israeli Muslim-Arab she played Nathan's adopted daughter and spoke in Hebrew, instead of Arabic – a relationship, which reflects on the actress's own experience as a Palestinian subjected to the power relations of the Jewish State.<sup>61</sup> This cross-casting, however, was incidental; so too was the choice of a Jewish actor for the role of the maleficent Patriarch – the renowned theater scholar and artist Gad Kaynar, who performed his role not in Hebrew, but in German.<sup>62</sup> Bearing in mind that in a scenic reading an actor is not expected to disappear behind her/his role, this casting was, nevertheless, significant. It sided Nathan with another Jewish character on stage, thereby not only alluding to the inner-Jewish rift between religious and secular forces in Israel, but also to the genesis and cataclysm of modern Judaism in Europe during the industrialized genocide of the German Final Solution.<sup>63</sup> In Kaynar's own words: »as a German-speaking Israeli actor, the language presented an additional alienating factor since, although I acted and taught in German before, it is still my MOTHER'S tongue, namely, mine and not mine at the same time« (emphasis in the original).<sup>64</sup> As the son of Jewish refugees who had fled from Nazi-Germany to Israel, Kaynar was brought up in a Hebrew-language educational system; but at home he spoke German, the native language of his parents. His maternal language, therefore, became a secondary mother-tongue.<sup>65</sup>

Henig's incidental exceptions (Elham-Jarrar and Kaynar) within her intended lateral casting – German actors playing German characters, and so forth – highlights the necessity and not just the possibility of choosing cross-casting in adaptations of Lessing's play unto non-Christian contexts. Considering the play's aforementioned asymmetric representation of religious characters, cross-casting allows for a differentiation of such bias in

favor of audiences, other than that which Lessing had in mind; nevertheless, still loyal to the underlying motivation of his play (that is, catering the ring-parable to target audiences in an appropriate and critical way).

Furthermore, cross-casting may create dramatic tensions imbued with meta-theatrical potential, since the very mimetic capacity of an actor may come to represent the emphasis of the play on the potential of unbiased compassion and empathy in intersubjective conduct (»von Vorurteilen freie Liebe«).<sup>66</sup> This possibility points to a structural similarity between Lessing's dramaturgy and his theology, apparent in Henig's focus on the performativity of reading – a choice truest to Lessing's original reading-drama – a point, upon which I would like to elaborate before presenting my conclusions.

#### IV. On Performing Multilingualism and Speech Acts of Silence

Attending Henig's trilingual production in Jerusalem, *Nathan* appeared to me as entertaining, Mozartesque theater, yet, on account of its dialogues, also as absurd.<sup>67</sup> In spite of the Hebrew supertitles, the dialogues staged nothing but disconnected discourses, let alone trialogues.<sup>68</sup> Only momentary speech acts of code-switching hinted at rudimentary dialogical encounters, beyond linguistic borders. Therefore, I began to focus on a hitherto unexperienced quality of silence in-between verbal exchanges. It seemed to me as if silence in three languages had a different quality to it. Fascinated, I recalled Walter Benjamin's notion of pure language ideally emerging in the process of translation,<sup>69</sup> and Bialik's poetic gaze into the void beneath language, »at that which is on the other side [of] the word.«<sup>70</sup> Henig confirmed the importance of this silence as an artistic statement, produced dialectically through the three languages, whose exchange amounted to most spectators as nothing but noise – but only if you did not understand the language of the other, according to Henig.<sup>71</sup> As a result, most spectators listened more attentively, Nakkarah explained further.<sup>72</sup> What I had experienced, then, was greater attentiveness that amplified these moments. Watching the video-recording,<sup>73</sup> however, I failed to re-experience this sensation. A sense of loss which, therefore, confirms Erika Fischer-Lichte's observation that a performance is constituted by interactions between actors and spectators that are contingent upon bodily co-presence – the so-called »autopoietic feedback loop,« which is irretrievably lost once the event is over.<sup>74</sup> Doron Tavory, too, who had played Nathan,<sup>75</sup> attested to the actors' heightened attentiveness, who, on account of their multi-lingual interaction, were highly dependent upon any visual sign, in addition to the linguistic ones (such as eye-contact, gestures, and so forth). Thereby, the basic theatrical technique of attentive, unbiased and open listening was intensified, and Lessing's ideological statement was hypostatized to an aesthetic level.

