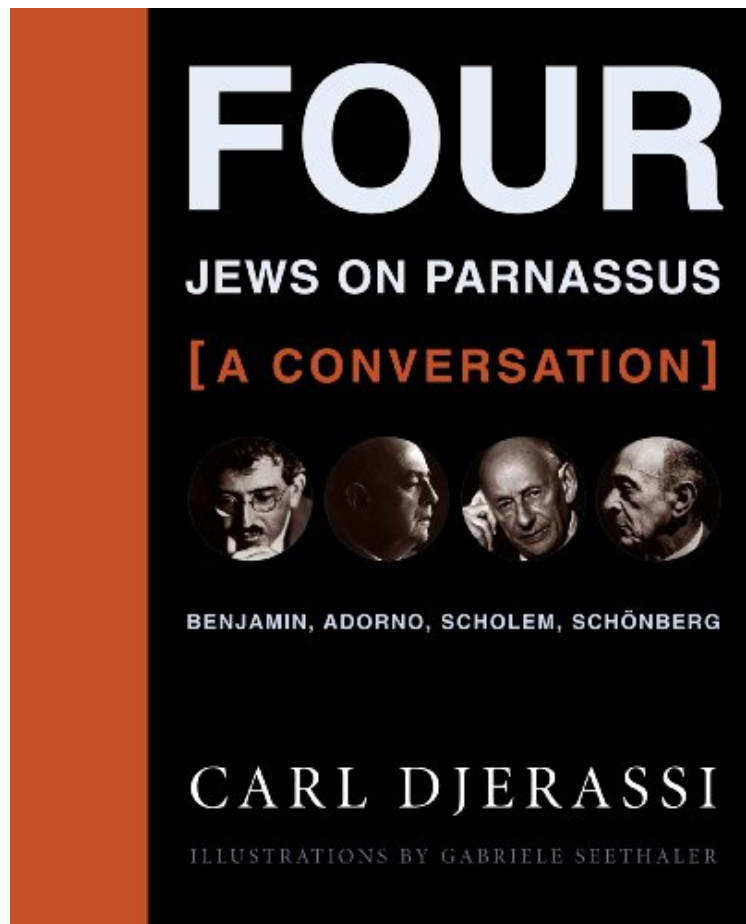


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Four Jews on Parnassus -- A Conversation: Benjamin, Adorno, Scholem, Schönberg [With Music CD]

Carl Djerassi

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Carl Djerassi : Four Jews on Parnassus -- A Conversation: Benjamin, Adorno, Scholem, Schönberg [With Music CD] before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Four Jews on Parnassus -- A Conversation: Benjamin, Adorno, Scholem, Schönberg [With Music CD]:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A deep thinker's media-bending post-Gutenberg contribution By Scriblerus 'Carl Djerassi's sumptuous foretaste of publishing's mixed-media future' is the title of a three-part review of this book at post-gutenberg.com. Extract: Now, here's a strange thing: the most thrilling media-bending creation that we at post-Gutenberg have met is not by a gangling, google-eyed nineteen year-old muttering 'mashup' and 're-mix' in sleeptalk, but by someone who will be ninety in October, writing imaginatively in voices brought back from the dead. Carl Djerassi, who made his name as an inventor of birth control pills and has won high honours as both a scientist and technologist, is somehow cramming at least four lives into a single lifespan. His harbinger of mixed-

media publishing's future evolution is a hybrid of ingeniously animated philosophical debate, art appreciation, experimental graphics and dramatization. It comes pressed between cardboard covers, titled *Four Jews on Parnassus*, and fitted with a pocket holding a CD compilation of clips from musical tributes by five composers to a single painting by Paul Klee. We will call the result simply a book for shorthand. The right-sounding term for it has yet to be invented. It is available as an e-book**, but the images in it - roughly half of them feats of larky digital tinkering, and as essential to its purposes as the pictures John Berger chose for *Ways of Seeing* were to his - are best savoured on paper. Rolls Royce-grade colour printing on luscious glossy pages makes *Four Jews on Parnassus* virtually pirate-proof; cheap knock-offs are inconceivable. If, as we believe, the only adequate reply to a great poem is a dance, if not another poem, then *Four Jews* is a re-creation ... [continues here: [...]]

