*Bambi’s Jewish Roots* *and other Essays on German-Jewish Culture*. By Paul Reitter. New York, London, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury. 2015. X + 282 pp., £16. ISBN 9781441166852

In a sense, this collection doubles as the academic autobiography of its author. Reitter is Professor of German at Ohio State University in Columbus and has been a prolific essayist since completing his PhD in 1999. These biographical facts are not only worth mentioning because Reitter himself finds them important enough to include in his preface, but because self-reflective thinking has also influenced his academic interests. The (auto)biographical genre represents a prominent theme of the essays collected in *Bambi’s Jewish Roots*. It is through the lens of their diaries, autobiographies, memoirs and a family biography that many of the Jewish writers are presented to the reader.

The reference to German-Jewish culture in the subtitle is slightly imprecise. Although some essays do deal with Heine, Börne, Scholem (whose name is misspelt), Nelly Sachs and Fromm, the book’s main focus, as the author of *Bambi* suggests, lies on Austrian writers and in particular on the ones of the so-called *fin de siècle*: Freud, Kafka and Schnitzler. Again an autobiographical connection can be drawn, this time to Reitter’s 2008 book on Karl Kraus, one of the *fin de siècle*’sdefining figures. While Kraus does not feature prominently in the volume under review, Reitter’s recent collaboration with Jonathan Franzen and Daniel Kehlmann on the *Kraus Project* (2013) demonstrates his continued interest. More importantly, the genre that Kraus perfected instilled in Reitter the desire to pursue academic journalism himself. The present volume then constitutes the realisation of this desire. All but two of its twenty-six pieces first appeared as review essays in two principal peri-academic journals, *The Nation* and *The Times Literary Supplement*.

As an intellectual journalist Reitter has perfected an eminently readable style – despite some mannerisms such as his prefacing of examples by asking the reader to ‘consider’, ‘witness’ or ‘recall’ – while simultaneously displaying profound knowledge of his subject matter. The reader gains from the author’s belief in the importance of the cultural context within which a writer and his work are located. His musings about similarities between the methodologies of poetry translation and the review of historical studies are enlightening in this respect. About the historian Istvan Deák’s collection of reviews in *Hitler’s Europe*, the author suggests that ‘the substance of Deák’s essays lies in his own narratives of the historical developments at issue’ (236) rather than in the engagement with the arguments of his authors. This applies to Reitter, too. To use his metaphor of poetry translation, his reviews – like Deák’s – are ‘unrhymed’, reproducing the ‘sense’ more than the ‘sound’. As a translator of Solomon Maimon’s autobiography, which he is currently completing and where he aims to improve over the previous translator by rendering Maimon’s ‘voice more adequately’, and as a critic of translations, notably of Kafka, Reitter knows what he is talking about. His English-speaking audience therefore has much to gain from his reflective and erudite mediation of German-Jewish culture.

Of course, a petty reader could identify shortcomings in *Bambi’s Jewish Roots*, such as the lack of information about the essays’ original publication or the incompleteness of the bibliography which, contrary to what is claimed, does not contain ‘full references for all secondary sources cited’ (265) but this cannot deny this volume its worth, which lies in creating a kaleidoscope of Jewish life and culture of one turn of the century from the vantage point of the next. Moreover, as a collection of review essays Reitter’s book also illuminates the trends in German-Jewish studies of the first decades and a half of the new millennium and the prerogative of culture within it.

Andrea Reiter, University of Southampton