In Henig's production, it was the medium of language that was paramount, rather than the message it conveyed.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, communicative acts of silence and acts of attention, such as listening, had become as important as speech. It is for this reason that mutual understanding had been enabled, and not primarily through verbal information. According to Murad Abu Elheja, who had played Al Hafi, Henig's interpretation gave rise to what he calls the »metaphor of the production«: »We see different people who, despite speaking different languages do understand each other« – that »notwithstanding their differences it is possible to overcome cultural and religious gaps.«<sup>77</sup> This overcoming of differences, Kaynar argues in his comment on an earlier draft of this paper, »has also been catered for by the co-acting of performers who – at least some of them – never acted together before. It was a highly challenging task that, in a way, constituted a correlative experience to what you [the author] describe[s].«<sup>78</sup> Lessing's Parable of the Three Rings metamorphosed, in Henig's production, into the »Parable of three Languages« – Hebrew, German, and Arabic.

Could we posit, therefore, that Henig exposed the dramaturgical grounds underlying Lessing's theology, by tracing the ideological aspects of the ring parable to its origins in the art of theater and oral story telling?<sup>79</sup> If we retrace our steps from the analysis of her scenic reading to a textual analysis of Lessing's dramatic poem with this new awareness in mind, we may discern these speech acts of silence as a *leitmotif* in Lessing's writings that has hitherto passed, to the best of my knowledge, unnoticed.<sup>80</sup> A tension between *Gehorsam* and *Hören* – between obedience and listening – as well as between different kinds of silence is noticeable in all characters, but may only be alluded to here as a point of departure for future research. Suffice it to recall that in the final scene the embraces are not only multilateral, but also mute ones: »unter stummer Wiederholung allseitiger Umarmungen« ends the play.<sup>81</sup> The climax of this motive can be found in Nathan's telling of the ring parable, which causes the Sultan, after repeated injunctions, to listen – »Du hörst doch?« / Sultan: »Ich höre, ich höre! – Komm mit deinem Märchen / Nur bald zu Ende,« just in order to eventually fall silent – »Ich muss verstummen« – shortly after Lessing's parable had highlighted the fact that the real ring could not, literally, »open its mouth.«<sup>82</sup>

The real ring cannot speak; it has no language.

### Conclusion

Clearly, Lessing's play has not been written in order to address Arabic or Muslim audiences. Lessing's Muslim characters but mask his criticism on Christian contemporaries. Therefore, in evaluating the possible relevance of the play for non-German and, especially, Arabic and Muslim audiences,

it is necessary to study theatrical adaptations outside Germany too; this concerns both the need to understand its critical philosophico-theological reception and the actual feasibility of Lessing's critique of Christianity and its vision of humanism in non-Christian contexts and cultures. One dramaturgical solution for this crux would be to isolate Lessing's version of the ring parable from the frame story of the play and re-contextualize it elsewhere, with the demands of contemporary productions in mind, specifically non-German audiences and their local conventions. This may mean a decontextualized presentation of Lessing's version of the parable, as a drama in itself. And it may have an effect on the play's characters, for instance the Sultan. Alternatively, a new theater play may be written based on Lessing's version of the ring parable. Such an adaptation will, most likely, alter it radically, as apparent, for example, in Ghanem's Egyptian adaptation, in which the apotheosized figure of Salah ad-Din comes to trump that of the Jew Nathan.<sup>83</sup>

Yet another solution to this dramaturgical problem is offered – intentionally or not – in Ofira Henig's multilingual scenic reading with professional German, Jewish, and Palestinian actors in Israel. Cross-casting furthers a tendency already hinted at in *Nathan der Weise*, which Lessing, however, would not fully implement: a transcending of religious identifications.<sup>84</sup> One could speculate about his reasons, which may be connected to the risk of exposing the play's dramatic disguises. But any artistic director producing the play today would have to clarify this aspect and further subvert the conflation of the characters' ethnic roots and religious affiliations. Cross-casting is one possibility that points to a structural similarity between Lessing's dramaturgy and his theology, and not only on account of an actor's meta-theatrical capacity that highlights the very act of empathy.

