

# Eugen and Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy vs. the Academy: a reflection on the centennial of the ‘Leipziger Nachtgespräch’

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Raymond Huessy

(Terque de Almería, Spain)

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Abstract:

There been a steady shift in scholarly opinion on the influence of Eugen Rosenstock on Franz Rosenzweig over recent years, and not to Rosenstock’s benefit. The shift has accelerated since the publication of the ‘Gritli letters’; much current scholarship seems to ignore long-established evidence, including the testimony of the two men themselves, and to indulge in speculation as to both events and motives, often on slender evidence.

The author attempts to provide a counter-balance to some current scholarly opinions regarding the events of 1916 and 1918 which have arisen since the availability of the ‘Gritli letters’; in support, he offers a selection of quotes from the parallel correspondence between Eugen and Margrit Rosenstock from the years the ‘Gritli letters’ began.

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In 1968, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy introduced the English translation of his 1916 correspondence with Franz Rosenzweig by commenting that ‘much nonsense has piled up about this “existential” correspondence’ (Rosenstock-Huessy 1969: 71). Not much has changed since then. Older scholarship was based on evidence so partial as to be inherently misleading; recent scholarship is equally misleading, but due more to the authors’ evident partialities. The first may (in theory) be corrected by publication of the facts; the second remains a problem in search of a solution.

In 1937, the correspondence was hailed as ‘the purest form of Judaeo-Christian dialogue ever attained’ (Schoeps 1963: 130).<sup>1</sup> Both Alexander Altmann’s 1944 essay and Dorothy Emmet’s 1945 essay acknowledge Rosenstock’s influence on Rosenzweig. In 1953, Nahum Glatzer reprinted Rosenzweig’s own acknowledgment of his debt to Rosenstock from ‘The New Thinking’ (Glatzer 1953: 200). Rosenzweig scholarship has since become a more self-referential field, its dogma that Rosenzweig was a philosopher, his works an exclusively Jewish affair, and Rosenstock’s influence minimal.

With the publication of the ‘Gritli letters’ that neglect yielded to personal attacks. In his otherwise remarkably even-handed 2003 article, Michael Zank read Rosenstock-Huessy’s example of love letters as proof that correspondence can change minds, as a description of the correspondence itself (Zank 2003: 95 n. 30). That insinuation became a public statement on July 29, 2006, when Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik claimed that Rosenstock had not only tolerated but fostered his wife’s love for Rosenzweig because of ‘a war-wound and homophile inclinations’ (Schmied-Kowarzik 2006: 4). Ephraim Meir added that Rosenstock, ‘blinded by his desire to convert Rosenzweig’ (Meir 2006: 67), had never ‘had real interreligious dialogues with Franz’ (53). At the conference held at the Simon-Dubnow-Institut in October of 2013 to commemorate the centennial of the ‘Leipziger Nachtgespräch,’ Micha Brumlik arrived at this progression’s logical conclusion by attacking Rosenstock’s language in the correspondence as ‘anti-semitic.’<sup>2</sup>

This may be consensus, but how is it scholarly? It ignores the work of Rosenstock scholars (even work presented at conferences on Rosenzweig) as well as the two men’s own words on the subject. Harold Stahmer has spent a scholarly lifetime citing ‘chapter and verse’ in their works to place the correspondence in relation to both the ‘Leipziger Nachtgespräch’ and their later works. Over twenty-five years ago, he publicly announced the existence of the ‘Gritli letters’ and read the first excerpts. In that paper, he cited both a letter of Rosenzweig’s to Rudolf Hallo: ‘Without Eugen I would never have written the *Star of Redemption*,’ and *Das Neue Denken*: ‘When I wrote *The Star* . . . the main influence was Eugen Rosenstock; a full year and a half before I

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<sup>1</sup> Manfred Vogel preferred Schoeps’ work to that of Jacob Katz and James Parkes. See Vogel 1965, 131.

<sup>2</sup> Brumlik’s remarks opened the conference on October 7, 2013. Rosenzweig himself tackled Rosenstock-Huessy’s language in the correspondence; should others not at least hesitate to denounce what he did not? Brumlik also claimed his ‘researches’ left many questions unanswered, though in fact a single book would have answered most of them (Rosenstock-Huessy 1968).

began to write I had seen the rough draft of his now published *Angewandte Seelenkunde*' (Stahmer 1989: 393). Ten years ago, in response to Zank's flawed reconstruction, Stahmer persuaded Freya von Moltke to make a statement on the actual events of 1918 (Stahmer, 2006). The most insightful treatment of the 'night-time conversation' itself is probably Wolfgang Ullmann's.<sup>3</sup> Michael Gormann-Thelen has dealt painstakingly with the shortcomings of the Bilam-Verlag edition of the 'Gritli letters.'<sup>4</sup> Their words seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Wayne Cristaudo's *Religion, Redemption and Revolution*, the first book in forty-five years to be written out of a profound knowledge of both men's work (and one which explicitly addresses Meir's and Brumlik's accusations) has received no significant attention.<sup>5</sup>

