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The *Juda* Collection in the Construction of German Cultural Zionism

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The framework

In 1900, the publisher F.A. Lattman opened its doors in Goslar, on the north-west edge of the Harz, expanding an earlier centuries-old print shop. Among the first publications in its catalogue we find 3,000 copies of a slim but exquisitely crafted volume. The title is short and to the point: *Juda*.¹ The white characters are stylized as Hebrew letters and the cover is blue. The national colours of Judaism are evoked on a single page, and they are the same ones that, just three years earlier, had adorned the flag at the entrance to the *Stadtcasino* in Basel for the First Zionist Congress.² Featuring around the title are the Star of David and the Tablets of Law against a background of *Jugendstil* roses and concentric thorny branches (fig. 1). Starting with its exterior, the volume quite clearly proposes a convergence of German style and Jewish symbols. The book is a collection of poems and artistic illustrations that accompany the advent of the new century. At the same time, this new publication marked the path to nascent German cultural Zionism and to the Jewish Renaissance that, beyond the shoals of assimilation, would outline new aesthetics in which the Jewish tradition provided subjects and motifs, and no longer the religious foundation. Naturally, it would draw on the Bible, its stories of patriarchs and prophets, rather than rabbinic writings. Above all, the nascent Jewish art would no longer be the outline of synagogical devotion, but would lay claim to its own new autonomy and dignity. It would be a lay aesthetic centred on itself and no

¹ The subtitle provides information about the paternity of the poems and illustrations: *Gesänge von Börries, Freiberrn v. Münchhausen mit Buchschmuck von E. M. Lilien*.

² Of the 3,000 copies, 65 were limited editions, published on rice paper and with a leather binding, and they were signed by the poet and illustrator. For the second edition of *Juda*, ten years later, 3,000 copies were printed by a Berlin publisher, Egon Fleischel & Co.



Figure 1: Ephraim Moses Lilien's illustration on the cover of *Juda* (F. H. Lattmann Verlag, Berlin-Goslar-Leipzig 1900). The illustrations that follow are also from the first edition of the collection.



longer borrowed from external models. This was the theoretical premise: the outcome – as we will discuss – often proved to be the opposite.

The term that, better than any other, marks this new artistic expression is *jungjüdisch*. It was a new word that ran through Jewish cultural milieus – first in Vienna, and then in Berlin and elsewhere – and that, in the few short years of the turn of the twentieth century, encompassed the fundamental aspect of these new discourses on beauty, born and developed within Judaism. Two concepts contributed to forming the term: youth and Jewishness. These are fundamental aspects that suffice to reflect the essence of this explosion of creativity. The theoreticians and practitioners of this *jungjüdische Bewegung* were, in fact, all young. And they were all Jewish: poets, narrators, sculptors, painters and illustrators who shared this new national awareness. Trained on the cultural scenes of *fin-de-siècle* Europe, in the first decade of the twentieth century these young artists would be the mainstay of cultural Zionism in the German language. As we know, this cultural Zionism was conveyed in German-speaking countries around the year 1900 through the pages of Ahad Ha'am, launching a lively and structured *Kulturdebatte* in the venues of Zionist discussion, first and foremost the annual congress. The role of culture within the national Jewish idea, whether it came before or after politics, its defining itself in the lands of the Diaspora or in Palestine, whether it spoke Hebrew, German or *Yiddish*: all of these issues would consistently mark the conduct of the Zionist Congresses up to the Great War, and in some cases also after. At the Fifth Congress, held in 1901, among the Zionist ranks there emerged a phalanx of thirty-seven young people, thanks to many summer contacts, and while it stayed with the movement, it gave the leadership no respite until at least 1904. It subsequently fell apart, leaving fertile ground for new developments in this debate. Chaim Weizmann, Berthold Feiwel, Ephraim Moses Lilien, Alfred Nossig, Davis Trietsch, Leo Motzkin, Martin Buber: all of them were leading players – each with his own personal accent – in a strained and hotly disputed discussion that would bring the new Jewish culture onto a scene recognized by the



world, into official circles and into the institutional heart of Jewish nationalism. Above all at the Fifth Congress – amid protests, demonstrations, torchlight processions and desertion of the proceedings – the new Jewish art and aesthetic education were terms that crossed the delegates' tables, eliciting both consensus and opposition.

But let's go back a year and return to Goslar, when the *Juda* collection was printed. It was a collection that considered itself a definitive badge of this Jewish cultural dawn. *Juda* arose through the confluence of two artistic actions and two wills that were opposite yet coincided. Poetic texts and black-and-white illustrations alternate regularly to comprise the ninety pages of *Juda*; there is a different hand for each of the two components.

The drawings are by Ephraim Moses Lilien (1874–1925), whose name already appears among those of the angry young men of the Zionist culture's avant-garde. Born in Drohobycz, in the geographical setting of eastern Judaism, Lilien rapidly left the closed milieus of Galician orthodoxy. Seeking a personal way of expression that had difficulty emerging, alone he travelled a path that, from east to west, led him first to an engraver's workshop and then to the art academies of Krakow and Munich. Between his time in these two cities, he also stayed briefly in Vienna. In Munich in 1894, Lilien encountered the Secession movement and its wave of rebellion against the artistic generation of the fathers, in a city that, now more than ever, was pushing all of German artistic life forward. The unrelenting return of myths and symbols evident in his illustrations, and the female element that is at once angel, enigma and sensuality, are indebted to the Munich Secession, already widespread and well-established ahead of its more famous Viennese sister, which Lilien would also get to know personally. Lilien became one of the collaborators of the journal "Jugend" published by Georg Hirth, the heart and financial backer of German *Art Nouveau*. All the aspects of *Jugendstil*, which owes its name and origins to Munich, can be found in his works from this period: curves, waves, soft lines, snaking lines, flowing tresses, foliage. In these decorations and symbolic forms, and the contrasts between black



and white, several scholars have noted analogies with the works of Aubrey Beardsley and his German pupils.³ But Lilien also worked for the competition and during this period he collaborated with the satirical journal “Simplicissimus”, which, like “Jugend”, was not established until 1896, although its profile was less rarefied and more open to broad participation. Lilien’s life in Munich did not see only delicate atmospheres and floral elegance; he had close contact with socialist circles and collaborated assiduously with the publisher Vorwärts and many left-wing periodicals, including the “Süd-deutscher Postillon”. The last stage of Lilien’s journey was Berlin, the venue of all of Europe’s artistic aspirations. Lilien reached the capital at the end of the century: here too, the Secession movement had made inroads, orienting tastes, and Lilien’s name soon echoed through fashionable artistic coteries. Among Berlin’s *bohème* he moved through literary and artistic circles, not only as a book and magazine illustrator, but also as the creator of extremely sophisticated bookplates. He often went to the Nollendorf-Casino in Kleiststraße, to the Thursday evening events organized by *Die Kommenden*, a society established by Ludwig Jakobowski, a man of letters with aims of cultural rebirth approaching the esoteric. In addition to the announcement of upcoming eschatologies, the circle was a hub of real or *soi-disant* artistic figures, of bohemians and debauchees who would agree to meet there, in an atmosphere where Nietzscheanisms and spiritualisms, various types of mysticism, criticisms of modernity and socialisms coexisted under the large umbrella of *décadence*. As a member of the upper echelons of this literary café, Lilien crossed paths with many figures from the Berlin art scene, writers, philosophers, composers, painters and various art connoisseurs. These included Peter Hille, who took over as head of the group after Jakobowski’s untimely death, Rudolf Steiner, who was already divided between pedagogy and esotericism, Johannes Schlaf, Clara Viebig, the brothers Friedrich and Julius Hart who, from the *Neue Gemeinschaft* on the Schlachtensee,

³ For example, see Milly Heyd, *Lilien and Beardsley: “To the Pure All Things Are Pure”*, in “Journal of Jewish Art”, VII (1980), pp. 58-69.



also sought *lebensreformerisch* sympathies here. And we also find Else Lasker-Schüler, Lulu von Strauß und Torney and Maria Eichhorn.⁴

This was Lilien before his encounter with Zionism, which occurred at some unknown point in time. Back in Drohobycz he may already have been influenced by the Zionist agitation surrounding an organization with the eloquent but not particularly imaginative name of *Zion*. Perhaps he heard the first rumours about resurgent Jewish creativity echoing Nathan Birnbaum and his writings even before Herzl came on the scene. Perhaps in Munich, in the spring and summer of 1897, he saw the resistance of the local *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* and its rabbis against the organizers of the Zionist Congress, which had considered the city as a possible venue for the first event. All conjecture. What is certain is that in 1900 his work on *Juda* reveals that he had already embraced this movement: by illustrating episodes and figures from the Old Testament, Lilien was fully a cultural Zionist. From this point on, the *Jugend* softness, which never left Lilien's production, would be at the service of the Jewish culture and a new *jungjüdisch* aesthetic. It was an aesthetic that, also for Judaism, would offer an autonomous beauty, independent of the ritual chain of art for synagogues. It was a beauty to which modern expression conveyed style and line to express the specificity of Jewish content. From then on, Lilien was ceaselessly involved in cultural Zionism and faced a flurry of commitments: the formation of the *Demokratische Fraktion*, the staging of a small exhibition of contemporary Jewish art in the rooms of the Fifth Congress, preparation of a cultural anthology entitled *Jüdischer Almanach* in 1902 and,

⁴ We could continue listing names, such as Georg Hermann, Erich Mühsam, Stefan Zweig, the conductor Hans Pfitzner, and the painters Anna Costenoble, Julie Wolfthorn and Käthe Kollwitz. For a description of the cultural milieu, see Mark. H. Gelber, *Melancholy Pride. Nation, Race and Gender in the German Literature of Cultural Zionism*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2000. In particular, see the chapter entitled *Börries von Münchhausen and E. M. Lilien. The Genesis of Juda and its Zionist Reception*, pp. 87-124. The volume, to which this essay is very indebted, is an excellent presentation of the literature produced in German in the milieu of cultural Zionism. By the same author and on the same subject, see also *The jungjüdische Bewegung. An Unexplored Chapter in German-Jewish Literary and Cultural History*, in "Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook", XXXI (1986), pp. 105-119.



also starting that year, his commitment to the *Jüdischer Verlag*, a true channel for the circulation of Jewish culture. He then illustrated *Lieder des Ghetto*, a book of poetry also dated 1902. Subsequently there were the illustrations for “Die Welt”, the official journal of the *Zionistische Weltorganisation*, and for the newly established “Ost und West”, clearly sympathetic to the Zionist culture. And there were also attempts made in mid-July 1903 – but never concluded – to organize an ambitious cultural conference in Vienna with Martin Buber and Markus Ehrenpreis. It is in the wake of the success of *Juda* that we should interpret a similar attempt, likewise a failure, to establish his own literary-artistic journal by the same name, which would end up floundering due to lack of funding. Lastly, there were the plans to establish the Bezalel School of Arts in Jerusalem and travels to Ottoman Palestine. Zionism, national art, *Jugend* sensuality and a certain monumentality looking towards classicism would be a single thing from then on, but not with the same energy and not forever. The intensity of his Zionist work would wane over the years; Lilien left the Berlin and Zionist orbit and, while remaining close to the movement, he ultimately blunted the sharp edge of activism, retiring to his wife’s estate in the countryside of Braunschweig, where he worked on illustrating the Bible until his death. He is a figure who is still in the shadows, with the exception of a few specific studies conducted on individual aspects of his oeuvre.⁵ Likewise in the shadows, and not only due to lack of knowledge, is the author of all the poems composing the *Juda*: Baron Börries von Münchhausen (1874–1945).

