



PROJECT MUSE®

Tom Stoppard's *Leopoldstadt*

William Baker

Style, Volume 54, Number 4, 2020, pp. 473-487 (Article)

Published by Penn State University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/777542>



Tom Stoppard's *Leopoldstadt*

William Baker

HANGZHOU NORMAL UNIVERSITY

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT: This article considers Tom Stoppard's latest play, *Leopoldstadt*, which premiered at Wyndham's Theatre London on 25 January 2020, and closed after eight weeks due to the London theatres shutting down because of coronavirus. The fate of the play mirrors its major preoccupations: the unexpected, the unpredictable, and their impact upon human beings. The article considers the drama's relationship to Stoppard's other work, to his life, and to its historical setting. The significance of the play's dates and its structure—from 1899 to 1924, then to 1938 and 1955, with a flash-back to 1900—is discussed. The ideological discussions and reactions to anti-Semitism in the play are outlined, as are the characters and the way their personal fates are intertwined within the background of Viennese Jewry in the first half of the twentieth century. Finally, the article considers selected theatre reviewers who attended the initial performances.

KEYWORDS: Stoppard, *Leopoldstadt*, anti-Semitism, fate, Vienna, the Holocaust

INITIAL PERFORMANCES

Stoppard's Jewish play represents his attempt to present dramatically what he had by chance, or fate, or the toss of a coin, avoided as a boy born on the outer fringes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1937. He discovered in his 60s that most of his family perished in the Holocaust. Previewing at Wyndham's Theatre in London's Theatre district on January 25, 2020, *Leopoldstadt* was scheduled to run for sixteen weeks. Like the characters in his play, the fate of his own family, and the events in life, the drama illustrates that the future cannot be predicted or anticipated.

Leopoldstadt received excellent preperformance publicity and largely favorable reviews, but shut down, as did other London plays, when the coronavirus hit.

PLAY'S RELATIONSHIP TO STOPPARD'S LIFE:
BIOGRAPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Leopoldstadt has been widely regarded as Stoppard's last full-length play and perhaps the most personal, if not directly autobiographical. In his stage directions, Stoppard specifically says the setting is not the provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but rather the Imperial capital, Vienna. Stoppard was born Tomáš Straüssler, on 3 July 1937, the second son of Eugen Straüssler and Martha in Zlín, in what was Czechoslovakia. His father worked for the Bat'a Shoe Company as a physician. Zlín, on the Dřevnice River, is a city in southeastern Moravia, in what is now the Czech Republic. The development of the modern city is closely connected to the Bat'a Shoe Company and its social schemes, developed after the 1914 to 1918 war and the resultant disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The era preceding the Second World War witnessed a population growth "from 26,400 to 37,400 and the number of employees of the Baťa Company grew from 17,000 to 22,000" ("Zlín").

There is no evidence to suggest that either of Stoppard's parents had relatives who lived in Vienna or had any connections with Leopoldstadt, the heavily populated Jewish area of Vienna after which his play is named. The setting is initially December 1899 but not in Leopoldstadt. The stage detail, common to a Stoppard play, relates that the setting for the initial scene is "*At the prosperous end of Viennese bourgeoisie, twelve members of two intermarried Jewish families*" and their servants "*are variously occupied among the overcrowded, fussy furnishings of an apartment of the Ringstrasse*" (3).¹

At the age of 62, drawing upon a memoir written by his mother, Stoppard wrote in his "On Turning out to Be Jewish"²: "When I was born, in July 1937 in Zlín, a small town in Moravia, my name was Tomas Straüssler, Tomik to my mother and father. We left Czechoslovakia—my parents, my brother Petr and I—when the German army moved in" (qtd. in Hunter 3). Decades later, he learned that all of his grandparents and three of his aunts had died in the concentration camps. He recalled that "By the time I understood there was a connection between these two events"—leaving Czechoslovakia and the German occupation—"I was an English schoolboy, Stoppard Two at prep school (Peter [his brother] being One), Tommy at home." Stoppard reflected:

“So were we Jewish? My mother would give a little frown and go ‘Tsk!’ in her way and say, ‘Oh, if anyone had a Jewish grandparent at that time . . .’” Stoppard wrote, “I believe I understand her ‘Tsk!’ It was less to do with denial than irritation. To ask the question was to accept the estimation put on it not by her but by the Germans. She had no sense of racial identity and no religious beliefs. Of course there were Jews in Zlin,” his mother told him, adding, “but they were proper Jews who wore black hats and went to the synagogue and the rest of it, Jews who were Jewish” (4). Stoppard continued:

