THE *PIETÀ* IN JACOB STEINHARDT'S EARLY ŒUVRE

Abstract

This essay explores the Pietàs by Jacob Steinhardt, an Eastern-European Jewish artist, in connection with his involvement in the Pathetiker movement. The paper proceeds to examine them against the backdrop of German and Austrian Expressionist movements, as well as other treatments of the theme by Jewish artists. Through stylistic and iconographic analysis of Steinhardt's Pietàs, Czekanowska-Gutman demonstrates that both of the works in question are in fact revisions of one of the most important Christian iconographic "framing themes," which Steinhardt situates within the Jewish context and perspective. The central argument of the paper is that Steinhardt's Pietàs address Christian audiences in their own representational conventions in order to denounce anti-Jewish violence, such as the pogroms of the time. The artist achieves this through the portrayal of Jesus and Mary as elderly Eastern European Jews (Ostjuden), using—remarkably—the visual language of anti-Jewish caricature. Finally, the paper investigates Steinhardt's masterful use of drypoint and woodcutting techniques to visualise the suffering of Mary and her dying son.

The Pietà, a devotional motif originating in the Middle Ages of the Virgin Mary mourning or contemplating the lifeless body of Christ lying across her lap, has become one of the most significant and powerful—to employ art historian Jan Białostocki's phrase—"framing themes" (*Rahmenthemen*) in Christian art.¹ In employing this motif, sculptors, painters and graphic artists have expressed the fundamental theological doctrines of Christianity, namely the mystery of the incarnation of the Christian God, his sacrificial death, and Mary's role in both of them.² The Pietà theme underwent a

process of secularization in the late nineteenth century, as epitomized in the work of Belgian artist Constantin Meunier's *The Damp Explosion* (1887–1889) and Norwegian artist Edvard Munch's *The Inheritance* (1897–1899) which added a layer of irreligious meaning of motherly suffering to the motif of the Pietà in European art of the twentieth century. Contributing to the process of secularization, a significant group of Jewish artists living in Eastern and Western Europe (Poland, Ukraine, Germany) and the United States included Pietàs in their artistic repertoire among other scenes from the Passion of Christ, mostly in response to various forms of anti-Jewish violence. Their treatment of the Pietà revealed not only a departure from the official mode of representing this motif in Christian art, but more significantly it introduced a Jewish perspective, or Jewish experience to the theme. This, in consequence, can shed light on the process of the creation and redefinition of modern Jewish art.

The importance of the Pietà theme in Jewish art was first pointed out by art historian Ziva Amishai-Maisels, who saw Pietà depictions as one of the significant Mariological symbols of suffering that emerged in the context of the anti-Semitism of the early twentieth century, primarily in Eastern Europe, reaching its height during the Holocaust period and thereafter in the works of Jewish artists from the United States (e.g., Abraham Rattner) and Israel (e.g., Marcel Janco and Naftali Bezem).³ However, beyond Amishai-Maisels's recognition of the motif as part and parcel of broader trends in Jewish art to incorporate Christological motifs, the unique dimensions and meanings of the

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¹ The word "Pietà" in Italian means a pious emotion that signifies both piety and pity. See Rona Goffen, *Giovani Bellini* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 67. On the Pietà as one of the "framing themes" in Christian art, see Jan Białostocki, *Stil und Ikonographie:*

Studien zur Kunstwissenschaft (Dresden: Veb Verlag der Kunst), 115, in particular the chapter entitled "Die Rahmenthemen' und die archetypischen Bilder," 111–155.

² See "The Pietà" in, Schiller Gertrud, *Iconography of Christian Art: The Passion of Jesus Christ*, vol. 2, trans. Janet Seligman (Greenwich, Conn: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 180.

³ Ziva Amisha-Maisels distinguished the Pietà as one of the Christian themes in the art of modern Jewish artists in three articles: Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "The Jewish Jesus," *Journal of Jewish Art* 9 (1982): 84–104; Amishai-Maisels, "Faith, Ethics and the Holocaust: Christological symbolism of the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4 (1988): 457–481; and Amishai-Maisels, "Origins of the

Pietà have been largely neglected in the literature, a lacuna this paper addresses.⁴

I offer a deep reading of two images of the *Pietà* in the early output of the Eastern European Jewish artist Jacob Steinhardt.⁵ I have chosen Jacob Steinhardt's *Pietàs* as they reflect what Milly Heyd and Matthew Baigell call "... some aspects of the Jewish experience—whether religious, cultural, social or personal."⁶ Therefore, in the following pages, I will examine Steinhardt's contribution to the process of secularization of the *Pietà* by looking at the specific Jewish features in his treatment of this motif. My analysis will explore how Steinhardt's works convey various concepts of Jewish thought, and how the iconography of his works is employed to comment on his self-identification as a Jew. I will also compare Steinhardt's *Pietàs* with other cotemporary *Pietàs* by Jewish and non-Jewish artists in order to highlight the socio-historical events and artistic phenomena that influenced the emergence of this motif and its growth in modern Jewish art.

Born in Żerków, a small town in the Prussian Province of Posen, today part of Western Poland, Jacob Steinhardt (1887–1968) received a traditional Jewish education. Yet, like many East European Jews living in the Prussian Kingdom, he was acculturated into German artistic society. This is reflected in his artistic path, as his major studies were at the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Berlin, where he became a leading figure of one of the German Expressionist movements, the so-called Pathetiker Group. Faithful to the Expressionist style throughout his career, Steinhardt was well known for scenes from the Hebrew Bible, which he executed

mostly in graphic techniques. His repertoire includes several Christian subjects, such as the *Crucifixion* (1910), created at a time of deep exploration of biblical themes; *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1912); the *Head of Christ* (1913), produced after his Italian trips in 1911; two versions of the *Pietà* in drypoint from 1913, and in woodcut from 1914.⁷

Exploring Different Media: Drypoint and Woodcut Pietàs

Steinhardt's two *Pietàs* were created only a year apart and testify to his common practice of dealing with the same subject in multiple different graphic media.⁸ Indeed, through the different possibilities presented by drypoint and woodcut, various diverse aspects of Steinhardt's aesthetic vision, representing different levels of pain and despair are given more emphasis.