Those who tell uncomfortable truths are best forgotten or, as the Germans say, 'totgeschwiegen' (ignored to death). That might be expected in the case of Eugen Rosenstock and his defenders, but Rosenzweig repeatedly testified to Rosenstock's influence, as even a casual reading of his letters shows. And in the letter Stahmer quoted, Rosenzweig also explicitly informed Hallo that his experience, his life, would never be exclusively Jewish:

'I demand that you believe me not because I lead a kosher life at home, but *because outside my house I will not feel myself bound by it in the least*. Or if you prefer, believe me for both reasons. But not—never—for the first reason alone. . . . Where Eugen, Rudi, and I met . . . no [such delapidated] walls separate people from each other. . . . What befell us, in Judaism, in Christianity, in creation (it doesn't matter! perhaps in all three together) is the only thing that retains life—[and] only out of that vital life . . . can the call of resurrection sound in the charnel house that is European and German existence' (Rosenzweig 1935: 381-382).<sup>6</sup>

He also wrote:

'The correspondence of 1916. . . was no chess game . . . it was *our shared achievement*; what the two of us could do in the war, in 1916, is done' (111).

Freya von Moltke has cited Eugen's 1970 letter denouncing the absurdity of treating Franz and himself in separation. The experience of finding common ground despite fundamental

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<sup>3</sup> Ullmann writes that the discussion 'heralds for the first time an epoch where the equation of God, and Nature which had ruled . . . since the 18th century, encounters a consciousness of reality in which the differences between God, man, and world are made manifest in an entirely new way' (Ullmann 1988: 149). He also restores Rudolf Ehrenberg's place in the conversation, often viewed only in relation to the works of either 'Eugen' or 'Franz.'

<sup>4</sup> Gormann-Thelen 2004: 61-77.

<sup>5</sup> The only mention of the book I know of is a few paragraphs in Kaplan: 2012.

<sup>6</sup> All translations from German are mine, unless an English-language work is cited.

differences, first with Franz and then with the Patmos group, became Eugen's theory and *modus operandi*. In the first book he published in German after 1945, he wrote:

‘Augustine spoke truth when he wrote that people are healed by love, faith, and hope. . . . In truly comprehending this sentence, we gain a new category, one of which sociology is in [desperate] need . . . that of mutuality. . . . We speak to each other and live for each other’ (Rosenstock-Huessy 1951: 292-293).<sup>7</sup>

He continued to quote Franz (particularly the dictum that the Jews are the coals at the heart of the fire that is God, the Christians the rays that reach out into the world (Rosenzweig 1921: 200)) to the end of his life.<sup>8</sup> Eugen's German works published after 1945 challenge the Germans to explain how the ‘charnel house’ can be re-integrated into the Christian era.

‘Today, the prime question is: how can Germans live the life of the spirit after the destruction of the Jews? . . . Why is [Martin Niemöller] unable to comprehend the full force of the question, how there can be Christians without Jews? People may still go to church, form state churches, and assemble in synods; but can these gentlemen propagate Christianity?’ (Rosenstock-Huessy 1958: 47).

‘We must all create originally (like the pagans), hope in expectation (like the Jews), and love decisively (like Christians)—that is to say, we must take part in the beginning, end, and middle of life. . . . Franz Rosenzweig was the first to express and explain this confounding fact of the openness of the three ‘isms’ to each other. A new edition of his *New Thinking* . . . is the urgent requirement of our time. . . . He had asked me about my faith, and I told him in my next letter that I could only hope to believe... that saying of mine he issued as dogma.’ (54).

‘At the moment of their execution, Helmuth James von Moltke and his friends were the only legitimate government of Germany. . . . Just as the prophet Isaiah or the prophet Jeremiah are the only ones who count in their periods of Israel's history, and we may safely ignore all other Israelites of their time . . . so these victims of Nazism represent justice, . . . The victims were invisible in 1944, yet . . . [i]f these righteous men had not existed in that Sodom and Gomorrah, Germany would have lost its history for good.’ (Rosenstock-Huessy 1965: 38-39).

<sup>7</sup> See also Rosenstock-Huessy 1968: 77, 104, 107, 155.

<sup>8</sup> Rosenstock-Huessy 1938: 221. See also Rosenstock-Huessy 1969: 169. (Eugen's whole treatment of the French revolution may be said to center on Franz's treatise on Schelling: 126-257, especially ‘Alpha and Omega: Gentiles and Jews,’ 219-237.)

