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## MEDIA AND PRESS

In late February 2022, following earlier reports of the repatriation of material stolen during World War Two including pressed flowers from Berlin's the Botanical Garden,<sup>1</sup> the *Tagesspiegel* ran a second feature entitled »Provenienzforschung in Bibliotheken: Auf der Spur der geraubten Bücher«. <sup>2</sup> This detailed two major research projects intended to clarify which books in the holdings of the libraries of the Institute for Jewish Studies and the Botanical Garden of Freie Universität Berlin come from Nazi-looted property. The article warned »Die Arbeit könnte noch Jahrzehnte dauern«. Around the same time, the Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin announced its intent to investigate the provenance of 1.1 million of its volumes.<sup>3</sup> So far, over 4,000 books have been clearly identified as Nazi loot and since systematic research began in 2009, over 900 have been restituted, although the media coverage saw fit to highlight the practical difficulties involved in such an endeavour, not least given the fact that many heirs often live far away, in South Africa, New Zealand, Israel, the USA or South America, for instance. Nevertheless, front and centre in much of the reports was institutions' publicly voiced adherence to the Washington Declaration that steps should be taken to find a solution that is as fair and just as possible.

Like it or not (and there are some who don't), provenance research is set to be headline news for the rest of the 2020s, and likely beyond. In recent months and years, the terms »Provenienz« and »Provenienzforschung« have appeared with ever greater frequency in the German press and media, not least given the publication towards the end of 2022 of Christoph Zuschlag's

- 1 Cf. Andreas Conrad: Raubgut aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg in Berlin. Von der Wehrmacht gestohlene Bücher gehen zurück nach Frankreich, online: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/raubgut-aus-dem-zweiten-weltkrieg-in-berlin-von-der-wehrmacht-gestohlene-buecher-gehen-zurueck-nach-frankreich-347821.html> (accessed: 11 May 2023).
- 2 Cf. Stefanie Hardick: Provenienzforschung in Bibliotheken. Auf der Spur der geraubten Bücher, online: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/auf-der-spur-der-geraubten-buecher-4311433.html> (accessed: 11 May 2023).
- 3 Cf. Provenienz-Forschung in Berlin. Eine Million Bücher als mutmaßliches Raubgut, online: <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/provenienz-forschung-in-berlin-eine-million-buecher-als-100.html> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

widely publicized and reviewed book *Einführung in die Provenienzforschung. Wie die Herkunft von Kulturgut entschlüsselt wird*.<sup>4</sup> Another case in point, which may reach a wider audience beyond the academy, is the long-running Norddeutsche Rundfunk series entitled »Museumsdetektive«, in which the cultural editors of NDR produce regular features on television and radio, as well as online, delving into how exhibiting institutions in northern Germany research the origin of their exhibits.<sup>5</sup>

Already back in 2018, the *Hannoversche Allgemeine* ran a feature that explored how the Stadtbibliothek in Hannover had begun examining its holdings to discover »hunderte hochverdächtige Bücher.«<sup>6</sup> As is the case with much media coverage, the article centres on one particularly poignant example of plundered cultural artefacts, in this case the book collection of the Jewish doctor Johanna Maass (1873–1940) and her murdered sister Lisbeth (1875–1941), which touches on antisemitic persecution and female disempowerment. Under the Nazi regime, the medical doctor Johanna Maass was only allowed to work as a »patient therapist« in so-called »Jewish houses«. Two years after moving, she died in Hanover, officially of natural causes. Lisbeth, however, was later deported to a ghetto in Riga in 1941 and murdered there. As is typical for such media coverage, the article concludes with the

4 Cf. Christoph Zuschlag: *Einführung in die Provenienzforschung. Wie die Herkunft von Kulturgut entschlüsselt wird*, Munich 2002. It is worth noting, however, that the discourse on art restitution was already lively in the 1960s and has remained so ever since, despite being suppressed by political actors and museums, as Bénédicte Savoy notes in »Afrikas Kampf um seine Kunst. Geschichte einer postkolonialen Niederlage«, Munich 2021. In this regard provenance discourse on books and collections, or libraries, would seem to be lagging behind by more than a few decades. For further discussion of this, see other case studies in the present volume (for example Joanna Raisbeck's chapter on Karoline von Günderröde, Stefanie Hundehöge's chapter on Stefan Zweig, and Anna Busch's, Peer Trilcke's, and Klaus-Peter Möller's chapter on Theodor Fontane) which demonstrate how in many cases collections were transferred, donated or acquired without attracting public attention.