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. His novels are great reading, too. By M. Lyon wanted to see what Djerassi had to say. His novels are great reading, too. And, he is an esteemed scientist, 1 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Disappointing till now. By vivi I was very excited when I saw this book on a library, in Spanish, and although the price was excessive (160 Peruvian soles) I bought it. I read till now till the dialogue of the wife's, which I jumped by the end because of boredom. What a shallow, uninteresting book. Nothing about the philosophical insights or very little. I am now reading the *Angelus Novus* part. Till now I read more in Wikipedia about than here. Maybe it will change, but meanwhile if I would have been an editor, I would have never published such a shallow, caricatural and repetitive work.

This book features a CD of rarely performed music, including a specially commissioned rap by Erik Weiner of Walter Benjamin's "Thesis on the Philosophy of History." Theodor W. Adorno was the prototypical German Jewish non-Jew, Walter Benjamin vacillated between German Jew and Jewish German, Gershom Scholem was a committed Zionist, and Arnold Schouml;nberg converted to Protestantism for professional reasons but later returned to Judaism. Carl Djerassi, himself a refugee from Hitler's Austria, dramatizes a dialogue between these four men in which they discuss fraternity, religious identity, and legacy as well as reveal aspects of their lives - notably their relations with their wives - that many have ignored, underemphasized, or misrepresented. The desire for canonization and the process by which it is obtained are the underlying themes of this dialogue, with emphasis on Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920), a canonized work that resonated deeply with Benjamin, Adorno, and Scholem (and for which Djerassi and Gabrielle Seethaler present a revisionist and richly illustrated interpretation). Basing his dialogue on extensive archival research and interviews, Djerassi concludes with a daring speculation on the putative contents of Benjamin's famous briefcase, which disappeared upon his suicide.

From Publishers Weekly Djerassi's latest project probably works better in theory than in practice: a "dramatized conversation" among "four extraordinary intellectuals of the twentieth century," philosopher Walter Benjamin, intellectuals Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem, and composer Arnold Schouml;nberg. Djerassi decided on this group, he says, because they "belonged to the peculiar subset of German and Austrian bourgeois Jews of the pre-World War II generation... more Berlinish or Viennese than their non-Jewish compatriots" (not incidentally the same subset to which Djerassi assigns himself). In an attempt to provide further insight into the Jewish struggle with identity and the overlooked parts of these men's private lives, he imagines separate conversations among their wives as well (each an "accomplished and energetic" woman). Author, playwright and chemist (who developed the birth control pill) Djerassi (*Cantor's Dilemma: A Novel*, *This Man's Pill: Reflections on the 50th Birthday of the Pill*) will pique readers' curiosity, but will probably only hold the attention of academics who don't mind a surfeit of esoteric references and philosophical flights of fancy. Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. A beautiful book. (Frederic Raphael *Times Literary Supplement*) The prodigiously illustrated book is a readable treatment of an important subject. (Booklist) These four titular mid-20th century Jewish intellectuals from Germany and Austria come back to life with vigor. (Library Journal) About the Author Carl Djerassi, novelist, playwright, and emeritus professor of chemistry at Stanford University, is one of the few American scientists to have been awarded both the National Medal of Science (for the first synthesis of an oral contraceptive) and the National Medal of Technology. He has published an autobiography, a memoir, a collection of short stories, a poetry chapbook, five novels, and eight plays that have been staged all over the world. Gabriele Seethaler, an Austrian biochemist who became a photographer and artist, began to fuse art and science in a project entitled *Identity Genotype-Phenotype*. The Viennese Gallery Heike Curtze has shown her work since 2000.