The last book he saw into print contains three essays central to his own work and his response to Franz: the ‘coda’ to the *Soziologie*; the essay ‘Ichthys: Life, Teaching, and Action’; and ‘The Fruit of Our Lips.’ (An English-language edition, including a first translation of ‘Ichthys,’ is currently in preparation.)

Cristaudo has called that coda ‘the key to [Rosenstock-Huessy’s] entire corpus’ (Cristaudo 2012: 216). In 1928, Eugen wrote Franz’s mother that “‘Ichthys’ came to me five years ago as a commentary on the last sentence of the “Star”,’ adding that behind ‘my dissent from the Franzian thesis that life after the vision of the star of redemption . . . could be simply the same life as before the vision . . . stands the great theological thesis of the “*felix culpa*” of mankind, which is to be found in Augustine, and in the Easter liturgy ever since.’<sup>9</sup> The vision granted in the ‘glow of the divine sanctum,’ said Eugen, is never what was ‘commanded . . . in the midst of life’ (Rosenzweig 1935: 670-671) but new insight which demands unheard-of action, action which is always political. (This is the kernel of what Cristaudo has called Rosenstock’s ‘incarnational Christianity.’)<sup>10</sup> The ‘polemic’ was purely private, as was their correspondence; rewritten for publication, the essay was neither ‘polemical’ nor aimed at Franz. The 1954 version of ‘The Fruit of Our Lips’ argues for the early date and unity of the four gospels, directly addressing Franz’s claim that contemporary Christianity must rid itself of the taint of Marcionism. In 1916, Eugen had demurred when Franz boldly proclaimed that he and all devout Jews would still willingly crucify Jesus; in 1964, ‘The Fruit of Our Lips’ stated baldly that from their own point of view, the Jews were correct to condemn Jesus—as most devout Christians would today (Rosenstock-Huessy 1964: 855, 872).

All this predates the book which proclaims that Judaism rightly continues *despite* Christianity. Could there be clearer proof of his life-long response to Franz? Still, the shift in consensus is clear; what it ignores is also clear. But what drives it?

The shift in consensus curiously parallels Edith Rosenzweig Scheinmann’s own changing attitude toward her husband and his friend. One can only applaud the courage manifested in her choices for the 1935 edition of Franz’s letters. When Eugen received his copy, he wrote Edith praising her selection for its masterly portrayal of Franz as a teacher, but added how sad he was

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<sup>9</sup> Unpublished letter to Adele Rosenzweig dated January 1, 1928. The Dartmouth archive contains over 180 letters between the Rosenstock-Huessys and Adele.

<sup>10</sup> See Cristaudo 2012: 184-229.

that he could not send his mother a copy.<sup>11</sup> Edith had included Franz's description of a nameless woman as 'spiritually insane'—a woman immediately identifiable (especially by herself) from the context and the dates (Rosenzweig 1935: 217). In retrospect, including that letter looks like the opening move in a long game.

Micha Brumlik did no more than echo Edith's own objections to the republication of the correspondence. In 1955, Edith wrote off the correspondence as no longer relevant but nonetheless gave Eugen further arguments against republication, including respect for the millions dead.<sup>12</sup> Eugen disagreed on both counts; here her veto met its limit. Eugen and Margrit had long agreed that those facts of Franz's life Edith had chosen to suppress would not be publicly discussed during her lifetime.<sup>13</sup> Eugen himself read Franz's letters to his wife in their entirety only after Margrit's death; when he wrote asking Edith for Margrit's letters, she replied, 'I don't have a single letter of Gritli's. Franz destroyed all her letters a few days before his death, or rather, had me destroy them.'<sup>14</sup> (Since Franz had written that destroying letters was tantamount to murder, we may question how much influence he had on Edith's actions 'a few days before his death.')<sup>15</sup> In 1966, Edith refused Eugen her cooperation in connection with *Judaism Despite Christianity*.<sup>16</sup> The 1979 edition of Franz's letters she co-edited dispersed the 1916 correspondence with Eugen so it could no longer be read as a whole.

It seems that after 1945, Franz (as he had been while alive) became an increasingly uncomfortable presence; Eugen certainly did. It was not just that he stood against the sundering of all things Jewish from all things German, or the assumption of a direct line from Luther to Hitler. The more Franz was seen in relation to Eugen, the less defensible presenting his work as entirely Jewish, and himself as nearly saintly, became. Franz had written Margrit that 'the gentleman from Bonn. . . wants to assemble Jewish life-stories for use in little anti-anti-semitic tracts. He had me in his sights because I'm such a nice man, I'm such a deep mystic, and I suffer

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<sup>11</sup> Letter to Edith dated May 28, 1935 in the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

<sup>12</sup> Unpublished letter dated June 4, 1955. Edith cites Achim von Boris, saying his arguments had swayed Ernst Simon and Martin Buber.