5 Cf. *Museumsdetektive – auf der Suche nach Raubkunst im Norden*, online: <https://www.ndr.de/kultur/kunst/provenienzforschung/index.html> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

6 Gunnar Menkens: *Stadtbibliothek sucht Nazi-Raubgut*, online: <https://www.haz.de/lokales/hannover/stadtbibliothek-sucht-nazi-raubgut-KZNIRBV7WXZ7QGBODFOHVIWDC4.html>, though this article misnames Johanna Maass's sister as Louise (not Lisbeth). Cf. <https://www.hannover.de/Leben-in-der-Region-Hannover/Bildung/Bibliotheken-Archive/Stadtbibliothek-Hannover/Wir-%C3%BCber-uns/Provenienzforschung-in-der-Stadtbibliothek-Hannover/Restitutionen/Dr.-med.-Johanna-Maa%C3%9F> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

institution's slim hope of reuniting the stolen goods with the original owners' descendants and the observation that there is still much work to be done.

In April 2022, Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg covered the fifth annual ›Internationalen Tag der Provenienzforschung‹ in Berlin. As with any instance of provenance research in cultural institutions, the stated aims of the event were to attempt to provide answers to the following questions: »Woher stammen all die wertvollen und auch weniger wertvollen Kunstschatze und Kulturgüter, die die Museen, aber auch die privaten Wohnungen füllen? Durch welche Hände gingen sie, wer hat sie ursprünglich besessen?« In line, too, with the majority of institutional investigations, the event sought to highlight in particular both the thrills and the tragedies in store: »Dahinter verbergen sich oft spannende oder auch tragische Geschichten, die von Emigration, Verfolgung oder auch Ermordung während der NS-Zeit erzählen.«<sup>7</sup>

In May 2022, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* reported on the Frankfurter Universitätsbibliothek's initial exhibition – under the evocative title ›Stolperseiten‹ – of the books in its holdings that had also been stolen during the Third Reich. As in the case of media coverage of other such investigations, the article emphasized not only the scale of the operation but also the painstaking, time- and money-intensive nature of investigating each and every item of visual art and furniture, as well as books, and particularly the necessity for financial support, in this case from the Deutsche Zentrum Kulturgutverluste in Magdeburg.

In June 2022, media outlets in Saxony reported that the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz and the Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden had returned a total of five books from their holdings to the descendants of the important French journalist and politician Georges Mandel (1885–1944).<sup>8</sup> Mandel had been a staunch opponent of the policy of appeasement of the Nazi regime, warned urgently of the dangers posed by National Socialist Germany even before the outbreak of World War II, and publicly criticized the Munich Agreement. Following the occupation of France he was persecuted and murdered by the *Milice française* in 1944.

Not all press and media coverage concerning literary provenance research has been universally positivist, however, particularly since the ease with which institutions can undertake such essential work may differ vastly de-

7 Thomas Fitzel: Spaziergänge zum internationalen Tag der Provenienzforschung, online: [https://www.rbb-online.de/rbbkultur/radio/programm/schema/sendungen/der\\_tag/archiv/20230412\\_1600/kultur\\_aktuell\\_1810.html](https://www.rbb-online.de/rbbkultur/radio/programm/schema/sendungen/der_tag/archiv/20230412_1600/kultur_aktuell_1810.html) (accessed: 11 May 2023).

8 Cf. Restitution aus der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin und SLUB Dresden – Erben von Georges Mandel erhalten Bücher in Paris, online: <https://www.medien-service.sachsen.de/medien/news/1051504> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

pending on the size of the organization and the number of its employees. It is also certainly the case that provenance research at many smaller institutions takes place, when it takes place at all, as part of temporary projects supported by limited, time-bound funding. Press and media coverage concerning smaller, more local institutions or private museums with smaller numbers of employees tends to dwell, not unreasonably, on the financial and practical challenges faced by museums and archives located outside of major urban centres, with all the financial advantages and attention that this entails.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, for a long time, the focus of provenance research in museums, libraries, and archives has been on research into the origins of cultural assets confiscated as a result of Nazi persecution. It is only more recently that this, and its subsequent media coverage, has expanded to include collection items from colonial contexts and the former GDR.<sup>10</sup> After 1945, thousands of cultural assets – including books and manuscripts – were also removed from castles and mansions in the Soviet-occupied zone, passing through depot museums such as the Albertinum in Dresden. These artefacts, whose origin will in all likelihood never be traced, then found their way into other collections and the western art trade, since the GDR government at the time repeatedly encouraged museums to sell art objects from their collections – especially to the West – in order to procure foreign currency. What press and media coverage of this ongoing provenance research has revealed, however, is a lack of political will to sustain these investigations in the longer term. As *Deutschlandfunk Kultur* put it: »Wenn es nicht gerade zu Skandalen wie in Dresden kommt, gibt es kaum politischen Druck.«<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, these stories and this sort of research are certainly undergoing a contemporary moment, although this is hardly unique to a German-language cultural context. Expanding the focus of ›Provenienz‹ and ›Provenienzforschung‹ reveals certain strains of cultural and national memory making at work in recent press and media coverage.