As I understand it, if I do, ‘being Jewish’ didn’t figure in [his mother’s] life until it disrupted it, and then it set her on a course of displacement, chaos, bereavement and—finally—sanctuary in a foreign country, England, thankful at least that her boys were now safe. Hitler made her Jewish in 1939. By the spring, in good time before the European war started, all that was behind her, literally; we embarked at Genoa for Singapore, in good time for the Japanese onslaught.

However, “the Japanese were a different story. They killed my father and did their best to sink the ship which got the rest of us to India, but it wasn’t personal, we weren’t on a list, it was simply the war and being in the wrong place at the wrong time” (qtd. in Hunter 4).³ Stoppard’s father booked a berth on a ship that returned into Singapore as the Japanese invaded. The ship he took was attacked by the Japanese. The ship Stoppard and his brother and mother were on was diverted to India rather than its original destination, Australia. From 1943 to 1946, Stoppard and his brother spent their formative years at a school run by American Methodists in India (see Nadel 32–33).

Their lives changed when, on 25 November 1945, his mother married a British major who took her and the two boys back to his native Yorkshire. They adopted his name, Stoppard, and the major never disguised his contempt for foreigners or ethnic groups such as Indians or Jews. Stoppard’s relationship with his stepfather was a negative one; they did not get on. The fear of alienating her husband was the reason Stoppard’s mother gave for disguising the fact of her and her family’s Jewish origins which, according to Stoppard, he only learned about the 1990s, when he was past 60 (see Baker and Shumaker I: 188–89).

Stoppard recalled in “On Turning out to Be Jewish” that in his mother’s family there were mixed marriages with gentiles. The proportion was about fifty-fifty. Her grandparents had become Catholics; when she joined Bat’a at the age of 18, Catholic was listed as her religion (Nadel 6–8). At the opening of

Leopoldstadt, it is made clear that two of the prominent members of the family are gentile “*Gretl is gentile. So is Ernst*” (3). The family celebrates Christmas with a Star of David prominently displayed on top of the Christmas tree. Given both his mother’s suppression of her Jewish identity and his father’s death, if we are to believe that Stoppard was unaware of his ethnic origins until relatively late in life, in his 60s, this may be interpreted as a trauma induced by his mother’s revelation. When his plays were performed in what was then Czechoslovakia, people claiming to be his relatives would wait for him outside theatres or lecture halls with family photographs that he initially dismissed until he recognized pictures of faces of individuals who had been to visit his mother in her new life in England (see Nadel 462–63).

Perhaps Stoppard has his mother and himself in mind in the ninth and final scene of *Leopoldstadt*. Leo, who has evaded the fate of his relatives by growing up in England, says:

My mother . . . Never talked about home and family. She did not want me to have Jewish relatives in case Hitler won. She wanted me to be an English boy . . . We were top country! I loved being English . . . English books, and the seaside and listening to the radio . . . Mother and I only spoke English. I didn’t know I had an accent till I lost it. Mummy never lost hers. (94)

Stoppard’s mother was in a difficult position, and his stepfather continually reminded his stepsons, “Don’t you realize that I made you British?” Indeed, the distance between Stoppard and his stepfather was reinforced when his stepfather refused to congratulate his stepson on his knighthood. For Major Stoppard, “to be born an Englishman was to have drawn first prize in the lottery of life” (Baker and Shumaker I: 183).

THE PLAY

There are nine scenes. With the exception of scenes two to five, they are populated by a kaleidoscope of extended families. A short scene two has Gretl, Hermann’s wife and a non-Jew, as the subject of a portrait by Klimt. With Hanna, Gretl discusses her desire for Fritz. Scene three has “Gretl, post-coital” in her lover’s apartment (28). In scene four, Gretl’s husband, Hermann, a highly successful businessman, and Ernst, discuss how the former is to react to having his honor insulted. Fritz apparently believes that “best of

all . . . were the wives of rich Jews, factory owners and suchlike . . . these wives were voracious for sex with a gentile, for anatomical reasons" (32). In a wide-ranging conversation, Hermann tells Ernst that his "great-grandfather was a peddler of cloth. His son had a tailor shop in Leopoldstadt. My father imported the first steam-driven loom from America" (33).