<sup>13</sup> Those who decided to ignore the understanding between the families must answer for it themselves.

<sup>14</sup> Unpublished letter dated June 24, 1960.

<sup>15</sup> The source is Franz's letter to Margrit dated September 2, 1918 (<http://www.argobooks.org/gritli/1918.html#sep>); see 'Works Cited.' Meir cites this letter (81), which may be why he doubts the destruction of her letters (14).

<sup>16</sup> Unpublished letter dated March 10, 1966. In the same letter Edith asked Eugen if he knew what had happened to the originals of the war-time correspondence. He did not; they are apparently lost.

so much. I could only escape this premature beatification by pointing out that I hadn't died yet.'<sup>17</sup>

His death removed that obstacle. And yet Zank closes his article with the statement that the 'eclipse' of the relationship between Franz and Margrit

'can only partially be blamed on the dedicated and much-abused widow. . . . Since the death of Rosenzweig the students and heirs of this unusual group have been locked in a battle of favorites. Either you loved Rosenzweig or you loved Rosenstock. Apparently only Gritli was able to love both' (Zank 2003: 90).

The last sentence may well be true; the rest seems less defensible. What have the Rosenstock-Huessys, their heirs, or any 'Rosenstock' scholar, said or done to detract from Eugen's constant avowal of the influence he and Franz had on each other? Which 'Rosenstock' scholars have edited any documents to remove references to Rosenzweig or allowed themselves the kind of public remarks made by the 'much-abused widow's' many heirs?

The publication of the 'Gritli letters' exposed the complexity of the story of *The Star*; Zank's comparison of the published edition with the complete text on-line exposed the reason for that complexity. We are certainly in Zank's debt for calling a spade a spade:

'What is fundamentally misleading [about the Bilam-Verlag edition] is the emphasis on Gritli as the main recipient of hitherto unpublished letters by Rosenzweig. . . . Margrit Rosenstock was only half of what stabilized Rosenzweig. . . . The other half is the very cause of his having come unmoored . . . the man he was to call his maker: Eugen Rosenstock (80).'

However, Zank also characterizes Eugen as 'by Jewish standards an apostate, by Christian standards a heretic, and by academic standards an oddball' (79); this too is part of the consensus. If apostates existed, they were Eugen's parents and maternal grandparents, none of whom were observant. His grandfather Moritz Rosenstock admitted Gentile students to Wolfenbüttel's 'Samsonschule' and sent Eugen's mother, Paula, to the local (Protestant) ladies' seminary; she in turn refused to allow the circumcision of her only son. Eugen wrote a friend that '[Franz] always got furious if I dared to mention my Jewish ancestry. "I have been in your parents' home," he

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<sup>17</sup> Letter dated May 22, 1924 (<http://argobooks.org/gritli/1924.html>).

would say. “You are a Gentile.”<sup>18</sup> Eugen was recognized as a completely orthodox Christian by Leo Weismantel, Carl Muth, Ernst Michel, and Joseph Wittig—Catholics in the vanguard of the movement vindicated by Vatican II. Indeed, he was ‘Catholic’ enough in the decade after his baptism that his wife’s native Protestantism presented difficulties.<sup>19</sup> Eugen started out as an orthodox academic, if one who could write that ‘language is wiser than he who speaks it’; at the 2013 Leipzig conference, Hanna Vollrath reported that his early works are still well-regarded in their field. He himself admitted that it was Franz who ‘forced him to renounce academe.’<sup>20</sup>

Ephraim Meir renews the claim that *The Star* was an exclusively Jewish event as if Zank had never published. Meir tries to separate letters to ‘Gritli’ from those to Eugen (which Zank had proven nearly impossible) and to drive an imaginary wedge between Eugen and Margrit in regard to Franz. ‘Rosenzweig’s extraordinary hermeneutic talents were greatly neglected by Eugen, while Gritli rightly valued them’ (Meir 2006: 17); ‘Gritli . . . paid attention to her lover’s alterity, something her husband . . . hardly respected’ (53); ‘Gritli apparently understood such examples of [Franz’s] Jewish thought better than her husband did, since his understanding was blinded by his desire to convert Rosenzweig and he did not hesitate to use his own wife to achieve it (67).’<sup>21</sup>

Meir makes tendentious statements without evidence (‘Eugen . . . was far from an expert translator’ (107); ‘Gritli had her child . . . and discovered her marriage [!]’ (161)) and reads selectively. He generalizes from a statement in one letter while ignoring contrary evidence in others (the letter Meir cites (83), in which Franz denigrates Eugen’s failure to see him as a person, is followed almost immediately by one of sincere apology). He takes umbrage at Eugen dubbing Franz ‘Adam Bann’ (107), when in fact Franz later wrote Eugen freely accepting the name.<sup>22</sup> Zank had already covered this territory:

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<sup>18</sup> Unpublished letter from Eugen to Rev. William MacNair. Many details of his family’s and his own relation to Judaism and Christianity are included in this letter, later dated only ‘1947,’ and in one dated February 18, 1946, published as a letter to an ‘American friend’ (Rosenstock-Huessy 1970: 182-190.)