Henig's production indicates a departure from concerns with multicultural and multi-religious issues, in favor of a multi-lingual production. Herein, too, the dramaturgy conveys, through its form, central aspects of the dramatic content: in speech acts of silence a performative space may be explored, from which conversation becomes possible through attentive listening across language barriers. Any exhaustive analytical approach to the study of multilingualism would have to account for this aspect, possibly by drawing upon linguistic methods, for instance, by accurately measuring the length of breaks, and by analyzing their mutual relationships.

In Lessing's play *Nathan der Weise* the act of listening (*Hören*), which he subtly distinguishes from unselfconscious acts of obedience (*Gehorsam*), corresponds not only symbolically to an unbiased perception of the other. The boundaries of comprehension on the side of actors and audiences who are unable to understand all three languages pose both a challenge and a risk for any theatrical production: only from such a stance of attentive listen-



ing may one establish a conscious relationship (not only by acquiring the language of the other). However, the danger of meaningless pronunciation, perfunctory repetition, and absurd exchange – the danger of xenolalia, the ability to utter a language which one does not understand – is imminent. These aspects seem to pose some of the most considerable obstacles for a multilingual shift in theater performances and studies, and, more generally, in cultural studies and the humanities.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, it is precisely through the ability of listening to and imitating the not-yet intelligible that a child initiates his or her language command from parents and environment. This mimesis is enabled by a performative act: a child speaks *as if* he or she understands the very words it is repeating (which necessitates the a priori act of listening). This performativity – suspending a reality devoid of understanding by acting *as if* understanding<sup>86</sup> – informs not only Lessing's dramatic poem and its theatrical adaptation, but also the underlying religious issues and rituals. According to Egyptologist Jan Assmann, Lessing's version of the ring parable singles out this common underlying performative principle and transposes it as the basis of a meaningful encounter for all religions.<sup>87</sup> Only on the basis that each religion consider itself *as if* it were the most judicious and truthful, each religion could perform acts – crawl and babble, as it were – to the benefit of all mankind and its allegorical image: that intangible Goddess. Truth in religion, according to Assmann's interpretation of Lessing, may never be constituted in a final way. It can only be the partial outcome of a successful performance. But any such performance needs to explore multilingual spaces through speech acts of silence and listening. Because, as the philosopher Giorgio Agamben argues, there is no longer a univocal belief in God, truth, people, or language, in whose name we can still speak. This missing name, however, »demands us to speak in its name,« and this calls forth »not the reality but the possibility of something,«<sup>88</sup> such as the prospect of the theater to speak and keep silent in many languages, in tacit heteroglossia.

Issues pertaining to multi-lingualism and the necessity of speech acts of silence, as described in this paper, are of importance to any contemporary and future production of Lessing's ring parable in a self-consciously multi-ethnic and multi-religious post-colonial context<sup>89</sup> – possibly even as pantomime or dance.<sup>90</sup> Acts of silence and listening, as well as related acts, such as reading or feeling, have to precede any rational act of speech or responsible action. Because, only »he who has long kept silent [...] has access to the coming politics and poetry.«<sup>91</sup>