Time changes are familiar devices in Stoppard plays, as are scene changes, and this play is no different. It begins in an apartment. The assumption is that Grandma Emilia of the opening scene—"Vienna 1899" (3)—lives not in the bourgeoisie section of Vienna but somewhere in Leopoldstadt. One scene, the sixth, takes place at Grandma Merz's place. She is one of the few characters who does not attempt to disguise her Jewish identity, and in fact is proud of it and its customs. The second and fifth scenes take place in the apartment of Fritz, "a lieutenant in the Dragoons" (28). The time changes occurring throughout the play move from 1899 to 1924 and then to the next generation on 8 November 1938, to an apartment far less prosperous and shorn of its possessions. Then, the date advances in the final scene to 1955, by which time the apartment "has been stripped, and has been empty or years" (90) and the audience and those characters still alive who survived the Holocaust learn of the fate of the others, with a brief flashback to 1900.

The implications of tossing a coin and on what side it lands, as a metaphor for what happens in life, are evident from the opening of Stoppard's first stage play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967), and reverberate through his work and life. Helen Lewis in her *New Statesman* review of *Leopoldstadt*, cites Stoppard as saying, "It's not about me . . . But it's a play I couldn't have written if I hadn't lived the life that fate has dealt me" (Lewis). Furthermore, *Leopoldstadt*, in common with his other dramas, has recurring imagery such as that of a cat's cradle as "an apt metaphor for the historical and familial weave that is Stoppard's closest terrain" (Wolf).

DIFFERING VIEWS OF CHARACTERS

Hermann's problem, as he discovers in the course of the drama, is that he cannot decide not to be a Jew. His cynical assimilationist view is also found in the characters of Gideon and another cynic, Pash, in chapter 42 at the Hand and Banner Public House in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*.⁴ Alternate views on the Jewish situation and reactions to it are debated in the first scene of Stoppard's play. These range from Ludwig's expression of Zionism expressed

in “Theodore Herzl’s little book” (23) to Hermann’s view that Vienna “is the Promised Land . . . We’re Austrians now. Austrians of Jewish descent” who believe that “Herzl is a man with a beehive in his bonnet, a fantasy of the Jews of Europe and America uprooting themselves for a utopia among goatherds, which wouldn’t even have a common language” (22). Meanwhile, for Ludwig, an eminent mathematician, “Assimilation means to carry on being a Jew without insult . . . But to a gentile I’m a Jew” (24). Such differences of opinion reverberate throughout the play and are expressed not only in ideology but through what actually happens to the human beings who express them.

The Jewish or non-Jewish origins of the play’s characters are clear from the opening stage directions and explanation of staging and characters. Stoppard frequently uses his characters as vehicles for reflecting ideas and ideologies that are popular or influential at the time. For instance, in the first part of the Voyage trilogy, *The Coast of Utopia* (2002), there is much discussion of the ideas of the Russian philosopher Alexander Herzen (1812–1870) and those of the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876) and his family. Stoppard’s *Travesties* (1974), set in Zurich in 1918, reinvents history as drama by utilizing the coincidence of James Joyce (1882–1941), Lenin (1870–1924), and the Dadaist Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), being in the same place during the same year. The characters in *Leopoldstadt* are also used as voices for various ideas. In his play text, Stoppard thanks those who advised him, citing various sources including “*Jews, Anti-Semitism and Culture in Vienna*, an indispensable collection of essays by various hands (ed. Ivar Oxaal et al.). Steven Beller’s *A Concise History of Austria* was my backcloth.” Stoppard also observes that “Alistair Summers helped me with the Seder and the *bris milab*” (see “Author’s Note” in Stoppard, *Leopoldstadt* vii): clearly, Stoppard is unable to remember his own circumcision, assuming that he had one! His forgetfulness concerning the Passover family celebration is also revealing. It suggests that Stoppard as a very young child probably did not have one or that his memory suppressed this fact of not having one.