The specificity of the drypoint *Pietà's* medium—a very difficult technique which enables creation of burred lines of a taut, soft, almost excited quality—allowed Steinhardt to introduce a more lyrical, emotional bond in the mother and son's expression of suffering (fig. 1). Whereas Mary's head emerges in the central part of the composition and its round shape is stressed through single lines, Christ's face, reduced to a barely visible forehead, small eyes, nose and mouth, is squeezed into the right corner by means of small, thin, acuminate lines. The lines of different shapes running down from the top of the dominant three-quarter bust portrayal of Mary's head situated to the left, through her forehead, naturally guide the

Jewish Jesus," in *Complex Identities: Jewish Consciousness and Modern Art*, ed. Matthew Baigell and Milly Heyd (Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 51–86. She also states that the *Pietà* was transferred into the depiction of the mother mourning her child, in particular in a memorial sculpture of the late 1950s and early 1960s in *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts* (Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1993), 188–189.

⁴ The motif of the *Pietà* was also briefly recalled by Jerzy Malinowski in *Malarstwo i rzeźba Żydów polskich w XIX w XX w.* (Warszawa: Warszawa Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000), 49–50 and by Barbara Brus-Malinowska and Jerzy Malinowski in *W kręgu École de Paris: Malarze żydowscy z Polski* (Warszawa: DIG 2007), 37, 76–78 while dealing with the oeuvre of several Polish-Jewish artists such as Leopold Pilichowski, and Leopold Gottlieb.

⁵ Jacob Steinhardt returned to the motif of the *Pietà* after World War II. He also dealt with it in the work *War* (1948, Bar Uryan Collection, Tel Aviv). See Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "Steinhardt in the Land of Israel," in *Jacob and Israel: Homeland and Identity in the Work of Jacob Steinhardt*, ed. Gabriel Ma'anit and Ruthi Ofek (Tefen: The Open Museum Industrial Park Tefen, 1998), 92–93, 99, 101, 217, 221, (in Hebrew and English); Amishai-Maisels, "Steinhardt's Wars: Reality

and Allegory," in *Jacob's Dream: Steinhardt in Prints, Drawings, and Paintings*, ed. Ronit Sorek (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2011), 13, 119–120 (in Hebrew and English). And he referred to the *Pietà* in his Hagar series such as *Hagar und Ishmael* (1950, Steinhardt Collection Nahariya; 1954, private collection; and 1957, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). See Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "Steinhardt's Call for Peace," *Journal of Jewish Art* 3–4 (1977): 92–93, 97–98; and Amishai-Maisels, "Steinhardt's Wars: Reality and Allegory," 104. I would like to thank Ziva Amishai-Maisels for drawing my attention to this aspect of Steinhardt's work.

⁶ Baigell and Heyd, *Complex Identities*, xiv.

⁷ Biblical themes at this time include oil paintings such as *The Crossing of the Red Sea* (1911), *the Flood* (1911), *Jeremiah I, II* (1911), *Lot's Escape* (1911), *Cain* (1912), *Crucifixion* (1910), *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (1912), *Head of Christ* (1913), *Pietà* (etching, 1913), *Pietà* (woodcut, 1914).

⁸ Steinhardt studied graphic techniques under Herman Struck (1876–1944), a German-Jewish artist from Berlin who specialized in etchings. As Ziva Amishai-Maisels points out, "Steinhardt was interested in working out not only different stylistic possibilities for each theme, but in investigating the way the different media could express all the nuances and meanings inherent in a given subject." See, Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "Steinhardt in the Land of Israel," 229.

Fig. 1. Jacob Steinhardt, *Pietà*, 1913, Drypoint on paper, 26.4 × 23.1 cm. Berlin, Jewish Museum. © Jewish Museum, Berlin.

viewer's gaze towards the three-quarter head of Christ, squeezed into the right-hand corner of the image. It is important to note that the movement from Mary's head to Jesus's face is part of a pronounced circular pattern, encompassing both of the figures that creates an almost hypnotic effect. This keeps the viewer's gaze fixed on the mother-son relationship, where Mary's sorrowful eyes contemplate the suffering and death of Christ, as epitomized by the blood emerging from his mouth.

The viewer's eye is also attracted to the more delicate lines of the anatomical features of their faces, such as the hooked nose, protruding ears, and Christ's open mouth with blood emerging from it. On the other hand, Steinhardt's use of crosshatching, with its thin, now-small, now-long diagonal lines placed at odds to each other, clashing and contradictory, effects a state of anxiety. Accumulated around Christ and Mary's noses

and open mouths, these lines create an impression of real physical and spiritual pain.

The drypoint technique also enables Steinhardt to emphasize Mary's old age and make Christ's appearance older than his mother. The convulsing, clearly delineated, angular, and distorted lines on Mary, and even more so on Christ's forehead and cheeks, serve as wrinkles, while the small, oval black spots give the appearance of dark, sunken eyes. The low socio-economic status of both figures is made apparent through the disorderly lines of Mary's long, thin curly hair and the barely-visible lines of Jesus's hair.

The specificity of the woodcut *Pietà*'s technique introduces a harsher edge to the depiction of Mary and Christ's suffering (fig. 2). The stark contrast between the black and white areas of the woodcut enables Steinhardt to juxtapose the background with the images of Mary and Christ. Contrary to the drypoint, the background in the woodcut—which occupies a significant area, filled-in white, with occasional black, thick, sharp lines—leaves Mary's and Christ's faces looking whiter. Shaped as a triangle, the background recalls either the mountain of Golgotha, filled with smoke rising up to heaven and thus evoking an atmosphere of pogroms, or is reminiscent of an apocalyptic World War I landscape (WWI broke out that year, at the end of July 1914). The compact pyramidal composition of the woodcut, with its clear division, emphasizes the visual unity between the dramatic background and the drama in the Mary-Christ relationship. The unadorned rendition of the bust of Mary and the head of Christ in the woodcut *Pietà*, which is related to the drypoint *Pietà* through mirror symmetry, lends to their suffering a rawer feel.⁹

Most importantly, the woodcut medium makes Mary's and Christ's faces even more suggestive than they could be in drypoint. Indeed, the more linear, thicker and controlled lines achievable in a woodcutting allowed Steinhardt to make Mary's face more distorted and masculine, with wide, strong cheekbones and a pointed chin. The hard-edged lines that form the hooked noses of both figures are stressed even more than in the drypoint; their old, exhausted expressions, sore eyes with falling eyelids, give the impression of a crude propinquity.

⁹ In the woodcut the bust of Mary is on the right and the head of Christ is on the left, whereas in the drypoint the bust of Mary is on the left and the head of Christ is on the right corner, making them mirror-images.

