

## In Memoriam: Ludwig Feuchtwanger (28.11.1885 - 14.07.1947)

by Prof. Edgar Feuchtwanger



(photo: Prof. Edgar Feuchtwanger)

Much of my father's professional life was devoted to the academic direction of the publishing house Duncker & Humblot from its headquarters in Munich. The publishing house had been founded in the late eighteenth century and among its authors was Goethe, but only in respect of one very minor work, *Des Epimenides Erwachen*. It was written for the opening of the Royal Opera House in Berlin in 1815 and also to celebrate the defeat of Napoleon. Duncker & Humblot published or republished works by Hegel and a great deal of Ranke. My father was appointed its director in 1914, at the early age of 28, largely, so he told me later, on the recommendation of Gustav Schmoller, whose student he was at the University of Berlin before the First World War. Schmoller was a principal protagonist of the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, a leading *Kathedersozialist*, a pulpit socialist, as he and his associates were contemptuously labelled by those who believed them to be dangerous revolutionaries. Duncker & Humblot in my father's time was a favourite publishing outlet for the circle of economists, sociologists

and political scientists linked with the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* or for those working in these fields of academic interest. From my childhood I can remember hearing the names of Lujo Brentano, Alfred and Max Weber cropping up in the conversation of the adults. My memory stretches just far enough to recall as visitors to my parents' house Werner Sombart, Carl Schmitt and Robert Michels. Naturally I did not know at the time what their significance was, but it was impressed on me that they were important.

Another 'super professor', if one could coin such a term, perhaps it sounds better in German as *Großprofessor*, that my father sometimes talked about with feeling was Max Scheler. From the books on my shelves I can see that he was published at least once by Duncker & Humblot and in the volume, *Versuche zu einer Soziologie des Wissens* (1924), my father has left a reproduction of Scheler's portrait by Otto Dix. My father spoke of Scheler with feeling, mixed ones I should say, because he was a blood relation. He was a cousin of his father, my grandfather, who, as far as I could gather, was Scheler's guardian. There was a period, long before my time, when my father had acted legally (he was admitted to the bar in Munich) on behalf of Scheler. What the ins and outs of the case were I never discovered. Scheler was, I now know, the product of a *mésalliance*, as it was then, in the 1860s or 1870s, regarded, between one of my grandfather's aunts and a Bavarian forester. This was a fate worse than death for an orthodox Jewish family, as all the far-flung Feuchtwanger clan were in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

This brings me to another central fact of my father's life, his ambivalent relationship with his Jewish background. It was an unusual background, very different from the Reform Judaism that was the heritage of most German Jews. My father's family belonged to an orientation whose guru was the Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who sought to combine strict adherence to Judaism and all its practices, such as dietary laws, with complete assimilation to the German cultural environment. My father, born in 1885, was the second of nine children, the eldest being Lion, later well-known as a writer and literary figure.<sup>2</sup> These children had the strictest of Jewish upbringings, could read Hebrew fluently, had to attend synagogue regularly, were not allowed to do or carry anything on the sabbath. Yet they were sent to normal German schools, my father and his brother Lion to the élite *Wilhelmsgymnasium*, by all accounts an institution typical of the pre-1914 German educational system in its rigorous authoritarianism. Among those who taught there in my father's day was the father of Heinrich Himmler. The German acculturation of Lion and Ludwig and the other children was not even a first-

generation phenomenon, for my grandfather, whom I never knew, was already a man deeply steeped in German literature, but still an observant Jew. From what my father told me he found this compartmentalized dual existence of his childhood hard to bear and in later life still thought it was an absurd, even bizarre combination of incompatible elements. Not surprisingly, when he and his brother left the parental home to go to the Universities of Munich and Berlin, they broke away. So did the other seven children, even those, including the four sisters, who received less of an academic education. In most cases it was not just a rejection of orthodox Judaism, but of the whole highly stylized, rigid German bourgeois way of life that was, in their case, inextricably mixed up with strict Jewish observance.

The rejection of Jewish orthodoxy was, however, in no way a rejection of the Jewish heritage, in which my father always maintained a strong intellectual interest. In this respect my father and his elder brother took a very similar path. Lion also rejected the orthodox Jewish way of life and became more radical than his brother in his opposition to the class-conscious *Bürger-tum* mixed up with it. He played a role in the literary avant-garde of the Weimar period, was linked in a life-long friendship and literary cooperation with Bertolt Brecht, but chose Jewish themes for many of his novels. Curiously enough, the rejection of orthodox Judaism in my father's branch of the Feuchtwanger family was not replicated in other parts of that family, particularly not in that branch connected with the regionally important bank bearing the family name, founded in Munich in the middle of the nineteenth century.