While it is difficult to generalise, there nonetheless exist certain aspects of press and media coverage that are common across many contexts. Whenever it occurs, media and press coverage of literary provenance research not only

9 Cf. Alexander Moritz: Provenienzforschung in Sachsen. Eine Herausforderung für kleine Museen, online: <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/provenienzforschung-leipzig-kleine-museen-100.html> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

10 Cf. Anonym: Provenienzforschung ist fester Bestandteil im Museumsverband, online: <https://www.antennethueringen.de/p/provenienzforschung-ist-fester-bestandteil-im-museumsverband-7zPIiCUfyKRaYWNyMuMZV8> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

11 Carsten Probst: DDR-Provenienzforschung. Es fehlt der politische Druck, online: <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/ddr-provenienzforschung-es-fehlt-der-politische-druck-100.html> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

evinces a far greater interest in the thrilling and the tragic, but also tends to concentrate on stories and situations that readers and viewers will (it is hoped) find relatable or personal, as well as – at times – sentimental, sensational, or even scandalous. There is a tendency to focus not so much on individual objects, unless the item in question is several centuries old or even verging on being classifiable as an archaeological find.<sup>12</sup> With more modern writers, the focus tends to be on large collections (size, for better or for worse, often does matter, it seems). Reporting on provenance in literary magazines has also often lent itself to visual art, which has a focal point, like in the case of the protracted debates concerning the provenance of the alleged Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) portrait of *Salvator Mundi* which raged across the letter pages of the *Times Literary Supplement* in late 2019.<sup>13</sup> Reporting on diffuse collections of manuscripts requires more than this: sensation, scandal, life story, or – more recently – societal significance or cultural justice. Yet interest in literary provenance has a far greater geographical and historical reach than just Germany in the modern era.

In 2014, the Ancient Greek poet Sappho (circa 630–circa 570 BCE) hit the headlines around the globe. This unlikely event was precipitated by the discovery of what were purported to be papyrus fragments of previously unknown poetry by the woman recognized as one of the greatest lyric poets of Antiquity, the majority of whose poetry is today lost. These finds were reported around the world in the tone of raptured wonder that is a key tenor of press and media responses to literary provenance.<sup>14</sup> In a perverse turn of

12 A pertinent example is, for instance the ancient Hellenic manuscript stolen from a monastery during the First World War that was repatriated to Greece by the Museum of the Bible in August 2022. Birgit Katz: Museum of the Bible Returns Centuries-Old Gospel Manuscript to Greece, online: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/museum-of-the-bible-returns-centuries-old-gospel-manuscript-to-greece-180980670/> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

13 See, for instance »Letters to the Editor: ›Salvator Mundi‹«, in: *Times Literary Supplement* 6078, 27 September 2019, p. 3.

14 Writing in the »Daily Telegraph« on 30 January 2014, Tom Payne declared that »A new Sappho poem is more exciting than a new David Bowie album«. Daniel Mendelsohn, writing in the »New Yorker«, also skewered the tantalizing nature of these discoveries, remarking that »All this buzz is both titillating and frustrating, stoking our appetite for a body of work that we're unable to read, much less assess critically: imagine what the name Homer would mean to Western civilization if all we had of the Iliad and the Odyssey was their reputations and, say, ninety lines of each poem«. Tom Payne: A new Sappho poem is more exciting than a new David Bowie album, in: *The Telegraph*, 30 January 2014, online: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/10607569/A-new-Sappho-poem-is-more-exciting-than->

events, however, a darker side to the Sappho rediscovery was later revealed in further substantial press and media coverage, and literary provenance was the fulcrum upon which the whole situation turned.