Fig. 2. Jacob Steinhardt, *Pietà*, 1914, Woodcut on paper, 29.2 × 22.6 cm. Berlin, Jewish Museum. © Jewish Museum, Berlin.

The Pathethiker and Expressionist Movements in Germany and Austria

The theme of the Pietà aligned with Steinhardt's ideological perspectives and artistic vision, as he himself

attested to in his memoir. Referring to the time when he was creating the Pietàs, Steinhardt wrote that “the images should depict the pain in forms and colours.”¹⁰ Moreover, Steinhardt created the 1913 drypoint of the Passion theme after an eleven-month trip to Florence and Rome, during which he saw masterpieces of Christian art, among them the famous *Pietà* (1498–1499) by Michelangelo in Saint Peter's Basilica.¹¹ Art historian Stefan Behrens claims that during this trip, Steinhardt “felt the underlying unity of religion, art and life,” and that “he brought this feeling of straight pathos from sixteenth century Italian art back to Berlin.”¹² Indeed, both of Steinhardt's *Pietàs* record the influence of a sorrowful, poignant mood. This results from the posture of Mary and Christ, who are directed towards each other and share a profound intimacy with each other, which in turn creates pathos in the viewer—a similar effect to that seen in certain Medieval German (e.g., *Röttgen Pietà* c. 1300–1325, Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn) and early Renaissance Dutch Pietàs (figs. 3 and 4).

The focus on pathos in Steinhardt's interpretations of the Pietà has several sources. First, the term pathos is commonly believed to be one of the possible meanings of the Italian word Pietà.¹³ Second, in 1912, Steinhardt, together with Ludwig Meidner (1884–1966) and Richard Janthur (1883–1956), co-founded *Die Pathethiker* group. The name of this artistic movement is often translated as “The Solemn Ones” or “The Pathetic Ones.”¹⁴ The Pathetikers saw the artist as a “pathetic prophet” creating a “new pathos.”¹⁵ In Steinhardt's own words:

We wanted to give the pictures content, great exciting content. We wish to create an art that enthalls the people and mankind, and not one that would serve the aesthetic needs of a small sector. We were exhilarated

¹⁰ Jacob Steinhardt, “Erinnerungen” in *Jacob Steinhardt. Der Prophet. Ausstellungs- und Bestandskatalog Jüdisches Museum im Berlin Museum*, ed. Dominik Bartmann, Inka Bertz and Kathrin Kellner (Berlin: Berlin Museum), 18.

¹¹ In the early twentieth century many Jewish intellectuals, in particular from Germany, such as Sigmund Freud, Herman Cohen, and Marcel Proust traveled to Rome in accordance with the well documented cultural fashion referred to as “Roman fever.” For them, Rome was not only the site of eternal art, but also the place of self-empowerment, and the affirmation of Diaspora. See more on German Jewish fascination with Rome and Italy at that time in Asher Biemann, *Dreaming of Michelangelo: Jewish Variations on a Modern Theme* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), in particular 114–115.

¹² Stefan Behrens, *Jacob Steinhardt. Das graphische Werk* (Berlin: Berlin Kunstamtes Wedding, 1987), 8.

¹³ Richard Viladesau, *The Pathos of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts—The Baroque Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 96.

¹⁴ For more on the translation as “The Solemn Ones,” see Dietmar Elger, *Expressionism* (Köln: Benedikt Taschen, 1994), 229, who writes that this word “very aptly described the passionately vivid expressiveness of their paintings.” For “The Pathetic Ones,” see Victor H. Miesel, *Voices of German Expressionism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 110.

¹⁵ In parallel with this group of painters, a group of young writers and poets emerged, who following in the footsteps of the others, called themselves the Neo-Pathetiker. Writers such as Kasimir Edschmidt, Walter Hasenclever, Arno Holz, Oskar Lörke, Alfred Mombert, Renne Schickele, Franz Werfel, Stefan Zweig, Arnold Zweig, Paul Zech, Richard Dehmel, Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele and Else Lasker-Schüler also belonged to this group.

and excited over our painted and un-painted works, and we were convinced that with them we would create a new artistic era.¹⁶

In his vision of the Pathetiker movement, Steinhardt was very much supported by the co-founder of the Pathethikers, Ludwig Meidner, a painter and print-maker from Silesia who became his friend after they met in 1908 at Herman Struck's studio. For Meidner, "pain, dynamics and great pathos were the main principles," as reflected in his great interest in apocalyptic landscapes full of destruction, flying people, and fragmentation which he created in particular between 1911 and 1913.¹⁷

The Pathetikers were an integral part of the intellectual movements of the day.¹⁸ Their search for transcendence and spirituality was close to that of Die Brücke group in Dresden (1905–1913) and of Der Blaue Reiter in Munich (1911–1914). Although German Expressionists dealt mostly with non-religious themes, religious motifs also held an important place in their art.¹⁹ German Expressionist scholar Bernard S. Myers wrote:

Most significant was, however, the use of religious subject matter as the expression of the search for inner content, the demand for the transcendent for its own sake or as a possible way to escape the materialism of the world and merge into the infinite divine.²⁰

For Expressionist artists like Steinhardt in the predominantly Protestant Germany, New Testament subjects and in particular the Passion were aesthetically appeal-

ing. German-Danish Expressionist painter Emil Nolde (1867–1956), a member of *Die Brücke* from 1906 to 1907, created his *Crucifixion* scene in 1911 and 1912 as one of the nine panels of the polyptych *Life of Christ*.²¹ There, in the centre, a flaming red-haired Christ is hanging between two thieves with outstretched arms and bleeding wounds. Christ's distorted face bears the signs of anguish and pain. To his right, at the side of the cross, stands Mary and possibly Saint John. To his left are the soldiers, casting lots. Heinrich Nauen (1880–1940), a member of the Rheinisch Expressionist group, painted a *Pietà* in 1913, wherein he depicted elongated figures in a style similar to El Greco's, of the lying body of Christ held and mourned by the three Marys, and a fainting Mary supported by Saint John to the side.²² Contrary to Steinhardt, Nolde and Nauen followed the expanded iconography of Passion scenes in the traditional manner. They filled the main scene with many figures, which allowed portrayals of secondary themes like the above-mentioned casting of lots by the soldiers (Nolde) and a variety of imaginative rocky and mountainous backgrounds (Nauen).