<sup>19</sup> The letter to Margrit dated June 16, 1918, cited below, is only one reference.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Georg Müller dated July 27, 1959. See ‘Works Cited.’

<sup>21</sup> This achieves a level of insult exceeding even Schmied-Kowarzik’s.

<sup>22</sup> Franz’s statement is found in the undated letter fragment directly preceding the letter dated April 30, 1917 at <http://www.argobooks.org/gritli/1917.html>.

‘With great regularity crises arose when Rosenzweig found fault with either Margrit or Eugen . . . . *At such moments* [Franz] either lamented Margrit’s distance or . . . Eugen’s inability to accept his Judaism as real.’ (Zank 2003: 90, emphasis added.)

When Meir writes that Franz ‘still mistrusted reason’ (54), he sees it as refutation rather than proof of Eugen’s influence.<sup>23</sup> He writes Franz called *The Star* ‘the *Gegenstück* of the cross’ when Franz actually wrote that it was the counterpart of Eugen’s ‘*Kreuz der Wirklichkeit*’ (Rosenzweig 1935: 124). In four pages, Meir supplies a dizzyingly contradictory list of influences: ‘Gritli’s husband was of foremost importance’ (34); ‘according to the letters, Hermann Cohen . . . most prominently influenced [him]’ (35); ‘more than any other writer, it is Rosenstock who most influenced [him]’ (35); ‘after Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, [Franz] said, Cohen was his first influence’ (36); ‘Nietzsche was never important to [him]’ (37).<sup>24</sup> Meir’s discussion of Franz’s view of Christianity ignores his concurrence with Eugen that ‘Christianity has its proof already behind it, in history’ (Rosenzweig 1935: 695).

Meir accuses Eugen of a Christological ‘monomania’ but *Love Letters* overflows with Meir’s own monomania, Eugen’s allegedly ongoing efforts to convert Franz (29, 30, 67, 89, 116), for which he presents no evidence. The 1916 correspondence took place long after and, indeed, in response to Franz’s decision to ‘remain a Jew’ (or, as Eugen reminded Margrit, to *become* a Jew).<sup>25</sup> If Eugen attempted to convert Franz, it was from his ‘*Philosophiegläubigkeit*’ (religious faith in philosophy) to a view of the world based in revelation. Zank writes that in 1913, ‘[Eugen] revealed his religious faith, *inadvertently compelling* [Franz] to consider baptism’ (80). Franz wrote his cousin ‘Rudi,’

‘I was completely disarmed by Rosenstock’s simple confession. . . . That a man like Rosenstock could consciously consider himself a Christian bowled over my entire concept of Christianity, and thus of religion in general, and thus of my own religion.’ (Rosenzweig 1935: 71-72.)

Rudi only told Eugen of the effect of his witness years later; it was at Rudi’s urging that Eugen wrote Franz. At first Franz replied defensively, but Eugen responded with respect for his change of mind:

<sup>23</sup> See Rosenzweig 1935: 639.

<sup>24</sup> What Franz actually said is that Nietzsche was unimportant ‘except when I most specifically think about our own time.’ See Rosenzweig 1935: 126.

<sup>25</sup> Unpublished letter dated June 21, 1918.

‘You overrate the Christian in me. I am not Paul of Tarsus, sad to say. My mission halts before you; you are the [one] human individual whose particularity I acknowledge despite its anti-Christian character. I see Judaism exactly as you demand that ‘the Church’—and you yourself?—see it’ (662-663).

He later answered one of Franz’s more defensive letters by saying that ‘you end with what I tried to make my beginning: I must, and am to, let you stand’ (694). It was just this mutual recognition which allowed the utter freedom of language and argument in the correspondence. Whatever expressions Eugen used to characterize Judaism in the correspondence (and Franz later used to characterize Christianity), the argument was the *beginning* of a process in the lives of both men: the discovery of common ground in spite of their differences.<sup>26</sup> It was the testimony of a Christian that prompted Franz to commit to living as a Jew.<sup>27</sup> That testimony and that commitment both *preceded* the letters.