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- 1 Jo-Jacqueline Eckardt, *Lessing's Nathan the Wise and the Critics: 1779-1991*, Columbia, SC 1993; *Lessing und das Judentum. Kamenzer Lessing-Studien*, vol. 1, ed. by Dirk Niefanger, Gunnar Och and Birka Siwczyk, Hildesheim 2015.
- 2 Nathan is, in many respects an inversion of Shakespeare's Shylock. Cf. Gunnar Och, *Imago Judaica. Juden und Judentum im Spiegel der deutschen Literatur 1750-1812*, Würzburg 1995, pp. 159-163; Christoph Schulte, *Moses war nicht Nathan – Die Ringparabel und Moses Mendelssohns Kritik am Christentum*, in: *Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette. Lessings Ringparabel – Paradigma für die Verständigung der Religionen heute?*, ed. by Jan-Heiner Tück and Rudolf Langthaler, Freiburg i. Br. 2016, pp. 181-201, here p. 182.
- 3 All references to the play *Nathan der Weise* refer to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*, vol. 9, *Werke 1778-1780*, ed. by Wilfried Barner, Frankfurt a. M. 1993, pp. 483-628, here pp. 557-561.
- 4 Lessing's positive depiction of a Jew in *Nathan der Weise* was preceded by that of his Jewish Traveller in *Die Juden* (written in 1749; first staged in 1954).
- 5 George L. Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism*, Cincinnati 1985, p. 15. See also Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews – A Dual Identity*, New Haven/London 1999, p. 16.
- 6 Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism* (fn. 5), p. 15.
- 7 Hannah Arendt, *Von der Menschlichkeit in finsternen Zeiten. Rede über Lessing*, Munich 1960, p. 42. Amir Engel argues that by positing »that friendship is possible not albeit the different beliefs but because of them,« Arendt situates Nathan, whom she regards as the paragon of friendship and democracy, »in the ancient polis.« According to Engel, Arendt's speech amounts to a redefinition of the nature of the »political relationship par excellence,« which stages Nathan »as the German paradigm of an anti-Nazi.« Amir Engel, *Renewal in the Shadow of the Catastrophe: Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, and Paul Celan in Germany*, in: *German Studies Review*, vol. 39.2 (2016), pp. 297-314, here pp. 304, 306.
- 8 Iris Shagrir, *The Parable of the Three Rings: a Revision of its History*, in: *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 23.2 (1997), 163-175, here p. 164. See also: Iris Shagrir, *משל שלוש הטבעות ורעיון הסובלנות הדתית בימי ביניים ובראשית העת החדשה* [The Parable of the Three Rings and the Idea of Religious Toleration in Premodern European Culture], Jerusalem 2017.
- 9 Zahim Mohammed Muslim, *Lessing und der Islam. Eine Studie zu Lessings Auseinandersetzung mit dem Islam*, Dissertation, Humboldt-Universität, 2010, pp. 20-44.
- 10 Also, the advocacy of »innigste Ergebenheit in Gott« may be read as an allusion to the notion of »Submission« inherent in the term »Islam.« Ibid. p. 192f., 196f. Cf. Monika Fick, *Lessing-Handbuch* (4th. ed.) Stuttgart/Weimar 2016, p. 447f., 509-513.

- 11 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Werke 1778-1780, in: Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden, ed. by Wilfried Barner, Klaus Bohnen, and Arno Schilson, vol. 9, Frankfurt a.M. 1993, pp. 1186-1187.
- 12 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Das Drama als poetisches Kunstwerk, in: Texte zur Theorie des Theaters, ed. by Klaus Lazarowicz and Christopher Balme, Stuttgart 2012, pp. 358-363.
- 13 Ibid. cf. Fick (fn. 10), p. 468.
- 14 Fick (fn. 10), p. 445. On the Fragmentenstreit, see also: Arno Schilson, Lessing and Theology, in: A Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ed. by Barbara Fischer and Thomas Fox, Rochester, NY 2005, pp. 157-184.
- 15 On this difference, see Fick, Lessing und die jüdische Aufklärung, in: Lessing-Handbuch (fn. 10), pp. 490-518, here p. 496.
- 16 Angelika Overath, Navid Kermani and Robert Schindel, Toleranz – Drei Lesarten zu Lessings Märchen vom Ring im Jahre 2003, Göttingen 2003, p. 34.
- 17 Jakob Hessing, Nachwort, in: גוטוולד אפריים לסינג: נתן החכם [G. E. Lessing. Nathan der Weise]. Transl.: Yosef Tsur. Jerusalem 1999, pp. 215-225; Jakob Hessing, Deutscher Autor – jüdischer Sprecher. Lessing legt Nathan die Ringparabel in den Mund (forthcoming), Thirty Years of Austrian / German-Jewish Literary and Cultural Studies, Conference Proceedings.
- 18 »Ohne sehr wesentliche Veränderungen würde es kaum möglich gewesen seyn, dieses dramatische Gedicht in eine gute Tragödie umzuschaffen; aber mit bloß zufälligen Veränderungen möchte es eine gute Comödie abgegeben haben.« Friedrich Schiller, Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung (1795), in: Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe, vol. 20, ed. by Benno von Wiese, Weimar 1962, pp. 445 f.
- 19 See Micha Brumlik, Lessings Ringparabel aus jüdischer Perspektive, in: Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette (fn. 2), pp. 263-277.
- 20 Na'ama Sheffi, Vom Deutschen ins Hebräische – Übersetzungen aus dem Deutschen im jüdischen Palästina 1882-1948, Göttingen 2011, p. 66.
- 21 Joseph Carlebach, Was schulden wir Juden dem Andenken Lessings?, in: Jeschurun, vols. 1-2 (i. i. 1929), pp. 1-20, here p. 3. I would like to thank George Kohler for pointing me to this source.
- 22 Barbara Fischer, Nathan's Ende? Von Lessing bis Tabori. Zur deutsch-jüdischen Rezeption von »Nathan der Weise«, Göttingen 2000, pp. 117-142, here pp. 128 f.
- 23 Anat Feinberg, Wiedergutmachung im Programm – Jüdisches Schicksal im deutschen Nachkriegsdrama, Cologne 1988.
- 24 Joerg Lau, Die guten, alten Reflexe des Polit-Theaters, in: Die Zeit, (10 January 2002), [http://www.zeit.de/2002/03/Die\\_guten\\_alten\\_Reflexe\\_des\\_Polit-Theaters](http://www.zeit.de/2002/03/Die_guten_alten_Reflexe_des_Polit-Theaters).
- 25 Overath, Kermani and Schindel (fn. 16), pp. 33-45, here p. 44.
- 26 Kuschel Karl-Josef, Jud, Christ und Muselmann vereinigt? – Lessings »Nathan der Weise«, Düsseldorf 2004, pp. 29-32.
- 27 Michael Bohlander, Political Islam and Non-Muslim Religions: A Lesson from Lessing for the Arab Transition, in: Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. 25.1 (2014), pp. 27-47.
- 28 E.g., the 2015 Volkstheater München production by Christian Stückl, [https://](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETctPQxJRSY)

- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETctPQxJRSY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETctPQxJRSY). Cf. the 1945 Deutsches Theater production in Berlin, <https://www.dhm.de/lemo/bestand/objekt/paul-wegener-als-nathan-der-weise-1945.html>
- 29 Yet another, however, incomplete translation into Arabic was produced by Riad Masarwi for the 2016 production by Ofira Henig, which will be addressed below. Furthermore, little is known about a Turkish translation and theater production in Constantinople, in 1834 (»ganz im Geiste des Morgenlandes gehalten und auch demselben entlehnt«). According to the report in the German-Jewish newspaper *Sulamith*, the fable of the rings had apparently enthused the audience, incl. Sultan Mahmud II (»Am Schlusse der Erzählung brach ein Jubel aus, in den auch die schweigsamsten Moslem einstimmten«). Anonym, Konstantinopel, *Sulamith*, vol. 8.2 (1834), p. 267
- 30 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, נתאן החכם [Nathan der Weise]. Transl.: Elias Nasr-Allah Haddad, Al Quds / Jerusalem 1932. Elias Nasr-Allah Haddad, *Wörterbüchlein zu »Nathan der Weise«*, Al Quds / Jerusalem 1932. Siehe auch Walter Koch, Zur aktuellen Bedeutung eines Bibliotheksfundes: Die Rezeption G.E. Lessings »Nathan« in der arabischen Welt (30.4.2007), <http://www.ha-bib.de/aktuelles/newsletter.htm>.
- 31 Haddad's translation was used in a series of youth-theatre projects, beginning in the year 2000. See fn. 54.
- 32 [http://www.ueberseztercolloquium.de/index.php?id=10&user\\_ueuseful\\_uid=125&user\\_ueuseful\\_name=Fausia-Hassan](http://www.ueberseztercolloquium.de/index.php?id=10&user_ueuseful_uid=125&user_ueuseful_name=Fausia-Hassan).
- 33 Project-Report by Enzo Wetzels, November 2005. E-Mail to author from Ghada El-Sherbiny (8 May 2017).
- 34 »*Hasasia*« (حسانية) also means allergy. Nelly Yusuf, القاهرة: נתان الحكيم, المهرجان الألماني في القاهرة: »Nathan der Weise« sends a message of tolerance to the Egyptian public, *Qantara.de* (14.10.2004), <https://ar.qantara.de/node/13738>. I would like to thank Nasrin Abu-Baker for verifying this.
- 35 On the absence of Mohammad in *Nathan*, see Fick (fn. 10), p. 512 f.
- 36 Yusuf, German Festival in Cairo (fn. 34).
- 37 Whereas an average theater production of Lessing's German text usually lasts about three hours, Ghanem stated that a full Arabic production would last five hours. He argued that Egyptian theater audiences were not used to such long productions, in addition to Lessing's play lacking conventional scenes of dance and singing. Ibid.
- 38 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, خواتم الثلاث [The Three Rings]. Transl.: Fauziya (also: Fausia) Hassan, Tübingen / Köln 2009. This choice of title, nevertheless proves to be an apt one for Arabic audiences, since, as a traditional idiom, it refers to the so-called three seals of prophecy: Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad – as the »seal of the prophets.« (Arabic draws a distinction between seal(s)/ring (محيين) and wedding ring (محيين), which also means »prison.«) I would like to thank Anwar Ben-Badis for this comment.
- 39 E.g., Elisabeth and Gerd-R. Puiñ, Kritik einer neuen Übersetzung von Lessings Schauspiel »Nathan der Weise« ins Arabische durch Fauziya Hasan, in: Hanna-Arendt-Bibliothek (2006), [http://www.ha-bib.de/debatte/texte/Nathan\\_der\\_Weise.pdf](http://www.ha-bib.de/debatte/texte/Nathan_der_Weise.pdf). See also: fn. 25-28.