In her article on Richard Grestl's self-portraiture, art historian Gemma Blackshaw demonstrates the heavy influence of images of Christ-in-pain on modernist artists in the Catholic milieu of Vienna, with their anguished and expressive bodies presented to audiences to generate an emotive response.²³ In particular, Oscar Kokoschka (1886–1980) was preoccupied with the motif of Passion scenes and the *Pietà*, notably in the early stages of his career.²⁴ In 1908, Kokoschka

¹⁶ Translated by the author. "Wir wollen den Bildern Inhalte geben, große erregende Inhalte. Wir wollen eine Kunst schaffen, die Volk und Menschheit packen und nicht nur den ästhetischen Bedürfnissen einer kleinen Schicht dienen sollte. Wir begeisterten und erregten uns an unseren gemalten und nicht gemalten Bildern und waren überzeugt, daß wir damit eine Ära in der Kunst herbeiführen würden." See Behrens, *Jacob Steinhardt*, 9.

¹⁷ Kathrin Kellner, "Steinhardt—Ein Pathetiker," in *Jacob Steinhardt. Der Prophet. Ausstellungs- und Bestandskatalog Jüdisches Museum im Berlin Museum*, ed. Dominik Bartmann, Inka Bertz and Kathrin Kellner (Berlin: Berlin Museum), 57. For more on apocalyptic landscapes in Meidner, see Carol E. Eliel and Eberhard Roters, *The Apocalyptic Landscapes of Ludwig Meidner* exh. cat. (Prestel, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990).

¹⁸ Kathrin Kellner, "Steinhardt—Ein Pathetiker," 47.

¹⁹ Indeed, the return to religion was one of the main features of German Expressionism as stressed by Katherina Erling, "Das Bekanntnishaft zieht mich an"—Christliche Motive und Inhalte im Frühwerk Oskar Kokoschkas," in *Oskar Kokoschka und der frühe Expressionismus*, ed. Gerbert Frodl and G. Tobias Natter (Vienna: Österreichische Galerie, Belvedere, 1977), 54. Christian motifs occur in Emil Nolde, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Max Pechstein of *Die Brücke*, and Wassily Kandinsky of *Der Blaue Reiter*, among others.

²⁰ Translated by the author. "Am bezeichnendsten war jedoch die Verwendung religiöser Stoffe als Ausdruck des Suchens nach inneren Gehalten, des Verlangens nach dem Transzendenten, um seiner selbst willen oder als einer Möglichkeit, dem Materialismus der Welt zu entfliehen und in der Unendlichkeit der Gottheit aufzugehen. See, Bernard S. Myers, *Malerei des Expressionismus: eine Generation im Aufbruch* (Cologne: DuMont Schaubert, 1957), 92.

²¹ Altarpiece Nolde Foundation Seebüll—Neukirchen. See more on this work and other panels of the *Life of Christ* polyptych in William B. Sieger, *The Religious Paintings of Emil Nolde, 1909–1912*, (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1998). It is also worth mentioning that in 1909, Emil Nolde had already painted his first crucifixion but the painting was destroyed.

²² Heinrich Nauen, *Pietà*, 1913, 210 × 320 cm. Kaiser-Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld, Germany.

²³ Gemma Blackshaw, "The Jewish Christ: Problems of Self-Presentation and Socio-Cultural Assimilation in Richard Grestl's Self-Portraiture," *Oxford Art Journal* 20.1 (2006): 32.

²⁴ For more on religious paintings in early Kokoschka's oeuvre, see Erling, "Das Bekanntnishaft zieht mich an," 54–73, and in Dorle Meyer, "Religiöse Aspekte" in *Doppelbegabung im Expressionismus. Zur Beziehung von Kunst und Literatur bei Oskar Kokoschka und Ludwig Meidner* (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, 2013), 177–196.

did a *Study for the Pietà* that shows Mary, with her head in profile, seated between the sun and the moon and holding in her hands the head of a wounded and exhausted reclining Christ.²⁵ A year later Kokoschka created a controversial Pietà for a poster advertising the premiere of his play *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (*Murderer, Hope of Women*). In it, he turned the religious meaning of the Pietà and its traditional iconography upside down by showing the woman slaying the man. Interestingly, six years later Kokoschka returned to a more classical version of the theme, using lithography to craft a Pietà entitled *Es ist genug!* (*It is enough!*) as part of a cycle of 10 lithographs entitled *O Ewigkeit—Du Donnerwort* (*O Eternity, Thou Word of Thunder*) in Cantata No. 60 by Johann Sebastian Bach (1723).²⁶ This depicted (fig. 5) a weeping woman with the body of a man lying on her lap, legs dangling in a curved posture. Contrary to Steinhardt's woodcut Pietà (fig. 2), created the same year, Kokoschka's figures suffer separately and there is no interaction between them. The woman weeps expressively: her wide-open eyes are filled with tears and in her mouth there is a handkerchief. The man turns his head away from the woman, as if his body was searching for escape from the woman's lap. Occupied with the themes of the Passion of Christ, Kokoschka also painted *Veronica with the Sudarium* in 1909, where it is not Veronica but Christ's staring eyes and open lips that attract the viewer's attention.²⁷ In 1911, he created the *Crucifixion* (1911), where the arrangement of the figures and of the importance of the ladder presages Marc Chagall's *Dedicated to Christ* (1912).²⁸

Pathos was also familiar to Steinhardt because of the attention it received in Jewish intellectual circles.

Martin Buber (1878–1965), the prominent philosopher and scholar of Jewish thought and the Hasidic movement, argued in his 1909 essay “Die jüdische Mystik” (“Jewish Mysticism”), that:

There is however one element which in a certain manner replaces all this, by providing the Jew's soul with “a core”, security and substance—admittedly not a substance that is sensory and objective but rather has a motor quality, a subjective quality. This is pathos.... It is an inborn attribute which together with all the tribe's other qualities was once created from the places and the fortunes that shaped it.²⁹

Thus Buber sees pathos as an important attribute of Judaism and the Jew, giving the examples of the pathos of the prophets of the Old Testament, Moses, and also of Jesus and Paul. The Jewish Austrian novelist and playwright Stefan Zweig (1881–1942), in his essay “Das neue Pathos” (“A New Pathos,” 1909) published in *Das literarische Echo* (*The Literary Echo*), believed that the loss of the relationship between the artist and the public can be recovered again through a “new pathos.” He wrote that “... this new pathos is above all the desire, the power, and the will to create ecstasy.”³⁰ Given the significance of the “pathetic mood” Steinhardt might have also responded with his Pietàs to the criticism by Kurt Hiller (1885–1973), a Jewish critic and editor of the German literary and political magazine *Die Aktion* that was published during 1911–1932. Hiller attacked Steinhardt's Biblical repertoire on the occasion of the 1912 Pathetiker exhibition as being not suited to the mood of the time.³¹ Steinhardt's Pietàs were both intended to be directly linked to current events, and to embody a current Jewish spirit.