In March 2021 the editors of the scholarly volume in which the circumstances of the discovery were detailed formally retracted the chapter, since the manuscript's »provenance is tainted,«<sup>15</sup> according to a statement issued through the book's publisher Brill. While there was no evidence that the manuscript was in anyway suspected of being inauthentic, concerns had been raised by scholars regarding the manuscript unavailability for study, as well as the absence of any documentation concerning its acquisition. In a lengthy essay published in the online classics journal *Eidolon* C. Michael Sampson and Anna Uhlig consolidate much of the press and media coverage of the unfolding scandal.<sup>16</sup> The story continues to make headlines, not least given the subsequent arrest of the papyrus scholar Dirk Obbink, a former Oxford professor and MacArthur Fellow who had published the original Sappho discovery, for allegedly selling stolen artefacts to institutions such as the Museum of the Bible.<sup>17</sup> This scandal continued to generate press and media coverage into the following year with the *Financial Times* running a special feature in the summer of 2022 entitled »To catch a rare-book thief.«<sup>18</sup>

The case of the Sappho provenance story is exceptional, however. Press and media coverage of the provenance of individual literary artefacts or individual writers' estates is rare. Only major canonical authors tend to provoke much journalistic coverage, which often asserts historically contingent forms of cultural memory and national identity. In May 2021, for instance, Sotheby's

a-new-David-Bowie-album.html (accessed: 11 May 2023) and Daniel Mendelsohn: Girl, Interrupted. Who Was Sappho?, online: <http://www.newyorker.com:80/magazine/2015/03/16/girl-interrupted> (accessed: 11 May).

- 15 Brill: Retraction Notice, in: The Newest Sappho: P. Sapph, Obbink und P. GC inv. 105, Frs. 1–4, 392, 19 May 2016, online: [https://www.doi.org/10.1163/9789004314832\\_retr](https://www.doi.org/10.1163/9789004314832_retr) (accessed: 11 May 2023).
- 16 Cf. C. Michael Sampson and Anna Uhlig: The Murky Provenance of the Newest Sappho Special Issue on the Papyrus Thefts, in: *Eidolon*, online <https://www.eidolon.pub/the-murky-provenance-of-the-newest-sappho-aca671a6d52a> (accessed: 11 May 2023).
- 17 Cf. Colin Moynihan: He Taught Ancient Texts at Oxford. Now He Is Accused of Stealing Some, in: *The New York Times*, 24 September 2021, online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/24/arts/design/hobby-lobby-lawsuit-dirk-obbink.html> (accessed: 11 May 2023).
- 18 Cf. Meg Honigmann: To Catch a Rare-Book Thief, in: *Financial Times*, 4 July 2022, online: <https://www.ft.com/content/e9deed2-9e5a-4225-bc8e-ef030e530805> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

auction house in London announced its intention to put up for sale a sizeable collection of literary manuscripts and first-edition copies of the work of the Brontë sisters. This unique collection had remained in private hands and more or less entirely inaccessible to the general public and researchers since having been originally acquired by the bachelor brothers William (circa 1835–1901) and Alfred (1825–circa 1913) Law, nineteenth century mill owners who resided near to the Brontë family home at Howarth. Writing in the *Washington Post* in early 2022, William Booth described this »discovery and recovery of a treasure chest of letters, diaries, poems and manuscripts, penned in the tiny meticulous handwriting by the beloved, pathfinding, canonical English writers, the incredible Brontë sisters« as being akin to »lifting a lid in King Tut’s tomb, dear reader«. <sup>19</sup> Once again, the archaeological and the literary are imbricated in provenance reportage that verges on kitsch.

The case of the Brontë material took an unusual turn, however, with the Brontë Society’s outright condemnation of the sale. In a public statement, the society announced that:

we are faced with the very real possibility that this immensely significant collection will be dispersed and disappear into private collections across the globe. We are determined to save as much as we can, but due to the dramatic financial impact of the pandemic, the timing is unfortunate. While Covid has reinforced the comfort and hope that we find in literature and culture, museum revenue has fallen away to almost nothing and competition for public funds has become fiercer than ever. We all have a stake in these remarkable treasures. We need to look beyond the narrow commercialisation and privatisation of heritage and work together to protect and share what we all value. As our campaign takes shape, we urge all with an interest in saving this remarkable collection intact to contact us. <sup>20</sup>

In a spectacular instance of Brontë-mania, the Friends of the National Libraries, an organization patronized by the then Prince Charles (\*1948), intervened and convinced Sotheby’s to pause the planned sale and allow the Brontë Society time to amass funds.