⁵ For example, see Alfred Gold, *E. M. Lilien in Jüdische Künstler*, edited by Martin Buber, Berlin, Jüdischer Verlag 1903, pp. 73-104; Moses S. Levussove, *The New Art of An Ancient People. The Work of Ephraim Moses Lilien*, B. W. Huebsch, New York 1906; Lothar Brieger, *E. M. Lilien. Eine künstlerische Entwicklung um die Jahrhundertwende*, Verlag Benjamin Harz, Berlin-Vienna 1922; *E. M. Lilien: Jugendstil, Erotik, Zionismus*, edited by Oz Almog and Gerhard Milchram, Mandelbaum Vienna 1998; Haim Finkelstein, *Lilien and Zionism*, in “Assaph: Studies in Art History”, III (1998), pp. 195-216; Dirk Heißerer, *Der Radierer und Lichtzeichner Ephraim Moses Lilien (1874 – 1925)*, Galerie Michael Hasenclever, Munich 2004; Wolfgang Krebs, Edna Brocke and Martina Strehlen, *Ephraim Moses Lilien: Jugendstil und Zionismus*, Alte Synagoge Essen, Essen 2005.



He was born into an ancient noble house and four names after his given name exalt his origins:⁶ the paternal lineage of the Münchhausens of Lower Saxony and, on his mother's side, the margraves of Saxony. In a word, a concentrate of Germanic purity. Examining the family branches, we find a string of Johanns, Friedrichs, Ernsts, Hilmars, Gerlachs, Giselhers and, last but not least, the braggart *Lii-genbaron*, the “Baron of Lies”, reinterpreted in numerous books and films.⁷ Börries von Münchhausen, the last scion of the white line,⁸ was a sensitive soul and, while forced to study law, he quickly turned to literature. Unsurprisingly, he hated anything new. For the baron, conservative in everything from politics to literature, tradition was his guide. In literature he cultivated a solid and essentially linear aim: rectifying the failures of the decadent café movements through the authenticity of the old German ballad, and stemming the driftage of the senses with the honesty of a genuine past. Thus, the ballad could elevate everything that was decadent and impoverished to ancient splendour. In the baron's words, it was “das seit langem schlummernde Königskind der deutschen Dichtung”.⁹ Archaic rhetoric, royal metaphors and traces of the Middle Ages were aimed at recalling a genre that, also in Germany, had a solid tradition going back centuries, a medieval and fairy-tale setting, but also up-to-date contents and elements of irony. Above all, the baron asserted – overlooking English, Irish, French and Provençal relations – that it was a German genre, with a linear outline devoid of the least nuance. From Herder's theory to the practice of many, the ballad was one

⁶ Börries Albrecht Conon August Heinrich Freiherr von Münchhausen.

⁷ The reference is to Hieronymus Carl Friedrich von Münchhausen (1720-1797), better known as Baron Münchhausen, made famous thanks to his unlikely accounts collected in English by Rudolph Erich Raspe and then translated into German by Gottfried August Bürger.

⁸ The differentiation between the “white line” and the “black line” for the family is due to the colour of the habit worn by the monk on the coat of arms – the family name means “monk's house”. For the black line, the monk is wearing a black tunic with a white scapular, while for the white line the monk is in a white tunic with a black scapular.

⁹ Börries von Münchhausen, *Von deutscher Ballade*, in “Stimmen der Gegenwart”, III (1902), p. 295.



of the most cultivated forms, along a path touching on important names from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A quick glance reveals famous examples over the years: Bürger's *Lenore* and Goethe's *Erlkönig*, not to mention the *Balladenjahr* – 1787, the year that, in the space of a few months, saw the composition of many ballads by Goethe and Schiller. But we also have Clemens Brentano, Joseph von Eichendorff, Ludwig Uhland, Adelbert von Chamisso, Heinrich Heine, Eduard Mörike, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer and Theodor Fontane. Above all, there was Count Moritz von Strachwitz, a model for Münchhausen, but an obscure name to most people a century later. Lastly, there was Felix Dahn, the untiring bard of Germanic purity. For Münchhausen, this poetic line was the true bastion to stop aesthetic corruption and withering tastes. It was the filter that could purify writing of *fin-de-siècle* woes and feverish words. The baron failed to realize that what he considered the quintessence of pure, whole and romantic form also continued to mark the age of symbolisms and aestheticisms – albeit less frequently and perhaps with less pathos – through figures from Richard Dehmel and Detlev von Liliencron to Hofmannsthal and Rilke, to mention only a few. And that it would also mark the “after”, opposing any intent of restoration, with Brecht. Thus, it was a genre that never waned but that the baron viewed as having been submerged by the literature of *décadence*. Driven by this restorative intent, Börries von Münchhausen founded and was the first director of a literary academy, the *Akademie zur Pflege der königlichen Kunst der Ballade*, in Göttingen, where he had studied law and that was the venue of a circle of poetic brethren who had gathered around him in the meantime. At the top of the priorities of this society there was naturally the revival of the German ballad. This would be followed a short time later, in 1898, by the revival of a literary journal that had had a resounding reputation until ninety years earlier but was already a pale memory – if that – by the end of the century.

The “Göttinger Musenalmanach”, established around the poets of the *Hainbund*, had hosted some of the leading examples of the literary ballad: Goethe, Bürger, Voss, Gleim, Hölty, Stolberg, Matthias Claudius and other authors until 1807, the year it closed. At the end



of the century, Börries von Münchhausen brought the journal out of oblivion to turn it into the hothouse of the ballad, both popular and literary, a place where – and this was the hope – an art that was once again pure and vigorous would be condensed, interrupting *décadence* in one fell swoop. Münchhausen brought together a group of connoisseurs and imitators of the romantic ballad, some more capable than others, who crowded the first volumes of the new “Musenalmanach”, published annually: Agnes Miegel, Levin Ludwig Schücking, Lulu von Strauß und Torney, Moritz Jahn, joined later by Hanns Johst, Bogislaw von Selchow and Manfred von Katte. Save a few exceptions, none of these figures are famous. There is no need to look too deeply to understand the ideas underlying this cultural operation: the cult of youth, the cult of creativity, the cult of tradition, the cult of the lower class and origins. And in this case, lower class and origins take on specific meanings. The ballad is romantic, it’s pure, it’s Nordic: there is more wisdom in a ballad – Münchhausen would say – than in a hundred Italian sonnets or romances in French verse.¹⁰ The difference lies in temperament and, naturally, the Nordic temperament is better. The treasure chest of the purest character, which holds the most limpid race, is – in the baron’s eyes – the *Niederdeutschland*, the “flat” northern Germany that runs through Holland and, in particular, Lower Saxony, with its crown of stories and legends. According to Münchhausen, it is no accident that was here that the ballad maintained its power, marking uninterrupted continuity from the Middle Ages through Romanticism and up to the late nineteenth century. In the projection of lower Germany against the heavens of myth, Münchhausen had a precedent: in *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, with hugely successful sales and reprints within just a few years, Julius Langbehn viewed the lower-German character as possessing intact purity and a lack of corruption.¹¹ Langbehn was convinced that a new German art would emerge from this. From here the new bards of the homeland, closer to the spirit of the peo-

¹⁰ Börries von Münchhausen, *Die Ballade in Göttingen um 1900*, in *id.*, *Meisterballaden. Ein Führer zur Freude*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart-Berlin 1940, p. 169.

¹¹ Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher. Von einem Deutschen*, Hirschfeld, Leipzig 1890, p. 168.



ple, would restore all the light of golden Germanism to German literature. Consequently, Baron von Münchhausen's was a poetic attempt in which local colour ill concealed the conservative and ideological aspect. In fact, this did not merely involve *Heimatkunst*, rustic stories that follow the path of Gotthelf's poetic realism, on the one hand, and even Hauptmann's Silesia on the other. What happened with Münchhausen was something else: restoration. His verses – which move between the rustic and the feudal, the epic and the historical, roving from the *Edda* to the Germanic Middle Ages and the Thirty Years' War – but also his pages on literary theory run through the narrows of nationalism and do not backtrack before the idea of race. Germanism – says Münchhausen, and he certainly wasn't the first – looks at every other nationality from on high; it has easy access to nature and the spiritual life of the people. The ballad is its seal of purity, a unique genre from which the land and the race speak. It is the only genre that can close the divide opened by *fin-de-siècle* disorder, creating a rift between poetry and popular expression. In the years in which the winds of modernism swept across Germany, the baron would be one of the staunchest opponents of the new. In his eyes, expressionism above all, with its metropolitan paintings, represented the disintegration of the German fibre.¹² This cultural chauvinism was not too far removed from the racially tinged literary criticism that, only a few years later, would paint the rooms of culture in a single colour. What is clear, in fact, is the ideological chain of which Münchhausen's theories were the link among links. This chain wound its way through romantic-conservative cultural pessimism, more or less fanatical antimodernist stances, anti-Semitic views born on Protestant and Catholic home turf, timid or hot-headed Pan-Germanisms, and rather parochial nationalisms. In short, we are talking about the entire *côté* of the German right, from Paul de Lagarde to Eugen Diederichs and Houston Stewart Chamberlain's ravings of supremacy. There are divergences, as we know, and there is a difference in degree between the spiritual and romantic conservatism of de Lagarde and Langbehn, and the spitefulness of

¹² See *infra*.



the writings of von Schönerer and Stewart Chamberlain. At least on this level, Münchhausen should not be confused with the theoreticians of race. Later the boundaries would become closer and often overlap. Thus, there are different intensities, but one thing is sure: they had common roots in the same land, a land that became fertile in the opposition between German and Jew. Or to couch it in terms that had already invaded the public space and would continue to do so, between Aryan and Semite.