²⁵ Oskar Kokoschka, *Study for the Pietà*, Private collection, Vienna. See Klaus Albrecht Schröder and Johann Winkler ed., *Oskar Kokoschka* (Munich: Prestel, 1991), 47 no. 3.

²⁶ Oskar Kokoschka executed these lithographs in the aftermath of his painful relationship with his lover Alma Mahler. Reflecting on his own experience, according to Meyer, Kokoschka is here engaged in representing gender relations between a man and a woman. Meyer, “Religiöse Aspekte,” 188.

²⁷ Oskar Kokoschka, *Veronica with the Sudarium*, 1909, 119 × 80 cm. Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest.

²⁸ Oskar Kokoschka, *Crucifixion*, 1911, Collection of H.C. Bechtler, Zurich. Marc Chagall, *Dedicated to Christ*, 1912, Museum of Modern Art, New York. On the historical context and the visual sources of *Dedicated to Christ*, see Ziva Amishai-Maisles's article, “Chagall's dedicated to Christ: Sources and meanings,” *Journal of Jewish Art* 21–22 (1995–1996): 69–94.

²⁹ Quoted in Inka Bertz, *Jacob's Dream: Steinhardt in Prints, Drawings, and Paintings*, ed. Ronit Sorek (Jerusalem: Israel Museum,

2011), 240–41 (in Hebrew and English). “Die jüdische Mystik” in *Vom Geist des Judentums: Reden und Geleitworte* (Leipzig: Kurt Volf Verlag, 1916), 99. Quoted in English in Inka Bertz, “The Prophets' Pathos and the Communionality of the Shtetl: Jacob Steinhardt's Work before and after World War I,” in *Jacob and Israel: Homeland and Identity in the Work of Jakob Steinhardt*, ed. Gabriel Ma'anit and Ruthi Ofek (Tefen: Open Museum, 1998), 240–41. See also Gilya Gerda Schmidt, *Martin Buber's Formative Years: From German Culture to Jewish Renewal, 1897–1909* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 99.

³⁰ Stefan Zweig, “Das neue Pathos,” (1909) in *Expressionismus: Der Kampf um eine literarische Bewegung*, ed. Paul Raabe (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1965), 15. Quoted in Ma'anit and Ofek, *Jacob and Israel*, 240.

³¹ Inka Bertz, “The Prophets' Pathos,” in *Jacob's Dream*, 241. “As a Zionist he paints ancient Israelite subjects with earnest love and sad colors ... It may be argued against him, not that at first sight his pictures give the impression of entrails, but that the true fully

Fig. 3. Gerard David, *Pietà*, end 15th century, Oil on panel, 33.5 × 34.5 cm. Otterlo, Netherlands, Kröller-Müller Museum. ©Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands.

The Visual Sources of Steinhardt's Pietàs

Pointing out the visual sources of Steinhardt's images, one should notice that they obviously lie in Christian art; in particular in the representations of the Pietà from medieval and early Renaissance Dutch works, which fitted his dramatic, and expressive style. An important influence were depictions of an intimate relationship between Mary and her dead son by Dutch painter Gerard David (1460–1523) in his *Pietà* (fig. 3) and *Lamentation* (fig. 4).³² In both images by David, Mary is gently holding in her hands the head of Christ, bowing her face sorrowfully and looking contemplatively at the wounds on the lifeless body of her son. Moreover, in both images by David, evidence of Jesus's suffering before his death is presented, for example the filament of blood running down Christ's temple and his exhausted, half-closed eyes.

The second family of iconographic sources, in particular for Steinhardt's woodcut *Pietà* (fig. 2), are the medieval mystical versions of the Pietà, as for example, from Lubiąż (fig. 6). In this huge and impressive sculpture, as in Steinhardt's woodcut, the devas-

Fig. 4. Gerard David, *Lamentation over Christ*, 1515–1520. Oil on panel, 87 × 65.1 cm. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art. © Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

tating pain on Jesus and Mary's faces is accentuated by distortion and deformation, giving the effect of ugliness.

In Steinhardt's drypoint *Pietà* there is another element taken from the iconography of the Passion: the image of a long, thin nail placed in the left corner of the depiction, close to Mary's head. One of the possible interpretations of this nail is that it is a reference to *Arma Christi* (Instruments of the Passion). In Christian art nails occur as one of the instruments of Christ's humiliation and torture during the Passion in two iconographical types: the Pietà and the Man of Sorrow (Christ displaying his wounds). A good example of the use of nails in a Pietà is Gerard David's *Pietà* (fig. 3), wherein the nails are placed next to the thorny crown and pillars on the right side of the picture. Whereas in Christian art the nails symbolize the suffering of Christ

Jewish artist would not be Jewish in subject matter, but rather Jewish in modality; he would scarcely paint something biblical, educational or episodes from the past, but rather he would paint something contemporary with a Jewish spirit (by which I mean with spirit)." This issue was also discussed by Ziva Amishai Maisels

in her chapter "Die drei Gesichter der Jakob Steinhardt," in *Jacob Steinhardt-Der Prophet*, 24.

³² For more on such iconography, see F. O. Büttner, *Imitatio Pietatis. Motive der christlichen Ikonographie als Modelle zur Verähnlichung* (Berlin: Mann Verlag, 1983), 100.

Fig. 5. Oskar Kokoschka, *Pietà* ("It is enough") [*Pietà* ("Es ist genug")] from *O Eternity—Thou Word of Thunder* (Bach Cantata), 1914, Lithograph, 29.2 × 32.2 cm. Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. © Kupferstichkabinett. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Fig. 6. *Pietà* of Lubiąż, 1370, possibly Lower Silesia, Limewood, polychrome, 181.0 × 119.5 × 75 cm. Warsaw, National Museum.

during his Passion, in Steinhardt's drypoint they may reference the crucifixion itself. Another possibility is to see the nails as part of the image of the Veil of Veronica, as in the example of 1475 (fig. 7), in which two nails occur at the top of the *sudarium*, serving to attach it to the cross. The image on the veil shows the face of a full-bearded Christ *en face*, scourged in pain, with his eyes half-closed, his eyes rolling back in his head and lips slightly open in anguish.