19 William Booth: A lost library of works by the Brontë sisters was destined for sale. Then Britain rallied, online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/02/bronte-sister-britain-discovery-sale/> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

20 Statement in response to Sotheby’s announcement re the sale of the Honresfeld Library, online: <https://www.bronte.org.uk/whats-on/news/241/rare-bronte-manuscripts-to-be-sold-at-auction> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

Ultimately, it was only after the intervention of the American-British-Ukrainian petrochemical-finance-entertainment mogul Sir Leonard Blavatnik (\*1957), who donated half of the fifteen million pounds required, along with financial assistance from Charles and many thousands of small donations, that the Brontë collection was purchased for the public. Striking a pointedly patriotic, even nationalistic, tone, Charles declared in a public statement that they had saved the library for Britain: »Our literary heritage is our cultural DNA and this preserves it for students, teachers, academics and ordinary readers in perpetuity«. <sup>21</sup> Yet, while authors like the Brontë sisters and other groups of writers (the Romantics, or the Victorians, for instance) are regularly subjected to forms of cultural nostalgia and commodification, there is a particular irony in the deployment of this mode in relation to modernism, not least given modernist writers' professed desire to break with the past and »make it new«, in the words of Ezra Pound (1885–1972). <sup>22</sup> In the century or so since their work first rose to prominence, however, it is indubitably Modernist writers in particular who have garnered the most attention when it comes to media and press coverage of literary provenance.

In the early 1970s, for instance, Leonard (1880–1969) and Virginia Woolf's (1882–1941) book collection of around 9,900 volumes was acquired through a friend of a friend of Leonard Woolf by the Washington State University Libraries. As recently as 2021, press coverage of the curious and contingent circumstances of this transatlantic acquisition were being rehearsed in *Washington State Magazine*, alongside earlier coverage from 2013 on historylink.org, the free online encyclopaedia of Washington state history. <sup>23</sup> At the University of Texas at Austin, The Harry Ransom Center's unsurpassed already extant collection of modernist archives and materials, along with regular new acquisitions, has also been the subject of substantial press and media coverage in the United States and elsewhere. <sup>24</sup> European reporting often strikes an envious tone at the spending power of the institution, as well

21 Friends of the National Libraries SAVES literary treasure trove for the nation in an unprecedented rescue of the UK's literary heritage, online: <https://www.fnl.org.uk/pages/honresfield> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

22 Cf. Ezra Pound: *Make it New*, London 1934.

23 Cf. Trevor James Bond: *How Virginia Woolf's library came to WSU*, online: <https://www.magazine.wsu.edu/2021/11/08/how-virginia-woolfs-library-came-to-wsu/> (accessed: 11 May 2023); Paula Becker: *The first lot of the more than 9,000-volume personal library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf arrives at Washington State University's Holland Library in Pullmann in 1971*, online: <https://www.historylink.org/File/10651> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

24 Cf. D.T. Max: *Final Destination: Why do the archives of so many great writers end*

as barely disguised frustration that much in the way of European modernist artefacts are housed in far-off Texas.<sup>25</sup> Alternatively, there are unexpected archives or collections, which, when discovered or exhibited, tend to receive substantial attention from press and media outlets. Back in May 2003, for example, *The Atlantic* ran a feature entitled »Hitler's Forgotten Library« with the disarming subtitle »You can tell a lot about a person from what he reads«. Largely ignored until after the turn of the millennium, the remnants of Hitler's personal book collection revealed a keen, if erratic, interest in theology.<sup>26</sup>

On the international – or ›world literary‹ – stage, however, there can be few writers whose literary estates have been subject to more media exposure, analysis, and debate than Franz Kafka (1883–1924). In 2011, the American philosopher and professor of comparative literature Judith Butler was invited to give one of the annual *London Review of Books* Winter Lectures at the British Museum. The title Butler chose for her talk was »Who owns Kafka?« and, in a presentation lasting almost an hour, a revised version of which was later published in the *London Review of Books* itself, she undertook a deep dive into the (at the time) »ongoing trial in Tel Aviv [that was] set to determine who will have stewardship of several boxes of Kafka's original writings, including primary drafts of his published works,«<sup>27</sup> which were being stored in Switzerland and Israel. The trial came about after the death of Max Brod's (1884–1968) secretary (and presumed mistress) Esther Hoffe (1906–2007), to whom he had bequeathed the material.