AFFINITIES WITH OTHER STOPPARD PLAYS

Leopoldstadt is autobiographical only in certain respects, although it has much in common with Stoppard’s previous plays where he juxtaposes different worlds—the past, the present, the world of discovery,

and interconnections between them. Hermione Lee says, "It is not Tom Stoppard's, or Tomáš Straußler's, story; and it is" (856). In *Rock 'n' roll* (2006), he returns to what might have been his home had his family remained in what was Czechoslovakia and survived. A recurring motif in his work is how lives can end up differently. Examples include *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, his screenplay *Shakespeare in Love*, in which characters in disguise seem to be one thing but turn out to be quite another, and in plays such as *Arcadia* (1993), and *Indian Ink* (1995) or *The Invention of Love* (1997), in which characters move from one place or time to another.

These dramas contain clever One word: wordplay reverberating puns, and paradoxical situations. Most of the characters in *Leopoldstadt*, still alive in 1938, could not have foreseen that their fate would be sealed in the most brutal way. Nor could the audience at the first performance have foreseen that, within weeks, the run of the play would be stopped, the theatre closed, and a pandemic unleashed.

This play has references to seemingly arcane and unsolved issues in mathematics. Stoppard's *The Hard Problem* (2015), for instance, features a reference to Gödel's proof. A mathematician, Gödel (1906–1978), proposed an argument for the existence of God (see Newman and Hofstadter). There is little discussion or mention at all of "God" in *Leopoldstadt*. In this play, one of the family, Ludwig (performed by Stoppard's son, Ed Stoppard), is a mathematician who dreams of proving "the Riemann Hypothesis" (13),⁵ and who thought he had "found a new way into the Riemann Hypothesis but only in his head" (100). He is oblivious to everything else that is going on except mathematics, although remarks are made that he experienced professional roadblocks because of his Jewish origins. He is preoccupied with the hypothesis proposed by Bernhard Riemann (1826–1866), which even today remains unsolved and is concerned with zeros and negatives (Sabbagh). In the play, Ludwig's obsession is with representing an issue that is without a solution. The unsolvable mathematical problem becomes a metaphor for a central preoccupation of Stoppard's play: the Jewish problem. Why the hostility? Why the savage hatred? Dreams of one sort or another echo through the play: dreams of escape, of solutions of mathematical problems, of the interpretation of dreams, of a refuge, of a Zionist homeland, and so on. These dreams, though, do not answer the basic question: why such hatred?

METAPHOR IN *LEOPOLDSTADT*

Discussions take place against the background of basic human archetypes with family squabbles over the possession or composition of objects, jealousy, theft, sexual infidelity, desire, ambition, and memories. In other words, life goes on until it doesn't. A way in which Stoppard powerfully conveys these archetypes of human behavior is through referencing a Gustav Klimt (1862–1918) portrait of Gretl, which hangs in the apartment. In 1938, the painting is stolen, along with other possessions, as the family is humiliated and evicted. The portrait becomes a symbol of what has been taken and serves probably as a reference to subsequent court cases and attempts to restore looted property and artwork to their rightful owners. The play's conclusion is set in 1955. Nathan, a professor of mathematics at the University of Vienna who has survived the concentration camps, recalls, "I didn't see the 'Portrait of Margarete Merz' again until I saw it on public display at the Belvedere art gallery after the war. At the Belvedere, the picture was called 'Woman with a Green Shawl' but there was no doubt it was the portrait of my Great-Aunt Gretl, who died from cancer in December of 1938" (90). Clearly, the fact that the portrait is in a Viennese art gallery raises ethical issues relating to ownership, theft, and possession.⁶

Other, perhaps more well-known references also operate as metaphors, among them, Freud and Mahler. In scene seven, dated 1924, Jacob, a World War One survivor "minus one eye and with one useless arm" (45), says rather naïvely, "Oh, Dr. Freud . . . The most famous doctor in the world and they still haven't made him a full professor! Is that because his patients aren't ill?" (48). In scene eight, we are told by Ernst, the gentile neurologist who married into the family and died in Auschwitz, that Freud "and his family got exit permits to England" (71). The British consulate was going to let into the country Jews in domestic service and people like Freud. As Ernst observes, "the last time I saw Freud, the most profound man I know, I asked him 'Yes but *why* the Jews?' He said, 'I don't know Ernst. I wasn't going to ask you, but-why the Jews?'" (72). In the manner of the Riemann hypothesis, the question remains unanswered. The name of the composer and conductor Gustav Mahler also appears. Leo, who is killed in 1934, refers to Mahler the first scene as "our man." Grandma Emilia, in her role as the defender of old values with a contempt for assimilation and conversion, retorts: "Another Christian still wet from his baptism" (13). Otto observes in scene seven, set

in 1924, that “today’s modern tomorrow’s nostalgia. We miss Mahler when we heard Schoenberg” (62).