That the Simon-Dubnow-Institut in Leipzig, or any institution dedicated to German-Jewish history, should hold a conference on either Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy or the ‘Leipziger Nachtgespräch’ was something of a milestone.<sup>28</sup> The conference theme, however, was ‘Biographie und Erkenntnis: Konversionen des Wissens’ (‘Biography and Insight: Conversions of the Intellect’), and that subtitle marks a minefield of scholarly misunderstanding, epitomized by Micha Brumlik’s words on the ‘[childish] innocence of assimilated Jews’ and his attack on Rosenstock’s language.<sup>29</sup>

For neither man was conversion a matter of the intellect: Eugen wrote that he dreaded his relationship with Franz being reduced to ‘an intellectual dialectic between two brains.’<sup>30</sup> Eugen decided to formally recognize the fact of his Christianity in the summer of 1907, but was not baptized until December 7, 1909. Although he spoke of those dates in response to questions about his ‘conversion,’ he was just as often explicit about not having ‘converted’ to Christianity

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<sup>26</sup> On July 2, 1919, Franz wrote Eugen that ‘the *Star* is based on the single assumption that Christianity is a lie’ (<http://www.argobooks.org/gritli/1919.html>).

<sup>27</sup> Rabbi Marshall Meyer invited Harold Stahmer to speak to Congregation B’nai Jeshurun on this very topic on Shavuot, the celebration of revelation, in 1989. See also Zank 2003: 80.

<sup>28</sup> The date of the conference in fact fell much closer to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a grimmer event in Eugen’s life: his mother’s suicide, in Leipzig, in response to the events of *Kristallnacht*. See Rosenstock-Huessy 1968: 92-93.

<sup>29</sup> The only other country to approach the degree of assimilation and intermarriage seen in 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany is the contemporary United States; are American Jews similarly deluded?

<sup>30</sup> Letter to Müller, date July 27, 1959.

at all, having been brought up Christian in all but name.<sup>31</sup> He claimed that his true conversion came with the decision to turn away from the offers made to him on demobilization and to enter the Daimler plant as a peacemaker instead—his first attempt not just to worship, but to live out his conviction that ‘truth is vital and must be socially represented’ (Rosenstock-Huessy 1938: 741).<sup>32</sup> He never denied his Jewish heritage; as he wrote Franz, ‘I melt down German and Jewish gifts. . . in the attempt to become a Christian’ (Rosenzweig 1935: 664). So conversion, as dissected by scholars of German-Jewish history, is a dubious proposition in his case.

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Can facts move the scholarly consensus? Perhaps, ten years after Freya’s von Moltke’s correction of Zank’s portrayal of Eugen in 1918, the time has come to publish more detailed evidence. Margrit and Eugen wrote each other daily, often including other people’s letters in their own. Margrit and Franz both included Eugen in their correspondence, with the exception of one brief and terrible period: after Margrit and Franz met in Cassel for the second time in February of 1918, Franz stopped writing Eugen. By April 14th, 1918, Eugen had to write, ‘Dear Gritli, I am beginning to worry about Franz. Write and let me know how he is doing.’<sup>33</sup> That plea alone shows that Eugen knew about their correspondence from the beginning; Margrit continued to send Eugen abstracts and excerpts from Franz’s letters—even from what are clearly love-letters. Eugen managed to put up with his best friend’s love for his wife and even tried to accept her growing love for his friend. It was only when Margrit returned to Cassel after Georg Rosenzweig’s death that Eugen began to feel that Franz and his family were crowding himself and *his* family out of Margrit’s heart. In the meantime, Eugen had asked Franz to critique a manuscript of his mother’s.

Margrit wrote her husband on April 25, 1918:

‘This morning long, long letters from Franz arrived. . . . If you were here, I would pack you off to read from [them], but that’s impossible. . . .

‘The other letter is about us, about him and me. “. . . because your heart’s superabundance flows toward me, I can only pass the gift onward to—whom else?—to Eugen.” . . . I see just now, that

<sup>31</sup> Letter to MacNair. See also the letter to Müller dated January 21, 1957: ‘I never *converted!*’

<sup>32</sup> See Rosenstock-Huessy 1970: 182-190.

<sup>33</sup> This and the following excerpts from the voluminous unpublished correspondence between Eugen and Margrit have been chosen to represent the tone and recurring themes of those difficult months. See ‘Works Cited.’

from there on I can send you the letter—once I have answered it. This isn't any kind of letter from me, it's really one from Franz.'

and again on April 28, 1918:

'I am still under the spell of Franz's great letter. I knew everything that was in it and still his "in recognition of all the limits—yours beyond limits" has robbed me of all words . . . I can't send you the letter after all. You wouldn't want me to.'

Eugen wrote on May 8th, 1918:

'It's probably a good thing that you were able to read my letter to Franz. You will see how hard it is for me still. . . . As long as he writes "yours beyond limits," I can't write to him. I think that you must sense that as a question of tact *hors de discussion*.