And yet in Berlin, at the start of a new century, an “Aryan” and a “Semite” met and worked on a book, *Juda*, whose publication generated surprise, admiration and outcries. It is a volume that, as we have noted, drove a wedge into the construction of German cultural Zionism. A year before Martin Buber showed the world the origins of this new creativity as he discussed the Jewish Renaissance,¹³ the *jungjüdisch* movement had already stopped its fluidity with this book, which was quickly considered – above and beyond the theories and all the intentions preceding it – the fundamental charter of artistic and literary Zionism in Germany.¹⁴

Inside *Juda*

Moving past the cover, the Star of David gives way to a *menorah*, the Jewish candelabrum that Lilien tones down in its austerity, flanking it with sinuous stems and unopened blossoms. These *Jugend* refinements are perhaps meant to evoke the cups shaped like almond blossoms and the buds described in *Exodus* as the decoration of the base and arms.¹⁵ On the following page there is another candelabrum that is even larger and more ornate, but this time it is not a *menorah*.

¹³ The reference is naturally to the programmatic article *Jüdische Renaissance*, written as an opening and to circulate the Jewish cultural reawakening in the West, in “Ost und West”, I (1901), no. 1, columns 7-10. On German cultural Zionism and its projects for artistic refounding, see in particular Martin Buber, *Rinascimento ebraico. Scritti sull'ebraismo e sul sionismo (1899 – 1923)*, edited by Andreina Lavagetto, Mondadori, Milan 2013.

¹⁴ In his 1922 monograph on Lilien, Lothar Brieger already viewed *Juda* as “das erste zionistisch gerichtete künstlerische Buch”, in Lothar Brieger, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

¹⁵ *Ex* 25, 31-40.



Behind it is the Ark of the Covenant surrounded by music-making angels and a tangle of lilies. Above the *paroket* – the curtain concealing the Ark – are Hebrew words with an attribution of the illustrations: “Ephraim Moses son of Ya’akov ha-Cohen Lilien, one of the devout sons of Zion” (fig. 2).¹⁶ The fourth page is already a leap from *Jugend* Germany to the ancient Orient. In the ballad *Euch*, the baron evokes biblical separations and shows a landscape where the steps to Solomon’s Temple are alternated with palm trees, with the Levitical city of Anathoth – where the exiles from Babylonia were still on their way to Jerusalem¹⁷ – and with the voices preaching in the desert paving the way to redemption, but without waiting for the arrival of the Messiah.¹⁸ Over everything is the archaic sound of the *sbofar*, the ram’s horn that has always announced the liberation of Israel. Here too, as in a jubilee where each one returns home,¹⁹ the sound beckons the ancient people to return home: “zurück zur Schönheit einst gesungner Psalmen, / zurück zum heiligen Bach bei Anathot, / zurück zu deiner Heimat Balsampalmen, / zurück zu deinem alten großen Gott”.²⁰ The entire Zionist iconography is contained within six quatrains in iambic pentapody, the classic metre of German drama.²¹ And there is all the ideology of a movement that rejects the Diaspora in its every path, from Talmudism to emancipation, and it descends into biblical beginnings to discover – intact – the vigour of an ancient people that has not been broken by offenses nor consumed by the obsession of a thought that feeds on itself and generates from itself. The entire exile is denied, the ghetto surpassed in a retrograde movement that in the Bible seeks heroism

¹⁶ “Efraim Moshe ben Ya’aqov Lili’en mivne Ziyyon ha-emunim” is the Hebrew sound of these words.

¹⁷ See *Ezr* 2,23 and *Neb* 7,27. The two passages list the number and provenance of the men who, deported to Babylonia by Nebuchadnezzar, returned to Judea.

¹⁸ “Predigers Stimme in der Wüste”, *Juda*, Goslar, F. A. Lattmann 1900, p. 12; (the pages are not numbered in the original edition and the indication is given here to facilitate consultation) takes up *Is* 40,3.

¹⁹ Münchhausen specifically mentions “des Halljahrs Hörner”, in *Juda*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Nevertheless, as opposed to the German *Blankvers*, here the iambic pentameters rhyme at the end.

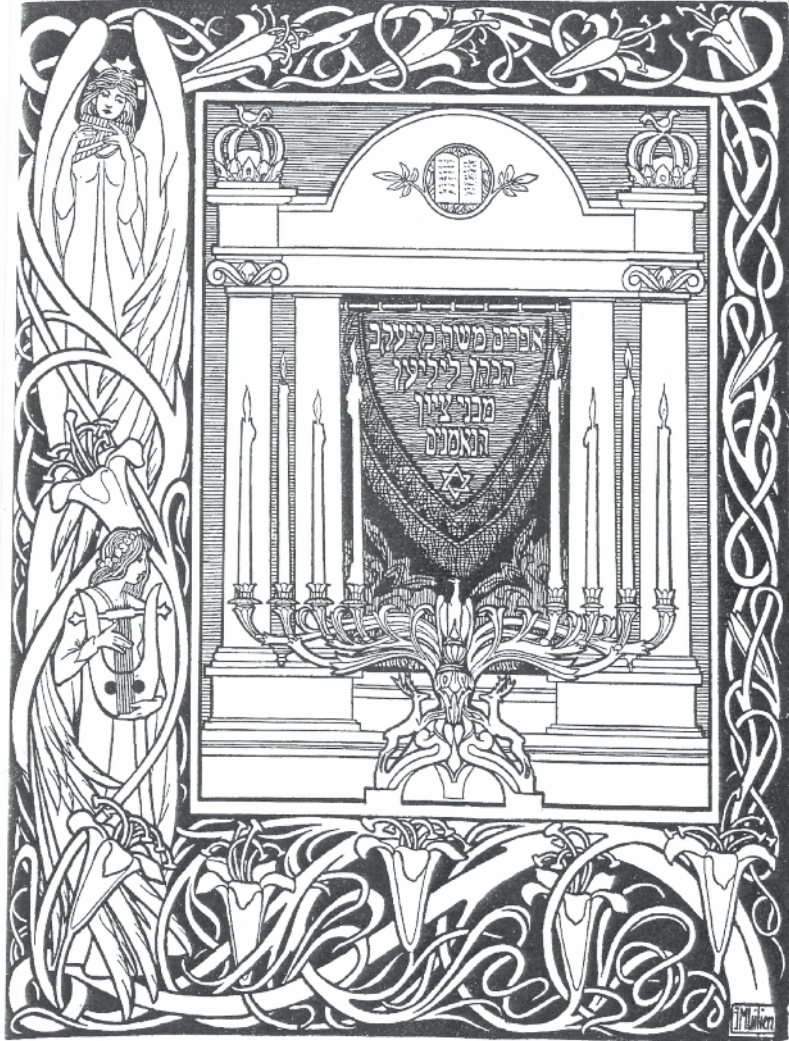


Figure 2: Ephraim Moses Lilien's illustration for the poem for the introduction of *Juda*.



and rebellion, courage and nobility of spirit. The heroes of ancient Israel, from Saul to David and on to Samson and the Maccabees, are recalled as figures of redemption, forming an iconography and a mythology. New physical powers, new senses, contribute to the image of the new Jew who breathes freely in the land of his fathers. No more curved backs or hunched shoulders, no more poverty of forced districts, but a new youth where Nordau's "Judaism of Muscles" encounters *fin-de-siècle* German vitalism. Münchhausen pointed to this new eastern sun, indicating the path leading all Jews back there: "Geächtet Volk, ich zeige dir die Stege / aus Haß und Hohn zu deiner Jugend Glück".²² This is the path leading them home, with their heart even more so than their body, in the awareness of a legacy, the appropriation of origins and the production of a culture that draws its lifeblood from this. First is a sense of self, the rediscovery of self, and then understandings, agreements, moving forward, in a double step that shows what Cultural Zionism's priority is.

The ballad is surrounded by Lilien's illustrative frame: the hirsute faces of Jewish sages from around the world – martyrs, ascetics, poets, priests – their hands raised in blessing²³ and a *Jugend* angel unfolding his wings. Just after this is a large illustration occupying two pages (fig. 3): in the foreground, the prophet Isaiah, piteous and sullen, before a sacrificial altar with an unnatural plume of smoke, curved and tortuous, rising from it. Garlanded male and female dancers, in a circle and holding hands, are in the background. Further back, on the hill, are the walls of Jerusalem, about to be destroyed. The young people dance as the sky darkens, the trees curve over in the wind and the grass is bent to the ground. The image is followed by Münchhausen's solemn and powerful verses, a paraphrase of the prophecies of Isaiah on the ruin of Jerusalem that has given itself to false gods and their deprivations, betraying identity and mission. The analogy is

²² Börries von Münchhausen, *Juda*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²³ This is the blessing gesture hands of the *kohanim*, the Jewish priests, with the typical position of their fingers joining the index and middle fingers, and the ring finger and pinkie. It is a recurrent motif in Jewish iconography, and perhaps also an allusion to the identity of the engraver, whose full name – Ephraim Moshe ben Ya'akov ha-Cohen Lilien – alludes to the priestly caste of Judaism.



Figure 3: Ephraim Moses Lilien's illustration for the poem
Die Weissagung des Jesaia.

clear: the goddess Astarte is within the text²⁴ and foreign populates, foreign knowledge and their seductions are outside of the text. Loss of self looms over those who lose their distinctive features in pursuing foreign forms. In an actualizing perspective, beyond the biblical guise, the poem clearly censures assimilation and is a buttress for Zionism. Sealing it all is an overt and revelatory title, *Also sprach Jesaia*: Nietzsche died in 1900, but Nietzscheanism prevailed.

This is followed by *Rahab, die Jerichonitin*, the development and twist of the events described in the second chapter of *Joshua*: the story of the prostitute of Jericho who hides Joshua's spies in her house and saves herself and her family from the destruction the Israelites would wreak on the city a short time later. Münchhausen makes the Canaanite woman a well-rounded figure with a clear profile. The verses move away from the biblical story: the red cord that marks Rahab's house and ensures her safety²⁵ becomes the rope around her neck to punish her for betraying her people. This too is a clear metaphor for self-alienation (fig. 4).

²⁴ "Dann raufe dir die Haare aus, / du Astaroth", Börries von Münchhausen, *Juda*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²⁵ *Jos 2*, 15-21.



Figure 4: Ephraim Moses Lilien's illustration for the poem
Rahab, die Jerichonitin.



In these verses, the spy sent by Joshua is named Joiada and the author entwines the biblical story with the love poems of the *Song of Songs*,²⁶ but they immediately portend ruin. Punishment for Rahab's betrayal is introduced with apocalyptic images: blood running from the clouds, along with a figure emerging from the deepest Germanic nights. "Vom Himmel fallen alle Sterne", sings Rahab, creating a fade-out on the words of the prophetess who, in the *Völuspá*, announced the great final blaze, when the sun turns black, the earth is swallowed up, the stars fall²⁷ and the gods wane. Through this bridge between the Bible and the poetic *Edda*, the oldest Germanic tradition is evoked in a poem and juxtaposed with an Eastern story.