The large *Leopoldstadt* cast list indicates different generations. As dates change, those who are young at the beginning age, and those who are old die. The scenes and the settings and characters are clearly explained. It is “Vienna December 1899.” The setting: “At the prosperous end of Viennese bourgeoisie.” The “twelve members of two intermarried Jewish families, and a housekeeper-cook (Poldi), a parlour maid (Hilde) and a nursemaid (Jana), are variously occupied among the overcrowded, fussy furnishings of an apartment off the Ringstrasse” (3). As the play proceeds into the twentieth century, the settings increasingly become less cluttered and more impoverished. The servants disappear, although Poldi, “now in her sixties” (44), is still at work in scene seven set in 1924 until the surviving inhabitants are removed by force. “The combined families are eight grown-ups and four children, plus an infant in a bassinet. The apartment, spread over one floor of a grand high-ceilinged block, is the home of the Merz family” (3). *Leopoldstadt* can be criticized for having too many characters of different ages and generations coming and going. The point is that they are unaware that the sword of Damocles hangs over their head. Their situation is not dissimilar in this respect from the pre-COVID age early in 2020. How could it, or of course the Holocaust, have been foreseen!?

DRAMA CRITICS REACTIONS

Reactions to early performances were favorable, with many critics indicating parallels between the play and Stoppard’s life. The doyen of British theatre critics, Michael Billington, came out of retirement as the *Guardian’s* chief theatrical critic to write that, in *Leopoldstadt*, Stoppard “not only traces the fortunes of an Austrian-Jewish family whose experience is analogous to that of his own Czech forebears. He also dramatises his own predicament in the character of Leo Chamberlain, a cricket and Shakespeare-loving anglophile whose parents escaped Nazi persecution in the nick of time.” Billington draws illuminating parallels between *Leopoldstadt* and *Undiscovered Country*, Stoppard’s 1979 adaptation of a play by Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931). For Billington, “like *Leopoldstadt*,” Stoppard’s Schnitzler adaptation is also “a play about the Viennese bourgeoisie. This time we see them on holiday in the Dolomites and there are plenty of characteristic Stoppard jokes.”

Undiscovered Country “ultimately . . . is a play that shows that under the decorous Viennese politeness lurk panic, death and an insane preoccupation with honour. Very much, in fact, like *Leopoldstadt*.”

In *Leopoldstadt*'s fifth scene, Hermann tells Fritz that he possesses a “copy of Schnitzler’s new play, privately printed and inscribed to Dr. Ludwig Jakobovicz” of the university of Vienna mathematics faculty (37–38). The copy was given by one of Fritz’s female admirers. The Schnitzler play is probably *La Ronde*, written in 1897 and privately printed in 1900. It “scrutinizes the sexual morality and class ideology of its day through successive encounters between pairs of characters (before or after sexual encounter)” (“Schnitzler”). The third scene of *Leopoldstadt* opens with “Fritz and Gretl, post-coital” (28), just one of the numerous inter-textual references that pervade *Leopoldstadt*. The consequences in this instance are ironic. Gretl commits adultery with a young army officer who reappears in *Leopoldstadt* as the tormenting official evicting the family from their apartment. She becomes pregnant, and in 1938, dies from cancer, but not before wishing to go to synagogue and become a Jew (90). Their son, Jacob—“more Aryan than you are,” as Hermann tells Ernst (88)—is bought up as a Jew. He inherits the family business only for it to be confiscated, and he commits suicide in 1946 (104).

For Kate Maltby, reviewing *Leopoldstadt* in the *New York Review of Books*, “the Merz and Jakobovicz families inhabit a universe as secure and solid as Wyndham’s must have seemed” in the opening decade of the twenty-first century. Stoppard’s play opens in 1899 on “a Europe where empires kept each other in check, industrial economies prospered and expanded, social reforms were coming slowly but steadily.” Hermann Merz dreams of being the first “Christian of Jewish descent” to join Vienna’s Jockey Club (24). “Only the mathematician Ludwig Jakobovicz dreams of a purer, prouder Jewish identity—and a Jewish homeland” (Maltby). At the conclusion of the first scene, Ludwig “raises his glass” and proclaims a toast: “To a homeland for the Jews. Happy Christmas” (Stoppard, *Leopoldstadt* 25).