- 40 Sivia Horsch, Lessing, der Islam und die Toleranz, in: Al-Sakina, (28.9.2004), [http://al-sakina.de/inhalt/artikel/lessing\\_islam/lessing\\_islam.html](http://al-sakina.de/inhalt/artikel/lessing_islam/lessing_islam.html).
- 41 Muslim, *Lessing und der Islam* (fn. 9).
- 42 Ahmad Milad Karimi, Wahrheit ist Sehnsucht, in: Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette (fn. 2), pp. 278-292.
- 43 Elisabeth Schratzenholzer, Sorry, Nathan! – Wortblind und sinntaub. Die Beschädigung des Denkens durch die Sprache des Patriarchats, Wien 2005. A recent production (June 2017) by German theology students in the Church of the Redeemer carried Lessing's *Nathan* for the first time into the Old City of Jerusalem. Director Jakobus Hartmann chose to substitute the father in the ringparable with a mother; attempting, thereby, a distinct feminist interpretation.
- 44 Apart from a few female characters in Lessing's play, women are mentioned only in the Acknowledgments of: Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette (fn. 2), pp. 11 f.
- 45 Given that Mendelssohn was not Nathan, Lessing's dramatic character was nevertheless informed by his friend. Cf. Christoph Schulte, Moses war nicht Nathan – Die Ringparabel und Moses Mendelssohns Kritik am Christentum, in: Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette (fn. 2), pp. 181-201.
- 46 Fick (fn. 10), p. 499, 507f.
- 47 Jan Assmann, Lessings Ringparabel – die performative Werdung der Wahrheitsfrage, in: Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette (fn. 2), pp. 13-35, here p. 13.
- 48 Another direct allusion is found in the play, when Nathan argues that that very deed which renders him a Christian in the Monk's eyes, makes him a Jew in his own. (p. 598, line 691 f.) Cf. Lavater's »Wollte Gott, daß sie ein Christ wären.« Moses Mendelssohn and Johann Kaspar Lavater, Briefe von Herrn Moses Mendelssohn und Joh. Caspar Lavater, Berlin 1770, p. 64. See also the famous painting »Lavater and Lessing Visit Moses Mendelssohn« by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (1856), <http://www.magnes.org/collections/museum/jewish-art/paintings/lavater-and-lessing-visit-moses-mendelssohn>. Cf. Fick, *Lessing-Handbuch* (fn. 10), p. 512.
- 49 See fn. 14.
- 50 Cf. Karl-Josef Kuschel, »Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette ...« Zur »strategischen Aufwertung« des Islam in Lessings »Nathan«, in: Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette (fn. 2), pp. 153-180. Cf. Micha Brumlik, Lessings Ringparabel aus jüdischer Perspektive, *ibid.* p. 277.
- 51 Recorded interview, Tel Aviv, 5 June 2016.
- 52 Cf. Kuschel, *Jud, Christ und Muselmann vereinigt?* (fn. 26), pp. 23-28.
- 53 Murad Abu Elheja, Toomas Täht, Doron Tavory, Suheil Haddad, Ofira Henig, Jutta Hoffmann, Jara Elham-Jarrar, Salwa Nakkara, Gad Kaynar, and Florian Innerebner, <http://www.goethe.de/ins/il/lp/vet/de15026628v.htm>.
- 54 See Jan Kühne, »Suspension of Belief« and »Dissimulation of Absence« – Themes in the Theatrical and Critical Reception of Nathan the Wise in Israel, Germany and Austria after 1945, in: Working Paper Series of the Center for German Studies, Hebrew University Jerusalem 100 (2011), pp. 9 f.
- 55 Recorded interview (fn. 51).
- 56 None of these interviewees related it to the Lavater-Affair.
- 57 Recorded interview, Tel Aviv, 8 May 2015.