Another text leads us into the first book of Samuel, evoking the foundations of the national Judaic mythology: Saul and the prophet Samuel this time. Saul, pushed to the edges of the salvific plan at this point due to his disobedience to God's instructions, turns to the practice of necromancy, which he himself had banned. Surrounded by the Philistines and God's silence, he consults another conjuror of the dead, the witch of Endor. The spirit of the prophet Samuel is called up from the underworld and reveals what will happen: God has turned his gaze to David and distanced himself from Saul, who will die in the Battle of Gilboa the following day. The episode, which had already been the subject of various writings and paintings and would be so again, was taken up by Münchhausen in the ballad *Die Hexe von En Dor*. With romantic accents, archaic tones and a language oscillating between the rural *Junkertum* and Wagner, the ballad responds to one of the most common types of the German tradition, the *totenmagische Ballade*, in which the encounter with the dead or their return is the focal point of the narration in verses.

²⁶ Rahab's love song contains explicit quotations from the *Song of Songs*. In particular the verses "Mein Freund ist wie ein Büschel Myrrhen, / das zwischen meinen Brüsten hängt, / [...] Sein Arm lag unter meinem Haupte, die rechte Hand liebte mich», Börries von Münchhausen, *Juda, op. cit.*, pp. 26–27, evoke *Sg* 1, 13 and 2, 6–7.

²⁷ "Vom Himmel fallen die klaren Sterne" is the historic German translation of the ancient Icelandic verse. By way of example, see *Die Edda. Nebst einer Einleitung über nordische Poesie und Mythologie und einem Anhang über die historische Literatur der Isländer*, Real-schulbuchhandlung, Berlin 1812, p. 231.



Then it is time for *Joab* who, as the title suggests, examines the commander of David's army and evokes his ambition and ingenious brutality. The events are taken – without any changes – from six verses in the *Second Book of Samuel*:²⁸ as he embraced the enemy general Amasa to greet him, Joab plunged a dagger into his belly. Münchhausen presents the episode with the language of the historic-legendary ballad in his *fin-de-siècle* revival: dark, serious and archaic language.

In both text and image, *Passab*, which follows, is an extract of the Zionist theme in its *jungjüdisch* proposal. Developed around the dual meaning of the adverb “einst” in looking back to the past and forward to the future, the ballad examines the symbolic complex of the *Pessab* supper. Unleavened bread, bitter herbs, walking sticks, mantles to wrap around one's shoulders for an upcoming and sudden departure: we have all the elements of the ritual that, perhaps more than any other, establishes the Jewish identity, removes it from a foreign land, starts its journey and sends it on its way to the promise and then a true home. And that, year after year, over the centuries of the dispersion of the people, evokes the end of slavery and promises a return, slashing the present in the messianic prospect of liberation. The departure from Egypt is an ever-vivid reality and the community of the Diaspora never forgot this in the centuries of exile. In the Zionist imagery, now more than ever the feast acquired meaning in putting an end to humiliation – and the entire chain of Jewish *Leidensgeschichte* – by hastening the fulfilment of the times with a return to the origin within history and not outside it. Not in awaiting the arrival of the Messiah but in the journey towards Zion. Or, from the standpoint of Cultural Zionism, in regaining a culture first of all, and then a land. In *Passab*, Münchhausen goes over the path from the past to the future: just as “once” – the word is “einst”²⁹ – the memory of the Egyptian captivity on the “Paschal” evening united Jews scattered around the world in a single destiny, “one day” – and the word is also “einst”³⁰ – these same Jews will celebrate the *Pessab* in

²⁸ 2 *Sm* 20, 8-13.

²⁹ Börries von Münchhausen, *Juda*, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³⁰ *Ibid.*



Jerusalem. It is a day that the Zionists (and seemingly Münchhausen) see – or hope – is at hand. Lilien’s illustration for these verses is the calling card for *Juda* and perhaps all of the German Cultural Zionism (fig. 5): in the foreground there is an old Jew, in pain but dignified, with the thorns of affliction wrapped around him. The entire Diaspora and its iconography are enclosed in a figure that is typically *ostjüdisch*. At his back, behind the East of Europe, is an east that is more distant and fabulous, with pyramids on the banks of the Nile and monumental statues of pharaohs. The present of the Diaspora is set alongside the mythical and recurrent present of Egyptian slavery. Shining behind the pyramids – its glare blinding – is the sun of the future. This sun bears the Hebrew word “Zion” and it shines on the suffering of the Jews from all lands and eras. The rising sun is a typical image of the Zionist and socialist repertory, and we know that for Lilien but also in broad areas of the movement the two were the same thing. But this sun, which surrounds the Hebrew letters with light, is also the dawn of a cultural rebirth from the viewpoint of the Cultural Zionism, the *jungjüdisch* movement, and the entire Jewish Renaissance.



Figure 5: Ephraim Moses Lilien’s illustration to the poem *Passah*.



Triumphgesang der Juden once again becomes a song of liberation. What recur are the images of the walking stick, imminent departure, the triumph of those who emerge from oppression and return after being far from home for so long. This time, departure is not from Egypt but Babylonia. But Jerusalem is in the same direction, and the Zionist use of the two cores, the end of exile and the return to one's land, is identical. What resounds in these verses is a blend of words from *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel* and other prophecies:³¹ thundering water, the wind rustling the leaves, dark dust rising from the river, storm winds from the north, blossoming almonds, the advent of the Almighty, the fulfilment of the times, the ruin of nations, the fall of Babylonia, the end of deportation. Everything is cloaked in the most full-blown Late-Romantic anguish, where the Jews living along the rivers of Babylonia chant “von Jeruschalajim das Sehnsuchtslied”:³² a Jewish setting and romantic compassion engage and mesh with each other. Freed, the Jews tie their sandal straps and start walking to the Judean Mountains, following the path of the setting sun led by the “Auge der Sehnsucht”,³³ and Jerusalem shining in the morning light is “die heilige Heimat”,³⁴ the centre of emotions and belonging, and anything but Middle Eastern.

The next stage, after the work on the destruction of Sodom, is the short poem *Simson*, the only one written specifically for *Juda*, which was otherwise composed entirely of existing texts.³⁵ Composed of 143 verses divided into three sections with stanzas vary-

³¹ Above all *Jer* 1 and *Ez* 1.

³² Börries von Münchhausen, *Juda*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Most of these texts were written between 1893 and 1898, as the baron himself recounts with a retrospective gaze: “Die ersten jüdischen Balladen schrieb ich vor acht Jahren als Secundaner und seit der Zeit hat mich der wundervolle Zauber jener alten Herrlichkeit, die pathetische Pracht der Geschichte des alten Volkes nie losgelassen. Ganz allmählich entstanden in diesem langen Zeitraume die Gedichte, die ich noch 1898 in ein dickes Gesamtmanuscript meiner Verse einstreute, ohne an eine Sonderausgabe zu denken”, Börries von Münchhausen, *Wie das Buch Juda entstand*, in “Die Welt”, V (1901), no. 14, p. 21.



ing in length, *Simson* has all the breadth and ambition of a founding text. There is another re-elaboration – on a psychological and sentimental level – of the coarse biblical subject: here it is a woman who gives the Nazarene Samson, blind and imprisoned in Gaza, the strength to tear down the pillars of the Temple of Dagon. Lilien illustrates a moment in history, the bare-handed killing of the lion, torn apart “as one tears a kid”,³⁶ where Samson is clearly the Hebrew mirror of the Greek Heracles (fig. 6). In the national epic created by Zionism, Samson would be one of the first to be included as a hero, defender of his identity and redeemer of his own offense. The face of the new Jew – also, and perhaps above all, from a cultural perspective – is constructed in the recovery of a mythical past and the foundation of a new collective memory. Jewish nationalism is structured in the ties with its past heroes, and in Münchhausen’s short poem, it projects itself against the backdrop of German nationalism.

The section of the volume *Die Gesänge des Jehuda* is a trio of love songs in which the biblical ballad moves towards lyric poetry, towards the equally German form of the *Lied*. The titles are *Das Sehnsuchtslied, das stille Lied, das Trauerlied*: anguish, the stillness of love and mourning for a Jewish woman are expressed in verses that entwine biblical love poems,³⁷ psalmody,³⁸ lamentation, the elegy to the contrast – typically romantic – between possession and loss, between exaltation and melancholy. The setting, the images and the atmospheres are biblical, but the tone and mental quality are not: dependence on the object of desire, the pain of definitive loss and the grip of anguish are signs of romantic torment. The illustration of *Das stille Lied* proposes the embrace, nocturnal and sensual, of two lovers, in an extravaganza of roses, grape clusters, doves and other floral motifs. This is an image taken from the *Song of Songs*

³⁶ *Jgs* 14,6.

³⁷ Naturally, the reference is above all to *Song of Songs*.

³⁸ The author looks above all towards Psalm 22, of which the initial rubric is cited at the beginning. “Dem Sangmeister: Nach: Hindin der Morgenröthe” (Börries von Münchhausen, *Juda, op. cit.*, p. 77) explicitly takes up the superscription of the Hebrew psalm, with indications on the liturgical execution.



Figure 6: Ephraim Moses Lilien's illustration for the poem *Simson*.



that is above all an eastern version of Klimt's *The Kiss*,³⁹ where once again the blending and overlap of languages and cultural codes is evident (fig. 7).

The next ballad, *Mose*, takes up and expands the song of the sea, the hymn of jubilation that Miriam – the prophetess, Moses' sister – sings, rousing the women in dance after the Hebrews walked on dry land in the middle of the sea. The subject presents nothing new: Israel leaves Egypt and crosses the water, free and victorious, on the path that will bring it to enter Canaan with Joshua. The national hope of Zionism uses these images and, in Münchhausen's words, it is cloaked in the solemn tone of the German ode and, even more so, the hymn in its transit through literature, from Klopstock to George.

Last is *Sabbath der Sabbath*, in which Münchhausen proclaims the "Sabbath of Sabbaths",⁴⁰ the last, the greatest, when eternal redemption, relegated to the end of history, makes its entrance. This is a redemption that Zionism sets against the present and places in the middle of time. In line with the Zionist advance, Münchhausen invites the Jews to suspend hope in the future: the God of their fathers will now lead them out of shame and derision.⁴¹ The final engraving shows a woman on a throne, beautiful and regal, holding the *Torah* scrolls (fig. 8): she is Princess *Shabbat*, about whom Heine had already written.⁴² The woman represents the splendour of *Shekinah*, which is at once the majestic presence of God and the bride of Israel, who follows the Jewish people in the succession of their exiles

³⁹ The analogy between Lilien's illustration and Klimt is presented in Mark. H. Gelber, *Melancholy Pride*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁴⁰ Judaism uses this superlative to identify *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, where the tension towards the future instant of redemption is strongest.