A key feature of this particular case of press and media coverage of literary provenance was Hoffe's descendents' assertion that the literary content of the collection should have no bearing on its value. As Butler summarizes: »no one could have predicted [...] that a trial would eventually take place

up in Texas?, in: *The New Yorker*, 4 July 2007, online: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/06/11/final-destination> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

25 See, for instance, the 2009 BBC Radio 4 Extra feature entitled »The Manuscript Hunter«, a profile of Thomas F. Staley (1935–2022), director of the Harry Ransom Center until his death, which has been rebroadcast on BBC radio and online in 2013 and 2018. *The Manuscript Hunter*, online: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/book9d7p> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

26 Cf. Timothy W. Ryback: *Hitler's Forgotten Library*, online: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2003/05/hitlers-forgotten-library/302727/> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

27 Cf. Judith Butler: *Who owns Kafka?*, in: *London Review of Books* 33/5, 2011, pp. 3–8, online: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v33/n05/judith-butler/who-owns-kafka> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

after Esther's death in which her daughters, Eva and Ruth, would claim that no one needs to inventory the materials and that the value of the manuscripts should be determined by their weight – quite literally, by what they weigh.«<sup>28</sup> Butler's talk is a clear-eyed, Foucauldian reading of Kafka's commodification. Yet the fact that she herself is Esther Hoffe's granddaughter (something she discloses in the live footage of the lecture but not in the final printed version in the *London Review of Books*) lends her analysis a whiff of scandal, however latent.<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, as Butler rightly emphasizes, if the content of Kafka's *Nachlass* was of little interest to the parties selling it, the content of Kafka's own work would – in a rare and potentially unique situation – provide insights into the procedure. As Butler remarked, »most of the trials and procedures that Kafka writes about involve unfounded allegations and nameless guilt.«<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, Butler argued, Kafka's writing would prove most pertinent »in helping us to think through the limits of cultural belonging, as well as the traps of certain nationalist trajectories that have specific territorial destinations as their goal.«<sup>31</sup> Even if Kafka was able to perceive, before his untimely death at the age of 40 in 1924, the rising forces of profit and of nationalism, Butler suggests, he could never have imagined how far these would reach in the case of his own literary estate and its provenance history. Nonetheless, Butler is keen to emphasize the bleak irony »that Kafka's writings finally became someone else's stuff, packed into a closet or a vault, transmogrified into exchange value, awaiting their afterlife as an icon of national belonging or, quite simply, as money.«<sup>32</sup>

At some point, even the most sophisticated analysis of literary provenance history in the press and the media will come down to financial matters, as in the case of the undisclosed sum paid by the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach (DLA) for what was called in numerous publications a »Sensation« and a »Jahrhunderterwerb.«<sup>33</sup> In December 2022, the DLA announced its acquisition of a vast collection of papers belonging to the Bohemian-Austrian

28 Ibid.

29 London Review of Books (LBR): Judith Butler: Who Owns Kafka?, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=234npiDz-SE> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

30 Butler: Who owns Kafka? (fn. 27), pp. 3–8.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 See, for example, *Nachlass von Rainer Maria Rilke kommt ins Deutsche Literaturarchiv*, in: *Zeit Online*, 29 November 2022, online: <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2022-11/lyriker-rainer-maria-rilke-deutsches-literaturarchiv-marbach> (accessed: 11 May 2023).

poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926). For decades prior to their being incorporated into the archive's already substantial holdings, these papers had been kept in private hands, stored in good condition in shoeboxes in the house of Rilke's descendants in the village of Gernsbach in rural Baden-Württemberg. In the aftermath of the worst of Covid-19, when there has been a marked increase in the digitization of events and of resources, press and media coverage of the Rilke acquisition not only focused on provenance and price, but also on the material's public use and the democracy of a digitized and freely available archive.<sup>34</sup>

For all of its present urgency in the early years of the 2020s, not least given its comparatively belated emergence in the wake of the 1999 Washington Principles, press and media coverage of literary provenance is here to stay. There is, after all, unlikely to be a scenario that does not involve sentiment, sensation, or scandal, or some irresistible combination of all three. Yet, it is at least to be hoped, that future coverage of digital technologies and the promise of partnerships among research and cultural institutions in the establishment of virtual collections with provenance histories fully accessible to scholars and members of the public alike might be a tonic to the grubbier matters of money, theft, and sleaze that have so dominated press and media coverage to date.

34 Ian Ellison: *Unboxing Rilke's Nachlass*, in: *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 6 April 2023, online: <https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/unboxing-rilkes-nachlass/> (accessed: 11 May 2023).