- 58 »Der Dichter hat nicht verstanden, [...] die Handlungsweise des historischen Saladins mit dem Saladin seines Stücks zu vereinbaren.« Friedrich Schiller, Undatierte Bemerkung anlässlich der Weimarer Aufführung des *Nathan* (1801), *Nationalausgabe*, vol. 21 (fn. 18), p. 91.
- 59 Recorded interview, Tel Aviv, 8 May 2015.
- 60 Recorded interview, telephone, 25 August and 15 September 2016.
- 61 Elham-Jarrar added that in her eyes *Nathan der Weise* is relevant for Israel, because the play had been banned by the Nazis in 1933, comparable to the way, she argued, in which poems and works by the Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish are being banned from Israeli pedagogical and cultural curricula in 2016. This is connected with ongoing legislative attempts to deprive the Arabic language of its status as a national language in Israel. See Jonathan Lis, Israeli Ministers greenlight Nation-state Bill: Arabic isn't an Official State Language, in: *Haaretz*, 17 May 2017, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.787689>.
- 62 Kaynar is the first among a few scholars to have written on the Israeli reception of Lessing so far; cf. Gad Kaynar, Lessing and Non-Lessing on the Israeli Stage – Notes on Some Theological, Political, and Theatrical Aspects, in: *Lessing Yearbook XXXII* (2000), pp. 361-368. Cf. fn. 75.
- 63 Those German-speaking Jews, who managed to reach Palestine/Israel, preserved their conditioning through German culture, henceforth forming the controversial social and cultural milieu of the so-called Yekkes. Anat Feinberg, Jeckes, in: *Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur*, vol. 3, ed. by Dan Diner, Stuttgart/Weimar 2012, pp. 180-183.
- 64 Email to author, 25 November 2016.
- 65 This marked dissonance is related also to the fact that the German language was and to some extent still is perceived in Israel as the language of Nazi-Germany, rather than also as the language whereby modern German-Jewish culture and its nationalist movement were decisively formed, beginning as early as the friendship between Lessing and Mendelssohn. Regarding the socio-historical and literary aspects of this phenomenon, see Jan Kühne, *Deutschsprachige Jüdische Literatur in Palästina/Israel*, in: *Handbuch der Deutsch-Jüdischen Literatur*, ed. by Hans Otto Horch, Oldenbourg 2015, pp. 201-220; Andreas Kilcher and Eva Edelmann-Ohler, *Deutsche Sprachkultur in Palästina/Israel – Geschichte und Bibliographie*, Oldenbourg 2017; Amir Eshel and Rachel Seelig, *The German-Hebrew Dialogue: Studies of Encounter and Exchange*, Berlin/Boston 2017.
- 66 Lessing, *Nathan der Weise* (fn. 3), p. 560.
- 67 The last of the four productions, following productions in Tel Aviv-Yaffo, Beer Sheva, and Acco. Scenic readings do not typically receive reviews in newspapers in Israel.
- 68 On the »extradimensionality« of supertitles, which add yet another, often discrepant »voice« to a performance, see Marvin Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theater*, University of Michigan 2006, pp. 191-201. In Henig's scenic reading, supertitles were not used as an »independent stage language.« cf. p. 200.
- 69 Walter Benjamin, *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV-1, ed. by Tilman Rexroth Frankfurt a.M. 1972, pp. 9-21.
- 70 Hayyim Nahman Bialik, *Revelment and Concealment in Language*, transl. by