⁴¹ "Hänge dein Hoffen ans Später, / traue dem Gotte der Väter: / aus Zeiten voll Schande und Spott / führt dich dein heiliger Gott", Bories von Münchhausen, *Juda*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁴² We are referring to *Prinzessin Sabbath*, included in the *Hebräische Melodien* section of the *Romanzero*. See Heinrich Heine, *Romanzero – Gedichte. 1853 und 1854 – Lyrischer Nachlaß*, in *Sämtliche Werke. Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke (Düsseldorfer Ausgabe)*, vol. 3/1, edited by Frauke Bartelt and Alberto Destro, Hoffmann und Campe, Hamburg 1992, pp. 125-129.



Figure 7: Ephraim Moses Lilien's illustration for the poem
Das stille Lied.



Figure 8: Ephraim Moses Lilien's illustration for the poem *Sabbath der Sabbathe*.



and that on the Sabbath day shines more brightly, announcing the final redemption.⁴³

Thus, with a final decoration, the word “Ende” in large linear characters and the baron’s name in Hebrew letters,⁴⁴ the collection of poems praising ancient Israel comes to an end (fig. 9). And this paves the way for a discussion on the encounter between a Jewish nationalist and a German nationalist who always moved along the far edge of anti-Semitism. Clearly, we cannot dismiss this cultural fact by being surprised by this paradox or simply observing it. Nor can we



Figure 9: Ephraim Moses Lilien’s illustrations at the end of *Juda*.

⁴³ It is above all the *qabbalah* of Yisḥaq Luria that insists on the splendour of the *Shekinah* on the Sabbath. It is a taste of the messianic redemption that will put an end to exile and that Zionism sets in the imminence of the future. On this, see Giulio Busi, *I simboli del pensiero ebraico. Lessico ragionato in settanta voci*, Einaudi, Turin 1999, pp. 351-352.

⁴⁴ “Börries of the house of the Münchhausen”, like the mention of Lilien, also in Hebrew characters, opened the volume. See *supra*, note 16.



merely make superficial recourse to the categories of antinomy, contradiction or, worse yet, incoherence. We must push this analysis further, recalling the great circulation and equally great popularity that *Juda* would enjoy in the months and years to come. There were numerous reprints and copious reviews. It was translated into many languages – including Hebrew, Czech and Polish – and letters of congratulations arrived from Salamanca, the chief rabbi of Romania and Theodor Herzl himself (fig. 10).⁴⁵ Praise never waned among Zionists. “Das Kommen einer jüdischen Kunst”: this is how Martin Buber welcomed *Juda* in a review published in “Die Welt” a few days before the volume came out.⁴⁶ In the collection, Buber saw the seeds of the future, the traces of a possibility: the possibility of a new Jewish art. Voicing the idea of a cultural reawakening accompanying the national Jewish thought in its migrations from eastern to western Europe, and using the same words that run through the discussions of cultural Zionism, Buber talks about “ewige Erneuerung und Verjüngung unseres Volkes”, about “wunderbare[s], sich stets wiederholende[s] Hervorströmen des Lebens aus dem Tode”.⁴⁷ In his mind, these are the contents of *Juda*. The new Jewish art springs forth, generated from the old, and it is on this vitalism of springing forth, in which the Nietzschean influence is evident, that Buber diverges from the baron. The reborn Jewish creativity, of which *Juda* is the germ, looks towards tomorrow and, according to Buber, Münchhausen’s invitation to go back⁴⁸ did not do justice to the future dimension of an idea that, just a year later, would burst out in all directions with the

⁴⁵ The letter from Theodor Herzl to Münchhausen, written shortly after *Juda* came out, was first published in “Die Welt” in the issue of 12 April 1911 as an appendix to the article *Moderne deutsche Dichtungen altjüdischer Stoffe*, written by Oskar Frankl of Prague for the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Juda* (XIV [1911], no. 15-16, p. 358). The baron reciprocated with a song of praise entitled *Theodor Herzl*, in which the founder of Zionism, liberating the people from exile, treads in Moses’ footsteps.

⁴⁶ Martin Buber, *Das Buch “Juda”*, in “Die Welt”, IV (1900), no. 50, pp. 10-12, here p. 12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ “[Z]urück zur Schönheit einst gesungner Psalmen, / zurück zum heiligen Bach bei Anathot, / zurück zu deiner Heimat Balsampalmen, / zurück zu deinem alten großen Gott”. See *supra*.

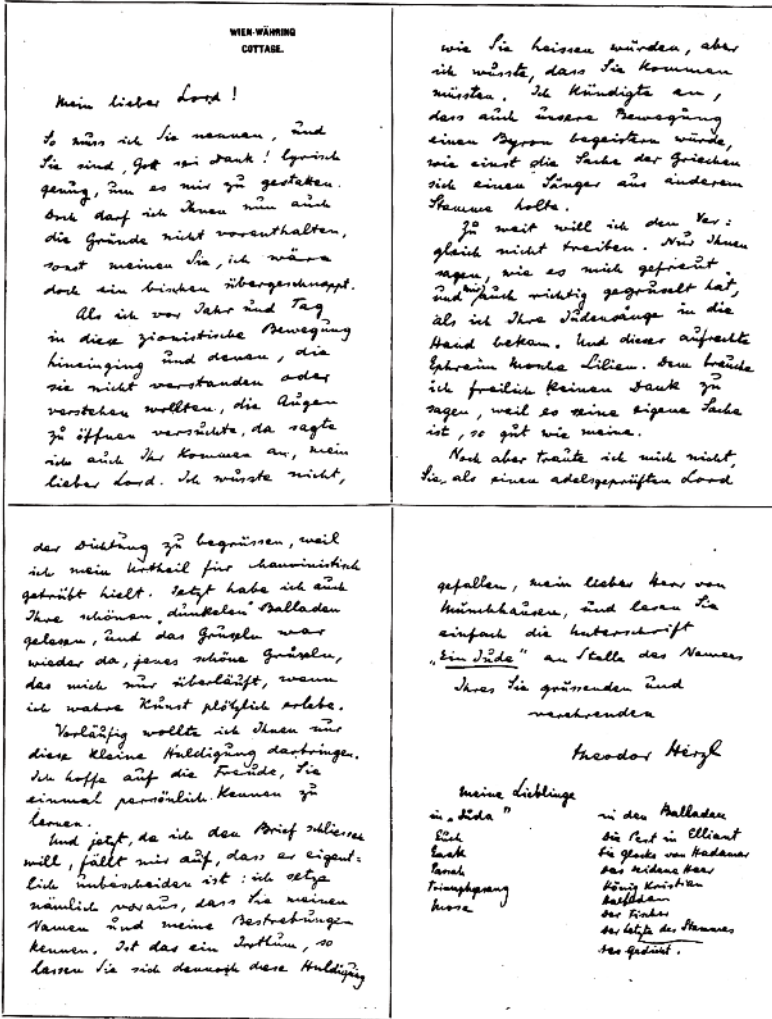


Figure 10: Theodor Herzl's letter to Börries von Münchhausen, from "Die Welt. Zentralorgan der Zionistischen Bewegung", XIV (1911), no. 15-16, p. 358 (free download from the digital repertory Compact Memory Universitätsbibliothek – Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, <http://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/cm/periodical/titelinfo/3316477>).



name *Jüdische Renaissance*.⁴⁹ Buber did not envisage a return to the past, but an advancement on new paths towards a rejuvenated Judaism.⁵⁰ Regarding the “zurück” of the first verses, hostile towards any drive forward and in keeping with the will to preserve the past, the paths of the baron’s reactionary idea and the revolutionary, regenerative concept of cultural Zionism diverged. But only in theory: in the transition from intent to practice, the distance tended to narrow.

There were countless words of praise from the Zionist side. According to the journalist Robert Jaffé, in a review that likewise appeared in “Die Welt” in April 1901,⁵¹ no Zionist house should be without a copy of *Juda*, as it represented the first complete product of a neo-Judaic art that was at once modern and romantic.⁵² In a word, it marked the Jewish path to modernity. Besides containing Buber’s editorial on the Jewish Renaissance, the first issue of “Ost und West” in January 1901, featured a review penned by the Zionist physician and writer Theodor Zlocisti.⁵³ Baron Münchhausen – in the reviewer’s words – was moved by the most sincere interest

⁴⁹ As already observed (see note 13), Buber would be the one to relaunch and circulate the idea of the Jewish Renaissance in 1901.

⁵⁰ In these words, the difference is clear: “Zurück!’. Hier scheiden sich die Bahnen. Dem Fremdling, der in unseren Thoren weilt und im letzten Grunde doch nur aus der Vergangenheit die spezifische Poesie des Judenvolkes zu schöpfen weiss, mag Rückkehr als das einzige Heilwort erscheinen; unsere Losung ist sie nicht. Wir lieben vor allen Offenbarungen die Poesie unserer Gegenwart. Wir kehren nicht zurück, wir gehen auf neuen Wegen weiter. Wir suchen noch, wir fragen, aber schon tritt unser Fuss sicher auf. Der Todten eingedenk, begrüßen wir das Leben. Mit treuer Demuth ehren wir das reine Thun der Väter, aber wir begehren ein anderes Heil. Wir wollen ein neues Palästina, wir wollen auch ein neues Judenthum. Eines, das Leben geniesst und Leben schafft. Eines mit starkem Natursinn und formsicherer Kunstgewalt. Ungehobene Schätze der Volkskraft wollen wir ans Licht bringen, verirrte Stammesfähigkeiten productiv machen. Ein neues hingebungsvolles Sinnenleben, [...] frohe, unbefangene zugreifende Energie, eine zweite Jugend der Nation: all dies reicht tiefer, als die Losung der Rückkehr”, Martin Buber, *Das Buch “Juda”*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁵¹ Robert Jaffé, *Neujüdische Kunst*, in “Die Welt”, V (1901), no. 14, p. 24.

⁵² “[D]as erste vollwertige Erzeugnis einer neujüdischen, modern-romantischen Kunst”, *ibid.*

⁵³ Theodor Zlocisti, *Juda*, in “Ost und West”, I (1901), no. 1, columns 63-68.



in the history of Judaism, a profound knowledge of the Jewish spirit, and participation in the suffering of the people of Israel; the enchantment of the verses of Isaiah resound in his verses.⁵⁴ According to Zlocisti, for the Jewish world in Europe *Juda* represented a dividing line: there was a before and an after. The reviewer sustained that the book would bring friends to Judaism because it gave poetic voice – one of the most sublime – to Jewish pride and the nostalgia for Zion.⁵⁵ But even outside the Zionist camp, non-nationalistic Judaism welcomed *Juda* with an equivalent sense of wonder. In fact, according to these voices the volume demonstrated that the convergence of Jews and Germans was possible, going against any tendency towards separation. That there was a spontaneous affinity between the two populations, a natural empathy. Symbiosis, cultural synthesis, were roads that could be travelled, and collaborations like *Juda* would enrich both identities. However, the voices coming from anti-nationalistic Judaism in support of *Juda* were marginal and minority voices.