Indeed, as it was already indicated, Steinhardt preferred Christian sources for his *Pietà*s over the existing Jewish representations of the motif. When Steinhardt took up the *Pietà* for the first time, this theme had already been represented by two Jewish artists from Poland. Leopold Gottlieb (1883–1934), Drobobycz-born, the younger brother of Maurycy Gottlieb and a member of the *École de Paris* group, painted around

1910 a variation of one of the Passion themes known as the *Entombment* (fig. 8). Leopold Gottlieb depicted Saint John holding an enigmatic, androgynous fainting Mary in a *Pietà*-like pose in the foreground, accompanied by Mary Magdalene against a background of the entombment scene taking place in the court of the Jerusalem Temple Mount. Then, in 1911, Leopold Pilichowski (1896–1933), an artist from Piła, Poland and President of the Ben Uri Art Society between 1926 and 1932, exhibited a painting entitled *Pietà* (fig. 9) at the Great Berlin Art Exhibition, as a response to the waves of pogroms of 1905–1906. Pilichowski's work replaced the traditional Christian iconography of a mourning Mary and Christ with Jewish victims of the pogroms: a dead man covered by a shroud lying on a *tallith*, being mourned either by his father, or a *shomer*, dressed in traditional attire.³³

³³ For more on Leopold Gottlieb's *Entombment* and Leopold Pilichowski's *Pietà*, see Monika Czekanowska-Gutman, "Dialogue with Christian art: The *Pietà* in early twentieth-century Jewish

art," in *Art in Jewish Society*, ed. Jerzy Malinowski et al. (Warszawa-Toruń: Polish Institute of Word Studies, TAKO Publishing House, 2016), 145–159.

Fig. 7. *The Image of the Veil of Veronica*, ca. 1450, Tempera, 72 × 52 cm. Church of the Blessed Mary, Legnica. Wrocław, National Museum. © National Museum, Wrocław.

Fig. 8. Leopold Gottlieb, *The Entombment (Putting into the grave, known previously as Pietà II)*, 1910, Oil on canvas, 146 × 114 cm. Jerusalem, Israel Museum. Photograph by Einat Arif-Galanti. © Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Rather than referring to these paraphrases of the Pietà by contemporary Jewish artists, Steinhardt combined his own Pietàs with his earlier works depicting Jewish prophets. For instance, in Steinhardt's drypoint *Pietà*, Christ's facial features, and the physical pain expressed in his sorrowful eyes and open mouth, bear a resemblance to similar features in Steinhardt's *Prophet* (1913).³⁴ There, an old, exhausted prophet with small dark eyes and open mouth raises his hands towards heaven in a gesture of anger and outcry, for permitting the destruction of the *shtetl*. Steinhardt's Christ from his drypoint *Pietà* also resembles his 1913 etching of *Job* (fig. 10), depicting an emaciated figure of a suffering, old, East European Jew, representing the prophet Job seated against a devastated landscape. This visual link between Christ and the Biblical prophet(s) adds a rather inner-Jewish and personal element: Christ can be seen in line with the prophets, or as a Jewish prophet.

Moreover, the image of a tired Christ with a wrinkled forehead and a long sharply hooked nose in the woodcut was influenced by Steinhardt's 1913 woodcut, *The Head of Christ* (fig. 11), created in the same year as his drypoint *Pietà*. This woodcut of Christ depicts the head of a young Christ with Christological attributes: the thorny crown on his head and the cross leaving no doubt as to who he is. Interestingly, the head of Christ here emerges from what appears to be a white veil, the sudarium possibly influenced by Kokoschka's painting *Saint Veronica with the Sudarium*. The mood of "dramatic spiritualization" of the woodcut (as Leon Kolb has argued) reminds the viewer of Steinhardt's famous *Prophet*.³⁵

The Innovation in Steinhardt's Pietàs and the Ostjude

Aside from several Christian sources already mentioned, Steinhardt undertook revisions of one of the crucial framing themes of Christian art. First, Steinhardt reduced the images of Mary and Christ only to their heads.³⁶ Second, by introducing to the Pietà

³⁴ Jacob Steinhardt, *The Propheet*, 1913, The New Synagogue Berlin-Centrum Judaicum Foundation.

³⁵ Leon Kolb, *The Woodcuts of Jacob Steinhardt* (Philadelphia: Publishing Society of America, 1962), 15.

³⁶ It should be stressed, however, that there are rare representations of the Pietà in which the bodies of Mary and Christ are reduced to head portrayals as, for example, the *Pietà* from the workshop of Gerard David (c. 1520, oil on panel, Philadelphia Museum of Art).

Fig. 9. Leopold Pilichowski, *Pietà*/(also known as *Darkness*), 1910, whereabouts unknown. Reproduced from *Wystawa Jubileuszowa Towarzystwa Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych w Królestwie Polskim*, Warszawa, grudzień-styczeń 1910–1911, no. 210. Courtesy of the National Library, Warsaw.

Fig. 10. Jacob Steinhart, *Job*, 1913, Drypoint on paper, 16.3 cm × 11.3 cm. Berlin, Jewish Museum. © Jewish Museum, Berlin.

Fig. 11. Jacob Steinhart, *Head of Christ*, 1913, Color woodcut on Japanese paper, 21.3 × 15 cm. Berlin, Jewish Museum. © Jewish Museum, Berlin.

images of blood coming from Christ's mouth, and not from his forehead and hands as in Christian examples (e.g. fig. 3), Steinhardt was proposing a new type of depiction of Christ's wounds. Taking into account the anti-Semitic context of these images, which will be discussed later, one may interpret the bleeding mouth as the result of a severe beating.

