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of the past, so that the image of the dream house is opposed to that of the childhood home [...] Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact, that we shall not have time to achieve it. For a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thought – serious, sad thoughts – and not to dreams. It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality.

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958)

While Ernst's achievement in *Shovel, City, State, Space and Identity in German-Language Jewish Literature of the 19th and early 20th Century* is to have uncovered in rich and original ways a poetics of Jewish space within the work of several generations of German-language writers facing major upheavals in the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the First World War, just as Bachelard explored the dreams and possibilities inherent in the poetics of architectural space, so too Ernst pointed out to what extent German-language Jewish writers imagined Jewish identity both then and in the future within a spatial framework.

Like most innovative interpretations, Ernst's argument seems hardly surprising, though only after she completed it. Traditional Jewish life in the rural world of Galicia and in the Pale of Settlement to the east and north came under massive pressure in a period of massive outmigration and urbanization. Towns and cities were transformed in decades. The population of Vienna and Berlin rose in the period 1880–1910, attracting people from rural areas in the east of the Austro-Hungarian, German and the west of the Russian empires. The incorporation of suburbs changed metropolitan boundaries too, and vast building projects constructed much of the urban fabric of these cities which has lasted to our own days. Newspapers, literary reviews, publishing houses flourished.

This metropolitan moment had major effects on the cultural life of both sending and receiving regions. The growth of transportation networks both within and around these burgeoning cities opened up possibilities of urban or metropolitan life for large numbers of people in adjacent regions. So far we are on traditional ground. But Ernst went beyond this point. The trail she constructed of Shovel, or Jewish village, city and state both describes a vector of migration, but also serves as a site of imaginative speculation as to where Jewish life, traditional or otherwise, could be lived.