Outside Judaism as well, the volume gained favour in the most prestigious and authoritative journals, from the “Literarisches Echo” to “Kunstwart”.⁵⁶ Regardless, anyone in Judaism who looked carefully at the baron’s world view, who glimpsed the logical consequences and inevitable outcome, should have set this book aside or at least avoid praising it. This did not happen and we need to examine why.

⁵⁴ “Es weht durch seine Strophen ein Hauch von dem Zauber der grossen Jesaia-Reden”, *ibid.*, column 64. Here the reviewer looks above all at the work *Die Weissagung des Jesaia*.

⁵⁵ “Münchhausen’s Buch wird uns neuen Juden Freunde werben. Man wird an ihm nicht vorübergehen wie an irgend einem Gedichtband”, *ibid.*, column 65. In Zlocisti’s words, “nostalgia for Zion” is “Zionssehnsucht”, *ibid.*, column 64.

⁵⁶ However, the reception of *Juda* was not a single positive voice. There were also contrary opinions and curt judgements, pointing variously to the fact that the collection was by no means innovative, and to the antiquated and superficial aspect of its writing. Denigrators of Münchhausen’s poetry assert – rightly to a certain extent – that it lacks warmth, originality and inwardness. According to the *Jugend* poet Georg Busse-Palma, the poetry in *Juda* is creaky and grating, and the entire collection is “screaming”. On this, see Mark. H. Gelber, *Melancholy Pride*, *op. cit.*, p. 108. The reference is to Georg Busse-Palma, *Drei Bücher Balladen*, in “Monatsblätter für deutsche Literatur”, V (1900-1901), pp. 324-26.



Looking ahead to the future

At this point it is worthwhile to take a look at events that had yet to unfold and recall what the baron's future path would be. His fame – certainly not dazzling – is tied to the twelve black years; he would never join the party, but his name stood out in the cultural life of the *Reich*, shining in its most important bodies. Never one to shy away from demonstrating his loyalty, his name would be listed among the eighty-eight writers who signed the *Gelöbnis treuester Gefolgschaft* to Hitler in the autumn of 1933. Furthermore, in June 1933 he became a senator in the *Deutsche Akademie der Dichtung*, which staunchly supported Nazism and published the monthly “Volk und Rasse”, a semi-popular periodical the very title of which speaks volumes: published by J. F. Lehmanns Verlag starting in 1925, it circulated racial theory and trite praises of Aryan virtues. Lastly, he was president of *Wilhelm Raabe Gesellschaft* and *Gesellschaft der Bibliophilen*.⁵⁷ He was a man of authority and influence, to whom the culture of the regime would give great prominence. In the new Nazified literary standards, his poetry would stand as one of the highest examples of a Germanic national spirit, of intact naturalism shielded from corruption. His entirely poetic oeuvre – he never wrote a novel or short story – would sell more than half a million copies in Germany. In his poetry, his supporters saw a genealogical line that extended pure and uncontaminated from the Teutoburg forest to the mouth of the new romanticism of steel, where myth, the sacredness of nature, the mysticism of race, heroism and all the debris of misguided Nietzscheanism would constitute points of reference. Books that did not demonstrate this content were destined to be burned, but the baron's works did not encounter this fate. Münchhausen openly supported the National Socialist programme and actively participated in the culture of the regime, and above all in his final years, he lived a life of seclusion on his estate of Windischleuba, in Thuringia. Germany's defeat marked the decline of his noble and feudal world view and his

⁵⁷ For a more detailed reconstruction, see Mark H. Gelber, *Melancholy Pride*, *op. cit.*, p. 88.



wife's death was the *coup de grâce*. Adrift without any points of reference, the baron feared he would be exiled from German soil and poisoned himself in his castle just a few weeks before zero hour. After this, there is nothing or very little: documents that say nothing, silence about the author and barely a mention in literary histories, and a few ballads in the anthologies of the German Federal Republic to bring a touch of folklore to children's classrooms.

In the haste for posthumous rehabilitation, some have wanted to emphasize the baron's distance from Nazism, his opposition to a Nazified culture, his barricading himself from the regime's political courtship, his clashes with Goebbels, his resignation as president of the Society of Bibliophiles. In short, he was not some minor literary hierarch. Indeed, taking an even greater risk some said that in the darkest years he showed passive resistance,⁵⁸ that he was merely a chauvinistic romantic who loved his people, the follower of a brilliant line of thought going back to Friedrich Schlegel. This line of thought, in the meantime, had rooted early romanticism's desire for the infinite in the ground. But in the eyes of those who restored his honour, these are mere details.

In striving to establish distance, these arguments instead reveal an immense convergence. Never ill at ease in the strictures of Hitler's twelve years in power, the baron conducted his rear-guard battle from an exceedingly authoritative position. As already noted, in the years of the first *Expressionismusdebatte* he was at the front line in condemning the movement, aligned with the position of Alfred Rosenberg and against Goebbels, who wanted to save modern art, linking it with the *völkisch* idea in the creation of a Nordic Expressionism. For Münchhausen, any understanding was impossible: every face of modernity poisons tradition, and by neglecting the people to the benefit of the individual and his subjectivity, Expressionism was one of its ripest fruits.

Rejection of Expressionism spills over profusely in various works – above all in *Die neue Dichtung* – with arguments that, in rhetoric and

⁵⁸ See Ernst Volkmann, *Börries, Freiherr von Münchhausen*, in "Imprimatur", X (1950-1951), p. 201.



language, are not far removed from Nazi writings.⁵⁹ The baron's main targets include Georg Kaiser, Oskar Kokoschka, Heinrich Mann, Carl Sternheim, Frank Wedekind and, guilty twice over because they were Jews, Ernst Toller, Alfred Döblin, Albert Ehrenstein, Else Lasker-Schüler, Samuel Lublinski and Franz Werfel. Gottfried Benn above all ended up being targeted by the baron, who viewed his poetry as one of the many trickles of degenerate art. For Münchhausen the author was nothing short of a unspoken and hidden Jew, his surname being an alteration of the Hebrew *ben*, the "son" – and this was the damning evidence – that is often part of the Jewish names. This reflects imaginative etymologies and overzealousness regarding an author, Benn, who, aside from his love affair with Lasker-Schüler – had little in common with Judaism and who, at this point in time, certainly did not need to prove his "Germanness": on 13 March 1933 he demonstrated his loyalty to Hitler by setting it down in black and white, forcing the other members of the poetry section of the *Preußische Akademie der Künste* to sign the *Loyalitätsbekundung* or leave.⁶⁰ News of Benn's alleged Jewish background caused a stir and would be circulated a few years later, corroborated by the baron, by the official organ of the SS, "Das Schwarze Korps", as well as the "Völkischer Beobachter". In the days in which the University of Bonn revoked Thomas Mann's honorary degree – in late 1936 – the baron raised his voice to defend Hitler, who had come like a blessing over an exhausted Germany: "Noch niemals, in keinem anderen Lande und zu keiner anderen Zeit, hat eine Regierung in so kurzer und so schwerer Zeit eine solche Fülle von Segen über ein Volk ausgegossen wie das Hitlertum seit seinem Bestehen".⁶¹ This boundless praise removes any doubt. The very leaders of the regime would be

⁵⁹ This rather controversial text is in the collection of essays entitled *Die Garbe*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart-Berlin 1933, p. 91.

⁶⁰ As we know, many would choose to leave or be forced to do so: Thomas Mann, Ernst Barlach, Ricarda Huch, Max Liebermann, Franz Werfel, Leonhard Frank, Arnold Schönberg. Signatories included Gerhart Hauptmann, Oskar Loerke, Georg Kaiser and Alfred Döblin. Though Döblin, a Jew, signed the *Loyalitätsbekundung*, this would not save him from expulsion.

⁶¹ See Münchhausen's letter to Thomas Mann, dated 22 April 1937, published in "Blätter der Thomas Mann Gesellschaft", XVII (1975), p. 17.



the ones to trumpet Münchhausen. In the July 1939 issue, the Munich literary monthly “Das innere Reich” published a special on the baron, written by Moritz Jahn, a poet and literary critic who was part of the regime and was likewise a native of Lower Saxony.⁶² Echoing the opinion of Felix Dahn, Jahn’s words crown Münchhausen as the most important ballad writer after Fontane. His verses were considered perpetual mastery of the German spirit. During the dictatorship, embarrassing silence fell over *Juda*. There was never any mention of his collaboration with Lilien, and the poetry collection disappeared from the baron’s bibliography, although it must be said that Münchhausen never denied this youthful episode.

As proof of his distance from the least soupçon of anti-Semitism, some of those who tried to restore his honour following his death cited a letter to Ludwig Jacobowski, written before the baron met Lilien, stating that he was “pro-Semitic”.⁶³ In addition, there was his profound knowledge of the Jewish world, which led him to write *Juda* and other works close to it in terms of subject.⁶⁴ Furthermore, there was his proximity to Zionism and the fact that he even promoted it at the time.

However, this does not seem to be the right interpretation: his contiguity with the Zionist movement seems to be the flip side of his aversion for assimilated Judaism. Therefore, there is no departure from un-nuanced Teutomania. Indeed, hostility towards the Jewish miser, a figure of empty, disjointed and disruptive social relations, led him to support the Zionist idea and accompany Jews on their way out of Germany: any viaticum, just as long as they leave. The poison of Jewish money corroded the bond of *Gemeinschaft* and the mingling of Jews and Germans extinguished the Germanic specific: the movement leading the Jews out of Germany thus had to be sup-

⁶² The works of Moritz Jahn – above all lyric poetry, but also ballads, fables and stories – are written in Low German.

⁶³ See *Auftakt zur Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts. Briefe aus dem Nachlaß von Ludwig Jakobowski*, edited by Fred Stern, Lambert Schneider Verlag, Heidelberg 1974, p. 265.