Maltby draws attention to the significance in the opening scene of Jacob, who we will discover is not ethnically Jewish, placing a Star of David at the top of the family Christmas tree (see Stoppard, *Leopoldstadt* 7). The two families attempt to accommodate two worlds, hosting Seders “and Christmases but are even confident enough in a Jewish identity to marry the odd guy—upsetting no one but the most traditionalist of relatives back out East” such as Grandma—“for to be *assimilated*, suggests Hermann, is to be *enlightened*.”

None of this, of course, will last," adds Maltby. But, as Maltby observes, "before we reach the cataclysm, we get adultery, the Great War, socialist young things, and the political violence of Red Vienna."

The penultimate scene of the play, scene eight, takes place on Kristallnacht, 9–10 November 1938, when Jewish property was smashed, burnt, and looted. Physical attacks resulted in many Jewish deaths throughout Germany and Austria. This destruction forms the background before merging into the foreground in this most powerful scene. For Maltby, "compared with most of Stoppard's work, this is an unusually old-fashioned, linear play, despite its knowing references to Arthur Schnitzler's *La Ronde*." Maltby also finds that "the narrative thrust is weak. Individual narratives are replaced by communal Holocaust history. This technique has strengths, too. The Kristallnacht scene is not an act of storytelling—there are no twists, no surprises—but an act of ritual witnessing borne in upon the audience." A further caveat is that "the sheer number of characters—a cast of over forty, with more appearing at every time-jump—doesn't help. I sat through the performance with the family tree from the program open on my lap: without it, I'd have struggled to remember who was who." In a sense, however, that does not matter, as we know that the characters' fates are sealed, their individuality erased in death and/or the Holocaust.

Maltby writes that "in Stoppard's eagerness to explain the parameters of his own Jewishness through his characters' . . . his writing in *Leopoldstadt* becomes uncharacteristically heavy on exposition. Sometimes, one wonders if he's aiming at the type of Gentile British theater-goers who simply haven't met any Jews." The play opens around Christmas time, and there is no explanation of Christmas or of the tree that Stoppard assumes his audience will be familiar with even in secular London in 2020. Yet in scene six, there is a detailed explanation of "the Seder table" and "of the Jewish holiday of Passover" (40). Maltby correctly observes that "*Leopoldstadt* deserves a Broadway transfer, but New York audiences will hardly need Gretl to deliver her straight-to-auditorium explanation of what a bris is."

Maltby perceptively remarks that, consequently, "for all its Viennese setting, *Leopoldstadt* is thus a profoundly English play." She points to the closing scene, where we re-encounter "Leo, Stoppard's clearest avatar—and an unwilling heir to *Leopoldstadt*." Leo has been "plucked to safety by an English stepfather (when we first encounter him as a boy in 1938), and raised after a model of Englishness that admitted no room for a competing Jewish identity." He "is performed by Luke Thallon [who] gives a painfully apposite

performance of the adult Leo as a man desperate to avoid confrontation with the memories locked in the bedrock of his own soul”—experiencing trauma.

For Helen Lewis, writing in the *New Statesman* on 12 February 2020, “from the moment that *Leopoldstadt* opens, on a bustling drawing room full of Austrian Jews incongruously celebrating Christmas, you can guess what its final image will be: the few survivors, half a century later, moving among the ghosts.” In company with Maltby, Lewis “needed to consult the programme to keep track of all the aunts, cousins and sisters-in-law.” According to Lewis, there is little small talk in the play, although she seems to have forgotten scene two, where Gretl and Hanna discuss the sex appeal of Fritz, and the following scene where Gretl and Fritz are “post-coital” (28). Interestingly, Lewis draws attention to the scene changes that “are assisted by projections on the curtain: unfortunately, these feel like a wasted opportunity.” According to Lewis, “the images will be familiar to anyone who has flicked past the History Channel, and part of the challenge of retelling this well-told story is rendering it fresh and shocking again.” For this *New Statesman* reviewer, the first half of the play is driven by “Hermann Merz’s disillusionment . . . as he discovers that no baptism, and no amount of money, can wash away his Judaism.” This is conveyed through “an excellent performance by Adrian Scarborough, moving from bluster to crushed acceptance to quiet integrity.”