The reduction of Mary and of Christ's bodies to heads in Steinhardt's works enabled him to focus on Mary's and Christ's physiognomies, and that leads us to the most striking features of his *Pietàs*. Art historian Samantha Baskind has rightly observed that "Christian tradition ignores the detail that Mary is not just any mother; she is a Jewish mother."³⁷ Considering this observation on a deeper level, we may say that in images of the key Christian figures of Mary and Christ made thirty five years after Max Liebermann's *The Twelve-year old Jesus in the Temple* (1879), Steinhardt went further than his predecessor by reducing the main figures of his work to faces, and embedding in them "Jewish characteristics" steeped in physical stereotypes.³⁸

The historical context explains Steinhardt's emphasis on Jewish physiognomies as well as his motivation in pursuing the *Pietà* as a subject. Amishai-Maisels argues that Steinhardt's interest in *Pietà* should be seen as a response to the anti-Semitic atmosphere and fear started by the Mendel Beilis blood libel of July 1911, and the September 1911 murder of the Russian prime minister Pyotr Stolypin by a Jewish revolutionary anarchist, Dymitry Bogrov.³⁹ In particular, the Beilis affair echoed in the German press and infected German Jews with fear of Russian pogroms, but was also widely discussed in Yiddish press of that time e.g. in *Haynt* in Warsaw.⁴⁰ Steinhardt included a direct response to the above-mentioned events in *Pogrom* (1913).⁴¹ In it, he depicts an army of furious men threatening Jews with

knives, throwing stones at them and beating those who have fallen with clubs. This dramatic and violent event is set against a background of the onion-shaped domes of Russian churches. Similarly, Marc Chagall responded to the Beilis affair with his first crucifixion painting, *Dedicated to Christ* (1912).⁴²

It is also possible that, as much as Steinhardt's *Pietàs* drew on the anti-Jewish events of 1911–1912 in the Russian Empire, they were also influenced by the pogroms that had already taken place in Russia from 1903 to 1906, before and during the Revolution of 1905. These occurred in Kishinev (1903), Odessa (1905), Białystok (1906), and in Siedlce (1906) in the Kingdom of Poland. In particular, the Kishinev pogrom evoked shock, and led to various literary and artistic responses in the Jewish world. Hayim Nahman Bialik dedicated his two famous poems *Al ha-Shchita* (*Upon the Slaughter*, 1903) and *Be-ir ha-Haregah* (*In the City of Slaughter*, 1903) to it, while Ephraim Moses Lilien produced a drawing entitled *To the Martyrs of Kishinev* (1903), which served as the illustration for Maxim Gorky's *Sbornik* (Miscellany).⁴³ The Polish-Jewish artists Wilhelm Wachtel (1876–1952) from Lwów/Lviv/Lemberg, and Maurycy Minkowski (1881–1930) from Warsaw, responded to the pogroms in Białystok and Siedlce in 1906. Wachtel in *After the Pogrom* (1906) depicted a family mourning the dead body of a family member, while Minkowski, in *After the Pogrom* (1905), showed the survivors of the pogroms resting at a railway station.⁴⁴

In Steinhardt's *Pietàs*, Jesus and Mary's faces display slightly exaggerated features, which in the hands of a non-Jewish artist might well be interpreted as caricature, in line with cultural and literary historian Sander Gilman's observation that "the Jew's experience of his or her own body was so deeply impacted by anti-Semitic rhetoric, that even when that body met the expectations for perfection in the community in which

³⁷ Samantha Baskind, *Jewish Artists and the Bible in Twentieth-Century America* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 90.

³⁸ Max Liebermann, *Twelve-year-old Jesus in The Temple*, 1879, 149.6 × 130.8 cm. Kunsthalle Hamburg.

³⁹ Beilis's trial took place between September 25 and October, 1913. Amishai-Maisels, "The Jewish Jesus," 100. On the pogroms in the context of Stolypin's death, see "Illustration zu Russlands Judenpolitik in den letzten Monaten," *Ost und West*, 11 October, 1911, 843–852.

⁴⁰ For more on the Beilis affair in German, see Amishai-Maisels, "Steinhardt and Bialik," 139; Amishai-Maisels, "Steinhardt in the Land of Israel," 229. For more on the Yiddish press' coverage, see Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikow, "Blut-bilbn oyfn ydishn folk: The

Beilis Trial in Haynt and the Mass-Circulation Yiddish-Language Press," *Gal-Ed: On the History and Culture of Polish Jewry* 25 (2015): 29, (in Hebrew).

⁴¹ Jacob Steinhardt, *Pogrom*, Jewish Museum, Berlin. See more on Steinhardt's source of the pogrom works in Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "Steinhardt and Bialik," *Jewish Book Annual* 42 (1984–1985): 137–149.

⁴² See, Amishai-Maisels, "Chagall's *Dedicated to Christ*," 68–94.

⁴³ Amishai-Maisels, "Steinhardt and Bialik," 141–149, argues that Bialik's pogrom poems influenced Steinhardt's iconography of pogrom.

⁴⁴ Wilhelm Wachtel, *After the Pogrom (or Mourning Over a Death)*, 1906, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Maurycy Minkowski, *After the Pogrom*, 1905, Museum of Art, Tel Aviv.

the Jew lived, the Jew experienced his or her body as flawed, diseased.”⁴⁵ The hooked nose so visibly stressed by Steinhart in both works was a popular anti-Semitic motif. Baskind observes that “The ‘Jewish’ nose acted as a constant referent and cultural assumption from as early as the Middle Ages, when Jews became objects, images, and stereotypes for vilification in the visual arts.”⁴⁶ The nose was also associated with the Jew’s nature. Edwen Warwick, in his *Notes on Noses* (1848) believed that the Jewish nose “indicates considerable shrewdness in worldly matters; a deep insight into character, and facility of turning that insight to profitable account.”⁴⁷ Repeated in the press, novels, and on the stage, the hooked nose, together with curly black hair and thick beard—as seen in the illustration *Auf einer posenschen Eisenbahn* (*Posen Railway*) from *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung* 1875, depicting a group of Jewish men waiting for a train—bore the stigma of stereotypical Jewishness.⁴⁸

Considering the phenomenon of the use of such stereotypical features—usually perceived as anti-Semitic—in the representations of the Jews by Jewish artists, art historian Linda Nochlin writes “much depends on the position of the artist—Jewish or non-Jewish, more or less sympathetic to Jews, ‘neutral’ or hostile—as well as the position of the viewer in relation to represented Jewishness.”⁴⁹ Thus, I believe that Steinhart did not intend his drypoint and woodcut to provide negative representations of the Jews. Rather, his placement of these physiognomic features served to demonstrate Jesus and Mary’s Jewish origins, and thus continue the line of Jewish artists such as Mark Antokolsky, Maurycy Gottlieb and Samuel Hirszenberg depicting Jesus as Jewish.⁵⁰ To put it differently, he employed the stereotypes to celebrate, not to disparage, in this case augmenting the Jewish origins of the

Christian key figures, a fact that was completely “forgotten” in the Christian environment. In Steinhart’s works the aforementioned facial features, together with the ascetic appearance of Mary and Christ achieved with the narrowing of their faces, all bring to mind the archetypical Eastern European Jews, the so-called *Ostjuden*. In Steinhart’s *Pietàs* Mary’s and Christ’s physical pain exhibited through facial deformation evokes sympathy and deflate the power of these features to act as caricatures.