- Jacob Sloan, in: *Revelment and Concealment*, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 11-26, here p. 23.
- 71 Email to author, 7 June 2016.
- 72 Recorded interview (fn. 51).
- 73 <https://vimeo.com/154691679>.
- 74 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, ed. by Minou Arjomand and Ramona Mosse, London 2014, pp. 20, 4f., 172.
- 75 In Tavory's own production, based on his own translation, in 2004. Cf. Jan Kühne, *A Multi-Tragic Paradigm – ›Nathan the Wise‹ in Israel*, Saarbrücken 2011, pp. 81-98; and *Deutschlands besseres Selbst? – Nathan der Weise in Israel*, in: *Kamenzer Lessing-Studien*, (fn. 1), pp. 431-456, here pp. 452-455.
- 76 Recorded interview (fn. 57).
- 77 Recorded interview, telephone, 25 August 2016.
- 78 Email to author, 25 November 2016.
- 79 Most versions of the ring-parable are written in vernacular and have probably yielded performative aspects and dramatic adaptations, that are yet to be researched. These unexplored aspects will, hopefully, integrate into the over one-and-a-half millennia of reception history of the parable. *Shagrir* 2017 (fn. 8), p. 132.
- 80 Cf. Susan E. Gustafson, ›Der Zustand des stummen Staupens: Language Skepticism in *Nathan der Weise* and *Ernst und Falk*, in: *Lessing Yearbook*, vol. 18 (1986), pp. 1-19. Gustafson analyzes the secretive character of silent, non-communicative moments in *Nathan der Weise* and interprets them as ›bonding moments‹ in the context of language skepticism and utopian visions, but neither in the context of multilingualism, nor in regard to speech acts of listening and obedience. Cf. fn. 89.
- 81 Lessing, *Nathan der Weise* (fn. 3), p. 628.
- 82 *Ibid.*, p. 558, line 439; 559, line 476, 498.
- 83 See also the two adaptations written by the Israeli-Hebrew dramatist Joshua Sobol. Jan Kühne, ›A Multi-Tragic Paradigm‹, pp. 62-80 and 140-153 and, for another adaption, 154f., and ›Deutschlands besseres Selbst?‹, pp. 447-452 (fn. 75).
- 84 E.g., Lessing's drama solves the romantic relationship between the Templar and the Jewish daughter by exposing the latter as a Christian girl that had been adopted by a Jew. The trans-religious family relationships, as revealed in the denouement of the last scene, exclude Nathan.
- 85 David Gramling, *Researching Multilingually in German Studies: A Brief Retrospective*, in: *German Studies Review*, vol. 39.3 (2016), pp. 529-540, here pp. 539-540.
- 86 Performativity is understood here as ›a time-space where reactions can be actual while the actions that elicit these reactions are fiction [...] where effects are much greater than their causes.‹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies – An Introduction*, New York 2013 (3rd ed.), p. 124.
- 87 Jan Assmann, *Lessings Ringparabel – die performative Wendung der Wahrheitsfrage*, in: *Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette* (fn. 2), pp. 13-35.
- 88 Giorgio Agamben, *In the Name of What?*, in: *The Fire and the Tale*, Stanford 2017, pp. 63-71, here pp. 67f. See also Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods – Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism*, Madison 2008, p. 140.

- 89 So far, the only comprehensive study of multi-lingualism in theatre ignores constitutive aspects of silence, using it primarily as a negative metaphor critical of the suppression of different voices in colonial contexts, e.g. as ›silencing the other.‹ However, I am referring to a mode of silence which allows for the perception of the other. Cf. Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues* (fn. 68), pp. 5, 17, 106, 123, 161, 171.
- 90 See for example the rediscovered silent-movie adaptation of *Nathan der Weise* by Manfred Noah (1922) and its pantomimic shadow-theater rendition of the ring-parable. The restored movie was staged in 2009 in a number of performances organized by the Goethe Institute, with a soundtrack written by the Lebanese musician Rabih Abou-Khalil, played by the Bundesjugendorchester, [https://www.welt.de/welt\\_print/kultur/article4977121/Nathan-Stummfilm-mit-neuer-Musik.html](https://www.welt.de/welt_print/kultur/article4977121/Nathan-Stummfilm-mit-neuer-Musik.html).
- 91 Agamben, *In the Name of What?* (fn. 88), p. 71.