Most perceptively, Lewis points to an incident in the final two scenes that is poignantly autobiographical for Stoppard and could otherwise be missed. In scene eight, in 1938, the eight-year-old Leo, frightened by the intruder, drops a cup and cuts his hand. His relative Ernst, who has refused to abandon his Jewish wife or her family, “sewed it up” and subsequently pays the ultimate price (100). Lewis writes, “This incident comes directly from Stoppard’s life: when he researched his family tree, he found an elderly woman in Czechoslovakia whose stitched hand was evidence of his father’s career as a doctor. ‘I have nothing that came from my father,’ Stoppard wrote later, ‘nothing he owned or touched, but here is his trace, a small scar’” (Lewis).

Lewis finds Leo’s account of his life and what he loves about England, including cricket—Leo won a University blue—and Shakespeare, embarrassing. So does Nathan, Leo’s cousin, an Auschwitz survivor, who tells Leo, “You live as if without history, as if you throw no shadow behind you” (99). In the end, for Lewis, “*Leopoldstadt* might be overstuffed and overextended, but it is inseparable from its author’s biography, and that means it has something to say on a subject where it can seem it has all been said.”

One more review will provide multiple perspective reactions to the play. For Dominic Cavendish, writing in the *Telegraph* (12 February 2020), *Leopoldstadt* “is a play about attempted assimilation, and the profound cost of that.” It is a play, according to Cavendish, that centers upon Hermann and tracks his despair from belief in assimilation to “disillusion and despair,” being forced to realize the truth conveyed in the opening scene of the play by “his mathematician brother-in-law Ludwig who warns,” Cavendish then cites from the play: “A Jew can be a great composer. He can be the toast of the town. But he can’t not be a Jew. In the end, if it doesn’t catch up on him, it will catch up on his children” (23). Cavendish understands that Stoppard “cried watching” the final scenes in which Leo “a veiled version of the author, trying circa 1955 (as Stoppard did, later) to find out what became of his family.” Rescued and raised in the United Kingdom, Leo “changed his name from Leopold to Leonard, and he weeps when confronted by the loss that entails.” Cavendish adds that Stoppard has been accused “of being too clever by half, lacking the power to move us beyond words; here is irrefutable evidence to the contrary.”

CONCLUSION

Leopoldstadt is a remarkable tour de force, let alone for a dramatist past 80 years of age. Whatever multiperspective lenses we view it from, it is a threnody: an attempt to convey in dramatic format a great tragedy. In its final scene’s flashback to 1900, Hanna during the Seder plays at the piano, where she “finds the missing matzo under the lid” (103). Her fate, as so many of the others, is then conveyed. Transitioning back to 1955, *Leopoldstadt* concludes with a word repeated seven times, leaving its audience in stunned silence. The word is “Auschwitz” (105).

WILLIAM BAKER is Distinguished Chair and Qiantang River Professor at Hangzhou Normal University, Hangzhou, PR China, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Northern Illinois University. He is the author, coauthor or editor of over 30 books and has published more than 150 refereed articles. He is updating his and the late Gerald N. Wachs’s *Tom Stoppard: A Biographical History* (British Library: Oak Knoll, 2010) and has contributed to the forthcoming *Tom Stoppard in Context* (Cambridge University Press). He is the coauthor with Jeanette Roberts Shumaker of *Jewish Writing: A Reference and Critical Guide to Jewish Writing in the UK* (2 volumes, Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2019). (wbaker@niu.edu and wbaker7777@hotmail.com)

NOTES

1. All references are to the first edition of *Leopoldstadt* (London: Faber, 2020). I would like to thank Tom Stoppard and his wife, Sabrina, the dedicatee of the play, for kindly sending me a copy.
2. Stoppard's "On Turning Out to Be Jewish" was originally published in Tina Brown's New York-based magazine *Talk*, September 1999 (190–94, 241–43) and reprinted in England, under the title "Another Country," in the *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 October 1999 (14–21). My citations from this are quoted from extracts in Hunter, *About Stoppard*.
3. Cf. Nadel, *Tom Stoppard* 466 and "Writing the Life of Tom Stoppard" 19–20.
4. For the differing views expressed see Baker, "George Eliot's Reading in Nineteenth Century Jewish Historians: A Note on the Background of 'Daniel Deronda.'" Eliot's novel is not included among the items Stoppard "profited from" when writing *Leopoldstadt* (vii), although he is familiar with Eliot's novel and owns a variant first edition (personal knowledge).
5. See Sabbagh.
6. For the legal and ethical dimensions involved with stolen art and its recovery with particular reference to Klimt, see Perloff, "The Legal, the Ethical and the Aesthetic: The Case of Gustav Klimt's *Woman in Gold*."