'I had written Mother at some length. Her answer . . . shows me how dangerously tense she still is. I ask myself constantly whether I should write Franz about his critique of [her] book, but I think I'll let it go. His sense of tact will surely come up with a better solution than any I could offer.'

In fact Franz came up with something quite different. On May 20th, Gritli wrote:

'I found a mountain of letters here. I would have loved to have been able to read them with you. . . . Franz found Mother's work not crazy enough by a long shot—[thought] she must have struggled too much in revising it. . . . The main impression: "a hick from the hinterlands of Posen." He said where she was concerned, he had always understood how some people became anti-semites.'

Zank could see on-line the letter from which Margrit quotes, but seems not to have seen that it offered reason enough for Eugen's outburst of accumulated heartbreak.<sup>34</sup> Eugen had suffered in silence until then, even accepting the accusation of silence; however, on May 26<sup>th</sup> he replied:

'These steps you take are yours, not mine—the ones I wish you would take, you neither will nor can take. I couldn't make my peace with that at first, but had to spend several days haggling over it. But you must understand how deeply I feel it, that . . . you are no longer dependent on me alone. . . . A new stage has come in which our love must and will live again, in new language and new form. Just don't be surprised or frightened that this newness makes me suffer.'

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<sup>34</sup> Margrit quotes from Franz's letter dated May 4, 1918 (<http://www.argobooks.org/gritli/1918.html#mai>). She pointedly did *not* quote other brutal passages from Franz's letters of May 3-5, so including these passages seems unfortunate at best.

She replied on May 28th:

‘Dearest, that it is I who makes you suffer so, struck me to the core. . . . Only the one thing appalls me: you must not speak of competition. . . . Believe that I am yours, quite undividedly—there is no way to divide a heart. . . . I am, in Franz’s [eyes] and in my own, always *Eugen’s Gritli*, anything else he would consider sin. . . . Hold me [close]!’

She wrote on June 7<sup>th</sup>:

‘Mrs. Rosenzweig . . . no longer sets any hopes on Franz—[she] feels herself repulsed by his Judaism. Her only comfort now is her freedom to end her life. . . . I know that you’re not happy I’m here, but if you could see it all with your own eyes, you wouldn’t have the heart to question it.’

By June 9<sup>th</sup> he had already sent a telegram:

‘I am getting better and love you. Dear Gritli, your Eugen.’

A letter followed soon after:

‘I can’t think of anything to say about you and Franz. Do I not fear the same impoverishment you do? I see and dread it just as much! . . . Perhaps Franz was only indirectly connected to your distance from me, perhaps he even tried to bring you closer to me, more than he led you away. . . . Believe me, Gritli, I have never wanted to strike at the bond you share. . . . It is just because I honor in him a vocation and a destiny, the one thing not chosen but both sent and laid on me by God—it is for that very reason that I hesitate so to even lay a finger on it.’

On June 16th he wrote his ‘poor, dear Margaret’:

‘Let us not quarrel because of Franz. Just this much: he [comes too soon, and] . . . deprives us of the mortar of a confession with well-set limits, *secure in its form*. . . . We have enough trouble to make ourselves at home and find our way in this or that visible church . . . . I am placed on the razor’s edge too soon: here Jew, here Christian, thrown back on a scar and a fracture at a time in which I am still trying to *become* a Christian without self-consciousness. . . .

‘Don’t you understand what a slap in the face it was for me in retrospect, that he should write to you that he had at last accepted the offer of “Du” I made a year ago—which he had so long and so disdainfully denied—out of *pity*, to comfort me? . . . That you had to copy the stuff about Mother was, I grant you, an unhappy coincidence, but it shakes me to the core. . . . A sentence like *that one* is like an exploding powder-keg and flings me an enormous distance.’

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, she wrote:

‘No, I love you *beyond all measure*. . . . In these weeks you must have felt how [my heart] is *your heart*, [how it] belongs *to you* and to no one else in the world. Just let me live and my life will tell you all this better than my words. . . . I love you endlessly, your Gritli.’

He wrote her that same day:

‘I am at last moving at what seems like a snail’s pace toward a far-off, dawning hope of healing. . . . I promise to tell you honestly . . . if I should ever threaten to become so small, as to shut Franz out in self-defense. Dear Gritli, shutting him out, *should it become necessary*, would be my final defeat.’

And on June 21<sup>st</sup>, probably in response to a letter now lost:

‘Dear, sweet Gritli. . . . I have to find my way back to Franz *on my own*. I must be able to move toward him without making the detour through you, now that he no longer writes as he used to—to you for me—but writes for you alone. . . .

‘I have a past with Franz. You do not bring him to me; I brought him to you, and you received him with all palpitations of a bride. Now he is yours, but for that very reason he is no longer *mine*. I mean no injury to your feelings for each other—just let the ‘us’ between you and me reawaken. . . . Dear Gritli, I won’t abandon you, either, because I am

your Eugen.