The idea of the *Ostjude* (Eastern Jew), developed, in its essence, over the course of the first half of nineteenth century and was formulated and propagated by West European, especially German, Jews. In general, as historian Steven E. Aschheim argues, West European Jews shared a negative attitude towards Eastern European Jews whom they regarded as “dirty, loud and coarse.” Overcrowded in the ghettos, speaking “jargon” and dressed in Polish caftans they were regarded as the antithesis of the German Enlightenment idea of *Bildung*. They were perceived as “immoral, culturally backward creatures of ugly anachronistic ghettos.”⁵¹ This was a symbolic construct by which they could distinguish themselves from their less fortunate, unemancipated East European brethren.⁵² On the other hand, as historian Michael Brenner demonstrated, “the image of East European Jews underwent a profound transformation around the turn of the century.”⁵³ “A counter-myth of the *Ostjude*,” as Steven Aschheim proposes calling this phenomena, was made possible due to the rise of political anti-Semitism, the Zionist movement, fin-de-siècle neo-romanticism and post-assimilationist Jewish consciousness, but did not crystallise until the Weimar period.⁵⁴ This “counter-myth” also owed much to Martin Buber’s idealization of the Hasidic world as a mystical and pietistic movement.⁵⁵

⁴⁵ For more on the caricature-like nature of a Jewish portrait, see Baskind, *Jewish Artists and the Bible*, 102. Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 179.

⁴⁶ Baskind, *Jewish Artists and the Bible*, 122–123. On “Jewish physiognomy” in the visual arts during the medieval period, see Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and in modern times, see Elizabeth Klamper ed., *Die Macht der Bilder. Antisemitische Vourteile und Mythen* (Vienna: Picus Verlag, 1995).

⁴⁷ Edwen Warwick, *Notes on Noses* (London: Richard Bentley, 1864), 11.

⁴⁸ Eugen Horstig, *Auf einer posenschen Eisenbahn im Coupé vierter Klasse* woodcut, in *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung*, 1670 (1875), 14. See also, Michaela Haibl, *Zerrbild als Stereotyp: Visuelle Darstellungen von Juden zwischen 1850 und 1900* (Berlin: Metropol, 2000), 86.

⁴⁹ Linda Nochlin, “Starting with the Self: Jewish Identity and its Representation,” in *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 18.

⁵⁰ See Amishai-Maisels, “Jewish Jesus,” 84–104.

⁵¹ Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers, The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness 1820–1923* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 3, 9, 10.

⁵² Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 3.

⁵³ Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 142.

⁵⁴ On the counter myth of *Ostjude*, see Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 187. On the influence of the Weimar period, see Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture*, 142.

⁵⁵ By that time Buber had already published *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman* (1906), *Die Legende des Baalschem* (1908), and *Vom Geist des Judentums—Reden und Geleitworte* (1916).

Arnold Zweig (1887–1968), a German-Jewish writer who had been in Eastern Europe with the German army in War World I, portrayed a very positive portrait of the *Ostjude* in his 1919 book “Das Ostjüdische Antlitz” (“The Eastern Jewish Countenance”). Incidentally, Steinhardt executed nine woodcuts to the *Book of Jeshu Eliser ben Sirach* (*Buche Jeschu Elieser ben Sirah*) published in 1929, to which Zweig wrote the introduction.⁵⁶ For Zweig, East European Jews are opposed to the assimilated Jews of the West, displaying their Jewishness in their religiosity and their spirituality as “the authentic Jews.”⁵⁷ Zweig believed that “The old Jew of the East, however, preserved his face.”⁵⁸ Zweig also made an interesting observation about pain and suffering as the condition of Eastern Jewry.⁵⁹ He even recalled the metaphoric presence of the biblical figures to whom the pain is attributed, such as Job and Jeremiah, among the Eastern Jews portrayed in Steinhardt’s works.⁶⁰

The connotation of *Ostjude* is strengthened in Steinhardt’s *Pietàs* by the rendering of Jesus as an old man. In particular, the elderliness of Christ, as I emphasised earlier, plays a very important role, as it serves to distinguish Christ as an archetype of an old Eastern Jew. Ultimately, Steinhardt’s decision to represent Christ as an old, beaten Eastern Jew came from his self-identification with the Eastern Jews he had known from his childhood in the Zerkow *shtetl*.⁶¹

Conclusion

Steinhardt made a lasting contribution to the *Pietà* motif, a Christian framing theme, through exploring innovative aspects of the visualization of suffering of Mary and of Christ through different graphic media. Whereas the drypoint medium enabled Steinhardt to accentuate the lyrical aspect of physical and spiritual pain through delicate lines in his first *Pietà*, the woodcut *Pietà* used strong contrasts between the black and white surfaces as well as raw lines to emphasize the destruction and deformation caused by physical and spiritual pain.

A remarkable feature is the representation of the Jewishness of Mary and Christ in both of his media through anti-Jewish stereotypes, such as prominently hooked noses, depicting them as *Ostjude*—weak, old, and beaten, situating them in the context of the pogroms that had happened and would happen again. In doing so, he created a sort of visual polemic, addressed to Christians as a condemnation of their actions against the Jews, in particular the anti-Jewish violence perpetrated against the Eastern European Jews. The *Pietà*’s solemn and pathetic nature fits this purpose perfectly—albeit surprisingly.

⁵⁶ *Neuen Holzschnitte zu ausgewählten Versen aus dem Buche Jeschu ben Elieser ben Sirach* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1929).

⁵⁷ Arnold Zweig, *Das Ostjüdische Antlitz* (Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1920), 14, 24. It is interesting to notice that Herman Struck made 25 drawings of Eastern European Jews for Zweig’s book.

⁵⁸ “Der greise Jude des Ostens aber wahrte sein Gesicht. Es sieht uns aus den Erzählungen Mendeles an, dies Gesicht: treuherzig und

verträumt und von einer Reinheit, die sich nur erkaufte mit Verzicht auf die breiten Tätigkeiten und das Glück der breiten Tätigkeit.” See Zweig, “Das Ostjüdische Antlitz,” 14.

⁵⁹ Zweig, “Das Ostjüdische Antlitz,” 42.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ See Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Jacob Steinhardt: Etchings, Lithographs* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1981), 11.