WORKS CITED

- Baker, William. "George Eliot's Reading in Nineteenth Century Jewish Historians: A Note on the Background of 'Daniel Deronda.'" *Victorian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1972, pp. 463–72.
- Baker, William, and Jeanette Roberts Shumaker. *Jewish Writing: A Reference and Critical Guide to Jewish Writing in the UK*. Revised and updated second edition, 2 vols, Edward Everett, 2019.
- Beller, Steven. *A Concise History of Austria*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
- Billington, Michael. "Life, Love and Leopoldstadt: Don't Be Surprised If Tom Stoppard Gets Emotional." *Guardian*, 27 Feb. 2020, www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/feb/27/dont-be-surprised-if-tom-stoppard-gets-emotional-leopoldstadt. Accessed 1 July 2020.
- Cavendish, Dominic. "Leopoldstadt Review, Wyndham's Theatre: Tom Stoppard Delivers an Unforgettable (Perhaps Final) Play from the Heart." *Telegraph*, 12 Feb. 2020, www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/leopoldstadt-review-wyndhams-theatre-tom-stoppard-delivers-unforgettable/ Accessed 1 July 2020.
- Hunter, Jim. *About Stoppard: The Playwright and the Work*. Faber and Faber, 2005.
- Lee, Hermione. *Tom Stoppard: A Life*. Faber and Faber, 2020.
- Lewis, Helen. "Tom Stoppard's New Play Leopoldstadt Is Inseparable from Its Author's Biography." *New Statesman*, 12 Feb. 2020, www.newstatesman.com/culture/music-theatre/2020/02/tom-stoppard-new-play-leopoldstadt-biography-review. Accessed 1 September 2020.

- Maltby, Kate. "Tom Stoppard's Theatre of Memory." *New York Review of Books*, www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/02/14/tom-stoppards-theatre-of-memory/. Accessed 1 July 2020.
- Nadel, Ira. *Tom Stoppard: A Life*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- . "Writing the Life of Tom Stoppard." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 27, no. 3, Winter 2004, pp. 19–29.
- Newman, James, and Douglas R. Hofstadter. *Gödel's Proof*. New York UP, 2001.
- Oxaal, Ivar, Michael Pollak, and Gerhard Botz, editors. *Jews, Anti-Semitism and Culture in Vienna*. Routledge, 2020.
- Perloff, Marjorie. "The Legal, the Ethical and the Aesthetic: The Case of Gustav Klimt's *Woman in Gold*." Keynote address, The 9th Convention of the International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism, Zhejiang University, 9 November 2019.
- Sabbagh, Karl. *The Riemann Hypothesis: The Greatest Unsolved Problem in Mathematics*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002.
- Schnitzler, Arthur. La Ronde. *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Ronde_(play). Accessed 2 July 2020.
- Stoppard, Tom. *Arcadia*. Faber and Faber, 1993.
- . *The Hard Problem*. Faber and Faber, 2015.
- . *Indian Ink*. Faber and Faber, 1995.
- . *The Invention of Love*. Faber and Faber, 1997.
- . *Leopoldstadt*. Faber and Faber, 2020.
- . *Rock 'n' Roll*. Faber and Faber, 2006.
- . *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Faber and Faber, 1967.
- . *Shakespeare in Love: A Screenplay*. Miramax/Hyperion, 1998.
- . *Travesties*. Faber and Faber, 1975.
- . *Undiscovered Country*. Faber and Faber, 1979.
- . *Voyage*. Faber and Faber, 2002. The Coast of Utopia, Part I.
- Wolf, Mat. Rev. of *Leopoldstadt*. 14 Feb. 2020, theartsdesk.com/theatre/leopoldstadt-wyndhams-theatre-review-stoppard-once-personal-and-accessible. Accessed 2 July 2020.
- Zlín. *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zlín. Accessed 1 July 2020.