⁶⁴ For example, one of the leading examples of his youthful work, *Rabbi Manasse Kohen*, is set in the Jewish quarter of Prague and indebted to Heine’s Hebrew melodies. And there is *Hesped-Klage*, written in 1903, following the disastrous Kischinev pogrom.



ported at all cost. This was the reason for the baron's enthusiasm over the heroic aspect of Zionism, respect for its national epic, the tribute to the ancient nobility of the Jewish people. As Münchhausen went on to say, the Jews are a proud and ancient people. Their heroes are full of glory, their eastern extraneousness exceedingly worthy. So hail to a movement that, skipping over all the miseries of the Diaspora, would return to the splendour of ancient Israel, speaking once more of ancient virtues, Samson and the Maccabees. And, above all, a movement that would leave Germany in order to go east. This attunement with Zionism is even more evident in areas in which the baron participated in cultural events organized by the movement, read his poems at evening gatherings and attended a Zionist congress. Like Zionism, Münchhausen also wholly rejected the Diaspora in its two branches: assimilation and the economics of money in the west, the poverty of the ghettos in the east. Uncoincidentally, the famous 1902 collection *Lieder des Ghetto*, with texts in *Yiddish* by Morris Rosenfeld – translated into German for the occasion by Berthold Feiwel – and Lilien's illustrations, were not well received by Münchhausen, who gave them a poor review: the proletarian slant of the book and the accent on the suffering of eastern Jewish workers clashed with the lofty and rarefied vision of Judaism and the kind of world that the baron was spreading. In later years, Münchhausen would be less inclined to make concessions to Jews and his opinions would be harsher. Regarding the celebration of the ancient glories of monarchic Israel, a negative opinion would prevail with respect to current Judaism, as would the urgency to remedy this. On 30 September 1929 in Kassel, the *Preußische Akademie der Künste*, together with the *Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft*, organized a conference on the subject of "Poetry and Radio". In his diary, with an accent bordering on obsession, the baron noted: "Nein, daß es so viele Juden gibt! Ich schlenderte in der Allee vorm Hotel mit dem greisen Georg Engel, dazu kam bald Ludwig Fulda. Im Foyer begrüßte mich der fette kleine Ernst Lissauer, beim Essen Arnold Zweig, Arnolt Bronnen, Alfred Döblin".⁶⁵ Regarding German-Jewish authors, in a

⁶⁵ Joachim Dyck, *Der Zeitzeuge: Gottfried Benn 1929-1949*, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen 2006, p. 56. These words naturally evoke other famous words uttered forty years



letter to his friend Levin Ludwig Schücking Münchhausen noted: “Vielleicht liegen mir diese Wiener Juden alle nicht, auch Hofmannsthal ist mir ein Greul. Ich fühle überall ein gewisses Minus und weiß nicht recht, ob es die sittliche Notwendigkeit der Werke oder der Charakter der Dichter ist. Jedenfalls wehrt sich mein Instinkt gegen sie, obwohl ich, wie du weißt, gar kein praktischer Antisemit bin”.⁶⁶ Statements of distance from political anti-Semitism – rather weak, truth be told – coexist with aversion. His spitefulness grew with the passing years: “Eine Ehe zwischen Arier und Juden ergibt immer einen Bastard”,⁶⁷ he wrote in 1924 in the columns of the “Deutsches Adelsblatt”, the periodical of the German nobility. And five years later he specified to the equally compromised Ina Seidel: “Wie Sie wissen, bin ich nicht Antisemit, glaube aber allerdings das Deutschtum in seinem verzweifelt Abwehrkämpfe gegen eine Überwucherung des jüdischen Geistes schützen zu müssen”.⁶⁸ The same dual discourse emerges in a letter to his Zionist friend Sammy Gronemann: “Sie sind Davidsternler, ich bin gewiss kein Hakenkreuzler aber doch werden Sie begreifen, dass es mir als deutschem Schriftsteller peinlich ist, wenn in der deutschen Literatur Juden eine führende Stellung innehaben, aber das könnte noch angehen. Was für mich schlechthin unerträglich ist, ist dass sie diese Stellung zu Recht innehaben”.⁶⁹ Gronemann himself was the one who elimi-

earlier by Vienna’s anti-Semitic burgomaster Karl Lueger, in a speech given in 1890 that plastically describes the cultural flood that frightened the German right: “Ja, in Wien gibt es doch Juden wie Sand am Meere, wohin man geht, nichts als Juden; geht man ins Theater, nichts als Juden, geht man auf die Ringstraße, nichts als Juden, geht man in den Stadtpark, nichts als Juden, geht man ins Concert, nichts als Juden, geht man auf den Ball, nichts als Juden, geht man auf die Universität, wieder nichts als Juden”, in Brigitte Hamann, *Hitlers Wien. Lehrjahre eines Diktators*, Piper Verlag, Munich 1996, p. 404.

⁶⁶ “Deine Augen über jedem Verse, den ich schrieb”, *Börries von Münchhausen - Levin Ludwig Schücking, Briefwechsel 1897-1945*, edited by Beate E. Schücking, Igel Verlag Literatur, Hamburg 2001, p. 229.

⁶⁷ Ernst Klee, *Das Kulturlexikon zum Dritten Reich. Wer war was vor und nach 1945*, S. Fischer, Frankfurt a. M. 2003, p. 423.

⁶⁸ Joachim Dyck, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁶⁹ Sammy Gronemann, *Erinnerungen*, edited by Joachim Schlör, Philo-Verlag, Berlin 2002, p. 70.



nated any ambiguity regarding the baron's two faces, the one in favour of Judaism and the one against it. Gronemann sustained that there was no change in direction between the beginning of the century and the 1920s, and that Münchhausen's Jewish ballads were merely a by-product of his nationalism: "Seine jüdischen Balladen wurden seinerzeit genauso falsch interpretiert, wie man jetzt seiner deutsch-völkischen Einstellung ratlos gegenübersteht. So bedauerlich seine neueste Phase ist und so sehr es einem in der Seele weh tut, den Dichter des „Juda“ in solcher Gesellschaft zu sehen – ich glaube nicht, dass er sich selbst untreu geworden ist, wenn ihn auch dieselbe Einstellung zu scheinbar widersprechenden Folgerungen geführt hat".⁷⁰ The bard of the Germanic past and the cantor of ancient Israel were one and the same person, and there was no contradiction.

Jewish convergences

Judaism thus did not seem to see the full implications. It did not seem to wonder what might have inspired a son of the deepest Germany, a lord in a castle in Thuringia, to embrace the idea of Jewish nationalism, nor what the agrarian *Junkertum* had in common with Zionism. Or perhaps it had no need to do so because, at least in part, it was treading the same conceptual terrain: at this juncture, all Jewish nationalism in Germany and Austria spoke the same language, in every sense. It wrote in German, of course, but it also moved in the same categories and used the same images. The front differed from German to Jew, but the words were the same. German nationalism and Jewish nationalism observed each other and defined themselves on opposite sides, but in the pursuit of a single language. This was a language that, as in every national thought, talked about roots, ancestries, stocks, specific traits, distinguishing traits, natural qualities, original physical features, essence. And it would very quickly end up talking about race. In its haste to give itself full substance above and beyond the volatile datum of religion, Jewish nationalism

⁷⁰ Hanni Mittelman, *Sammy Gronemann (1875 – 1952). Zionist, Schriftsteller und Satiriker in Deutschland und Palästina*, Campus, Frankfurt am Main 2004, p. 48.,



drank ceaselessly from this German lexicon running through the veins of romanticism, old and new.⁷¹ The agitated disassociation from assimilation, with its chain of rationalisms and materialisms, created the convergence with anti-Jewish prejudice and the words expressing it. The difference among the various nations is substantial, instinctively perceptible, given by nature. It is impossible to overcome. The harmonious fusion of Jews with the German world was thus unachievable: the Zionist conviction moved here from *völkisch* premises that cropped up – identical – in the breeding grounds of German nationalism. The moral indignation of Jewish assimilation towards anti-Semitic thought – and this is the point – would never reach the same level and the same intensity in the Zionist camp.

National Jewish thought thus hurtled towards the new dawn of identity that would go beyond the old contrast between the German knight and the Jewish shopkeeper. Flat rationality and trite materialism – the Zionists would say – are deviations to be straightened out on the path to a new definition of identity that would draw from the repositories of German nationalism, in a script in which the characters change but the substance remains. According to this new thought, the Jews are not a pathogen that disturbs and disunites. They are not the aridity of material accumulation and thought wrapped around itself. They are not spineless men without roots.

⁷¹ The influence of the *völkisch* idea on German Jews, in general and with reference to particular aspects, has already been widely discussed in the historiographic and cultural debate. In addition to Mark H. Gelber, *Melancholy Pride*, *op. cit.*, see also the following works, among others: *Antisemitismus – Zionismus – Antizionismus 1850 – 1940*, edited by Renate Heuer and Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow, Campus, Frankfurt am Main–New York 1997; Steven A. Aschheim, *Culture and Catastrophe. German and German-Jewish Confrontations with National Socialism and Other Crises*, Macmillan Press, London 1996; George L. Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1985; *The Influence of the Völkisch Idea on German Jewry*, in *Germans and Jews: The Right, the Left and the Search for a "Third Force" in Pre-Nazi Germany*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1987, pp. 77-115; *Jüdische Intellektuelle in Deutschland. Zwischen Religion und Nationalismus*, Campus, Frankfurt am Main–New York 1992; *Confronting the Nation. Jewish and Western Nationalism*, Brandeis University Press, Hanover–London 1993; Shulamit Volkov, *Die Juden in Deutschland 1780 – 1918*, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, Munich 1994; *Antisemitismus als kultureller Code. Zehn Essays*, Verlag C. H. Beck, Munich 2000.



They are none of the clichés of assimilation. Just the opposite: they are a spirit, a past and a mythology, a strong and outlined character, the vitality and heroism of the very beginning. They are blood and progeny. In short, they are a race. All of this was in the hope – ultimately illusory – of making Judaism, in its national guise, acceptable to the Germans. The post-assimilation *Trotzjudentum* was also this: a Jewish stubbornness in which the desire for recognition and approval is evident. German approval of Zionism would not fail to arrive, because it was a prelude to new lands. As we have seen, Münchhausen himself appreciated the pride of this new Judaism reborn in strength and nobility of the spirit. It was a Judaism the baron considered compatible with his repertory of medieval virtues.