‘Postscript on Judaism: luckily, you must see it from the outside, as a strange [and wonderful] garden, but that is not how it is for me. The world considers me a Christian who used to be a Jew; even if I was in fact a pagan, I am still considered a *Jewish* pagan. That was why Franz’s word “how some people become anti-semites” hit me so hard. . . . I am a foundling which gets to know his birth parents after the fact, *just* when he has discovered his adoptive parents *for the first time* . . . his playmate comes and sings the praises of his natural parents. . . .

‘Anyone who fails to encounter God in a firm confession of faith, soon ceases to encounter him at all. . . . For me the opposition and simultaneous unity of the Old and New Testament has become a burning and unbearable question.’

Then on the 26th:

‘Dear Gritli . . . as you require an official document, in writing and in proper form, I hereby confirm that you are granted all peace and freedom, and that the unfortunately still unengaged and

unmarried Franz Rosenzweig is granted the title of your beloved, or “Dear Franz,” as the case may be. Signed this day at headquarters about noon, Eugen I of Bergenuau.’<sup>35</sup>

She wrote around the same time:

‘I would so much like to tell you about Franz, about the letters which are really to you. But you wouldn’t believe it, don’t want to admit . . . that I am more than anything else the vein connecting you to him. . . he, the one who was probably, after me, the first to believe you. . . . “Doesn’t he feel what it means, that *I* believe him? Doesn’t he know not only how hard it *was*, but how hard it *is*, to have to believe him? My life would be so much simpler if I didn’t have to believe him. He is the turning point in my life and so the chain that drags behind me. It is no coincidence that when I felt I had no choice but to spread myself out completely before Cohen, I spoke only of my relationship with Eugen and of nothing else.” [!] I would love to send you the whole letter, but I understand only too well the sense of shame Franz must feel towards you, and that his lips must be silent . . . [referring] to the terrible jolting of that night in Leipzig.’

On June 28th, Eugen closed their months of suffering with this:

‘Today I read all the letters you’ve written since Pentecost, one after the other. How strange and terrible that I have let you experience such a month. How pure and true to yourself you have remained in all the storms—for that I thank you, but especially for your faithfulness to Franz.’

Eugen was finally able to surmount the crisis; that is the main point. His accumulated suffering sought an outlet only when Franz, asked to critique Paula Rosenstock’s work, instead criticized the woman herself. So it was particularly unfortunate that Edith chose to include another such statement in the published letters.

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It is a bitter irony that Rosenzweig’s and Rosenstock’s work is now exclusively discussed by academics (people who, from their subjects’ point of view, are still living before 1913). The contrast between the two men’s attempts to become teachers of truth for society at large and the concerns of those who now research their lives speaks for itself. Their encounter threw them both beyond accepted academic thought and institutions; by accepting revelation as orientation, they consciously declared the beginning of a post-critical age. The distortions of their work created by many academics may arise from simple discomfort with the fact that the two men’s shared faith

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<sup>35</sup> The name Eugen took when playing with tin soldiers as a child. Rosenstock-Huessy 1968: 149.

in the creative power of speech roots in Genesis 1:1–2:4. Indeed, their works may be broadly considered extended commentary on that passage, its translation into new language for a new time. Perhaps Rosenstock-Huessy himself put it best: ‘a Jew and a Christian momentarily put aside their insoluble antithesis and united against self-styled humanists of all descriptions,’ seeing “the swindle of the academic class . . . in its murderous impact on the Western World’ (Rosenstock-Huessy 1969: 71). The academy now seems quite eager to return the favor.

For better or worse, we are creatures of flesh and blood, and it is from the lives of flesh and blood that all spirit will proceed. The traces of the spirit left by the lives of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig (and by their neglected partner in the ‘Nachtgespräch,’ Rudolf Ehrenberg) are significant enough that we should approach their lives, and the lives of the people they loved, with respect. ‘Respect’ would entail not assuming what we cannot know and not saying what we can only assume; letting people speak for themselves rather than putting words into their mouths; and not twisting their words to suit our agendas. Above all, it means honoring ‘*Zeugnis*’ (witness) over ‘*Zitat*’ (citation). I hope we may all learn to do so in time.

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All excerpts from the ‘Gritli Letters’ are taken from the online text at <http://argobooks.org/gritli/index.html> (accessed 2 April 2014). I am grateful to Eckart Wilkens for the use of his electronic version of Rosenstock-Huessy’s correspondence with Georg Müller; the originals are available at the ‘Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen’ in Bielefeld. Other cited unpublished letters to and from Eugen and Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy are available to scholars at Dartmouth College’s Rauner Library, which also holds the originals of the ‘Gritli letters’ themselves.

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