Zionist reviews of *Juda* are an assortment of converging words. In “Die Welt”, Buber had already glimpsed the common trait of two artists in their pride in ancestry and a mastery of racial quality, handed down to descendants through inheritance: “die stete fruchtbare Wechselwirkung” – these are the words – “dieser beiden jungen Männer von so verschiedener Stammesart und so gleichem Stammesstolze”.⁷² “Das Gefühl der Rassentüchtigkeit und der wohlthätigen Vererbungen”⁷³ has created this happy interaction: different races, of course, but similar in the thought that ties creativity to the chain of the generations. Jaffé’s arguments are even more convoluted, recognizing a certain level of danger in romanticism. The romantic idea that returns to the people, that renews the bond – full of blood and life – of national belonging, runs the risk of being channelled towards the darkness of reactionary thought.⁷⁴ This possible deviation would be more evident among the Jews than elsewhere, and there would be a greater risk of being overcome by the dullness of rabbinic scholasticism or moving towards the poverty of the ghetto.⁷⁵ According to Jaffé, this danger was averted by Zionism, which projected the bond with the peo-

⁷² Martin Buber, *Das Buch “Juda”*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Robert Jaffé, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁷⁵ “Alles, was Romantik ist, hat bei der Eigenart des jüdischen Volksschicksals eine noch gefährlichere Kehrseite, als bei den anderen Völkern. Wenn ein moderner Jude sich von dem leichten Schaukelspiele eines individuellen Daseins nach der blutvollen,



ple into the radiant prospect of the future, and which held together the light of European thought and the dark blood running through the generations.⁷⁶ Jaffé suggested that a new Jewish art could only arise in this union.⁷⁷ As the reviewer understood it, only Zionism could straighten out the twisted logic of the *Galut* and restore to Jews the original character that assimilated and assimilators had lost by adhering to other cultures.⁷⁸ For Jaffé, this solution would soon show its tragic face and the full extent of its ambiguity. First he would repudiate his principles, embracing Christianity and the anti-Semitic right, and then he would slash his wrists in the forest of Grunewald. The dual movement of rejection and adherence, detachment and the desire for acceptance, is more evident here than anywhere else.

Even the words of the Zionist Zlocisti clearly show the convergence of thought, sustaining that *Juda* is the product of a nobility: a nobility of lineage, spirit and poetry.⁷⁹ Those Christians who had so

lebensvollen Gebundenheit eines nationalen Zusammenhanges sehnte, welche verführenden Missverständnisse waren da zu vermeiden, und wie leicht konnte sich unerträglich Reactionäres dazwischenschieben! [...] In der Kunst schloss die romantische Rückkehr zum jüdischen Volke nun dadurch Reactionäres in sich, dass sie eigentlich in die Ghetto-Hütten und – Gassen hineinführte”, *ibid.*

⁷⁶ “[S]o vereinigt eine neujüdische Kunst die Zartheit und unendliche Differenziertheit eines kosmopolitischen europäischen Lebens mit dem dunklen Blute, das durch tausend Adern von den starken, gesunden Lebensvorgängen her in das Herz eines Volkes zusammenflutet”, Robert Jaffé, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁷⁷ This is the title of Jaffé’s review of *Juda: Neujüdische Kunst*.

⁷⁸ These ideas evoke analogous concepts expressed by Julius Langbehn in *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, regarding the opposition between the Jews of the pre-modern era and assimilated Jews pursuing the Western model and forgetting themselves: “Rembrandt’s [*sic*] waren echte Juden, die nicht anderes sein wollten als Juden; und die also Charakter hatten. Von fast allen heutigen Juden gilt das Gegenteil: sie wollen Deutsche Engländer Franzosen usw. sein; und werden dadurch nur charakterlos”, Julius Langbehn, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁷⁹ “Das blühende Gefühl, starkgeistiger Ahnen ein Enkel zu sein, liess die junge Kraft nicht mehr an innerer Heimatlosigkeit müde verdämmern. Da wir in die Vergangenheit blickten und uns als die Glieder einer stolzen Heldenreihe wiederfanden, quoll es in uns auf wie der Stolz alter Aristokratie. Die man mit Füßen trat als heimatlose Bettler, hatten ihren uralten Adel entdeckt: einen lebendigen Adel mit reinem Herzen und hoheitsvoller Geberde [*sic*] und geraden Worten und treu, aber trotzzig blickenden Augen”, Theodor Zlocisti, *op. cit.*, p. 63.



far acknowledged the identity of a people, the desire for a homeland, the pride of the Jews' ancestry,⁸⁰ were part of an aristocratic line. Zlocisti aligned the names of the Baltic, Bohemian and Bavarian nobility: Baron Zoege von Manteuffel, Baron Gundakkar von Suttner, the better-known Baroness Bertha von Suttner, Prince Carl Philipp von Wrede. And ending with Baron von Münchhausen, who in *Juda* exalted the heroism and ancient nobility of the Jews.⁸¹ Far removed from any psychological subtlety, his poetry maintained the energy of the heroic epic, the power of the Nibelungen stanza.⁸² This was a power that did not get lost in convoluted thoughts but possessed a linearity of feeling and will, a robust sensuality that looks to the origins.⁸³ Again according to the reviewer, the baron's gaze, which zoomed in on things and people, was that of a German with roots in his own land.⁸⁴ By recognizing – beyond the night of the ghetto and the one of the Enlightenment, which for Zlocisti was even more profound – that the Jewish people had the same greatness, the baron even overcame his anti-Semitism in the encounter with an equally robust ethnic figure, that of Lilien.⁸⁵ Their origins were different, their personalities were different, the character emerging from the poetry and the illustrations was different, but both Münchhausen and Lilien re-

⁸⁰ “Die uralte Idee eines geeinten jüdischen Volkstums, neu erwachte Heimatssehnsucht und Zukunftshoffnungen hatten einen jungen trotzigen Männerstamm in Juda geschaffen”, *ibid.*

⁸¹ “Nun ist dem neuen Judentum in den Reihen des Adels auch ein Sänger erstanden, der das Sehnen unserer Seele mitlebt und mit munterndem Zuruf zur That uns anfeuert: Börries, Freiherr von Münchhausen”, *ibid.*

⁸² “Wie er mit Vorliebe den Rhythmus der alten Nibelungenstrophe meistert, so liegt auch etwas von dem Schwung, der Kraft und dem Trotz alter Nibelungen in ihm”, *ibid.*, p. 64.

⁸³ “Seine Welt ist die Welt der Heroen mit tönenden Herrenworten, gradlinigem Wollen und Empfinden, die zwar nicht tausendfältig differenziert, aber von majestätischer Grösse sind. Er ist kein mürrischer Grübler und Bohrer mit faltiger Stirn und verkniffenen Augen”, *ibid.*, p. 64-65.

⁸⁴ “Er sieht in das Leben und in die Menschen mit der schwellenden Gesundheit und Geradheit eines in eigener Scholle wachsenden Germanen”, *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁸⁵ “Münchhausen's [*sic*] – des aristokratischen Dichters – Entwicklungsgang in seiner Stellung zum Judentum wird etwas Vorbildliches haben. Es ist die innere Ueberwindung des Judenhasses, den alle „Abwehr“ nur giftiger machte”, *ibid.*



vealed marked individuality, an equally original constitution, a “racial type” that was equally “monumental”.⁸⁶ These are *völkerpsychologisch* arguments and they are unquestionably right-wing.

And the German right would wholly approve of *Juda*: “Wäre ich Jude, wäre ich begeisterter Zionist” pronounced the Teutomaniac Felix Dahn in “Literarisches Echo”.⁸⁷ Liberal Jews promptly disapproved of the crossover between Zionism and the German right. Hermann Cohen, by no means a minor voice, felt the same unease towards anti-Semitism that he did towards Zionism. He observed that Zionism provided arguments to the anti-Semitic idea when it accentuated the specificity of Jews, when it settled the entire Jewish integration by equating liberals with assimilated Jews disloyal to the world of their forebears. In this – and Cohen was convinced – Zionism coincided with the most raging anti-Semitism. Naturally, Zionists rejected liberal criticism. For example, they did so through the words of Paul Amann, who denied the liberal accusation whereby “dem Jungjudentum sei jener theoretische Rassenstandpunkt der Antisemiten ganz sympathisch und seine Anhänger im Grunde erwünschte Bundesgenossen”.⁸⁸

But liberal Jewish thought would not be immune to overlaps with the language of German nationalism either. Regarding Lilien, Stefan Zweig, a man far removed from the national idea, said: “Seine Eigenart blüht aus eigenster Heimatscholle, aus Volksmythe und Rassenwerten, aus nationaler Umgebung und persönlichem Schicksal ins Leben empör”.⁸⁹ According to Zweig, his main merit lay in having united the universal of technique and the particular of race.⁹⁰ Thus, to a certain extent assimilated Judaism also drew on the same linguistic-lexical source, but with the opposite intent with respect to Zionism, demonstrating – through recourse to the same words – that

⁸⁶ “[die] Schöpfungen zweier so markanter Individualitäten, so monumentaler Rassentypen”, *ibid.*, p. 67.

⁸⁷ “Das Literarische Echo”, III (1900-1901), pp. 718-19.

⁸⁸ Paul Amann, *Die Lebensprobe. Zur Kritik der politischen Einsicht des nationalbewußten Judentums in Deutschland*, in “Der Jude”, VII (1923), no. 2, p. 66.

⁸⁹ Stefan Zweig, *Einleitung*, in *E. M. Lilien. Sein Werk*, Schuster & Loeffler, Berlin-Leipzig 1903, p. 12.

⁹⁰ “Synthese modern-universeller meisterlicher Technik und jüdisch-rassigen nationalen Gehaltes”, *ibid.*



the symbiosis between Germans and Jews was a possible horizon. And that, given the intimate coincidence of sentiment, the Jews could readily expect to be accepted by the Germans.

This linguistic reservoir – in which German nationalism, Jewish nationalism and, to a small extent, liberal Jewish thought converged – is composed of strong words that definitively include or exclude, marking the boundaries of an identity defined by myth, blood and roots. It was an identity that could not be negotiated: either you belonged or you didn't. On the Jewish side, these words must obviously be set in relation to the construction of a new post-assimilation identity, strong and indisputable, and firmly rooted in the ground. But they are – and remain – German words, words that, at the very same time, in the hotbeds of German nationalism, flatly denied any possibility for symbiosis and sanctioned exclusion of the Jews. Nevertheless, there may be an interpretation for this ambivalence: these linguistic crossovers manifest the depth of Jewish roots in the German culture, rootedness in its structures and the fundamental lack of other categories. Emerging from this culture to discover (or rediscover) a Jewish specificity inevitable meant returning to it. Like a tragic script, the road is circular. From this standpoint, all the rest looks like a superstructure, illusion and perhaps even artifice. The Zionist Hugo Bergmann stated this in very lucid terms. A soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army during the Great War, he wrote a letter to his friend Buber that, more than many words, reveals the nudity of things, with all the pregnancy of a closing thought. “Und jetzt, seitdem wir für die deutsche Kultur gekämpft haben, fühlen wir mehr als je, was sie uns ist und wie wir doch mit unserm ganzen Wesen in ihr stehen. Ich kann mir nicht denken, daß unserer Generation, die doch nur künstlich gewonnenen Beziehungen zum biblischen, zum chassidischen Judentum usw. so natürlich werden könnten, wie die zu Fichte [...] Nur weil wir Fichte hatten, fanden wir die entsprechenden Strömungen der jüdischen Kultur, verstanden wir erst das Judentum”.⁹¹

Translation from the Italian: Catherine Bolton

⁹¹ Letter of 11 May 1916, Martin Buber, *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, edited by Grete Schaeder, 3 vols., here vol. 1, Verlag Lambert Schneider, Heidelberg 1973, pp. 388-389.