My father was similar to, but also slightly different from his brother, perhaps because his temperament was even more equable, emollient and non-confrontational. As a man whose professional life allowed him to follow his own academic and intellectual bent as a scholar, he read, studied and wrote widely on Judaism, on biblical scholarship, on related historical and theological fields and on the modern situation of the Jews, particularly in Germany. Biblical and pre-biblical archaeology, Egyptology and the fathers of the Church were all subjects that at one time or another engaged his interest. One of his more extended pieces was an introduction to the German translation of a book by the Danish scholar Ditlef Nielsen, *The Historical Jesus*, published in 1928. In it my father comes to grips with the whole canon of scriptural scholarship and its bearing on Christian revelation. He defends, against theologians like Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, the empirical historical approach to the New Testament as a source to be treated like all other sources. All this was alongside his engagement with sociology, political science, economics and history involved in his work at Duncker & Humblot. Such a

spread of interests would be impossible to carry off in the modern academic world. The starting point for many of his private scholarly concerns was undoubtedly his Jewish awareness.

It is more difficult to pinpoint what he believed. He was too much of a humanist and a rationalist to commit himself to any religious belief, but there was somewhere a layer of it. I remember that he sometimes read, for comfort as it were, in a heavily thumbed, small, printed Hebrew Bible. Perhaps a neo-Kantian idealist humanism was at the core of his beliefs. I was too young for him to talk to me about philosophy, but I remember remarks such as ‘the only thing that is good is good intention, good will’. But he had undoubtedly distanced himself from his Jewish family background and his first wife was a Catholic, albeit not a practising one, herself very much a product of the Bavarian background. My father shared this Bavarian background, which in those days was even less subsumed into the general German identity than it is now. He spoke the Bavarian dialect and was at home in the Bavarian ambience. Yet my father had little time for Jewish assimilationism, the tendency of many German Jews to draw a veil over or even to suppress their Jewishness. This he thought absurd and a suitable subject for jokes. But he did not have much sympathy with Zionism either, though during the Third Reich he came to accept it. He probably felt that Zionism was too close for comfort to the German chauvinism which he abhorred and that Zionism could therefore turn into a form of assimilation by the backdoor. To list all these complexities and ambivalences in cold blood may now, after the lapse of seventy years or more, seem like the portrait of a confused identity. It was nothing of the sort. My father, and others like him, were remarkably complete, integral personalities, who could survive with dignity the worst a terrible century was to fling at them. Paradoxically and sadly he and others were ill equipped to recognize how great a danger the rise of National Socialism posed to them and their civilization. It was too absurd to be taken seriously.

It was the German high culture of his time, soon to give birth to and be overwhelmed by a tide of barbarism, that was the pond in which my father swam. Again it was the confluence of many, often contradictory ingredients, that produced a unique and unmistakable concoction. Rebellion against the parental home, in my father’s case never carried to the point of open warfare, produced a predisposition towards radicalism. By the time he was in his early thirties the impressive façade of Imperial Germany, which for many young men of his generation had been an object of hostility curiously mixed with pride, was on the point of cracking. Munich became the scene of revolution in November 1918 and of short-lived soviet republics in the

following spring. With all these goings-on my father had some sympathy. I remember him telling me how a red guardist took refuge in his office, when the whites, the free corps of General von Epp, later Hitler's Statthalter for Bavaria, retook the city. My father described how he let this man flush his uniform or armband down the lavatory and allowed him to escape through a backdoor. He knew and met, possibly through his brother, some of those around the Munich soviet, Gustav Landauer, who was murdered, Ernst Toller, Johannes Becher. He stressed their idealism, but was clearly aware that their project was futile, even counterproductive. My father shared something of the anti-capitalism that was almost universal among intellectuals both on the left and the right at that time. I remember him using the phrase 'moral insanity' about financial dealings, in which, however, friends and members of his family might be involved as a matter of course. He did not really have alternative recipes, just a distaste for much that went with commercial and entrepreneurial activity. To use a phrase popularized by one of his authors, Werner Sombart, *Händler oder Helden*, my father had little sympathy for either traders or heroes. But such sentiments were common among the German mandarins, though they might have a hankering for heroes, and merely emphasized their distance from practical affairs and from the 'dirty trade' of politics.

My father spent much of his life among these mandarins and shared, in spite of a dash of radicalism and contempt for German chauvinism, many of their attitudes. There was Weimar republicanism, inescapable after the bankruptcy of the imperial regime, but my impression is that it did not warm my father's heart. It was not so much that he jibbed at its imperfections, as many utopian left-wing intellectuals did. It was rather that he was remote from, and somewhat puzzled and frightened by, the masses who had now entered politics with a vengeance. The inchoate fears of mass politics that provided much of the motivation for such as Oswald Spengler or Ernst Jünger were quite familiar to my father. One of his authors, with whom he had a relationship that was perhaps closer than that between author and publisher often is, was Carl Schmitt. My father found him *geistreich*, simply clever. He published and took pleasure in Schmitt's attacks on parliamentarism and liberalism. Schmitt characterized the essence of the political as consisting in the friend-foe relationship and I am sure my father thought this was a formulation of great intellectual potency. In the early 1930s, well within the range of my childhood memories, Schmitt had become a public figure of considerable influence. His proposals for modifications in the Weimar constitution gave intellectual underpinning to the presidential regime that had commenced under the chancellorship of Brüning. Schmitt, as one now knows, had links with the *Tatkreis* and with Schleicher and Papen.<sup>3</sup> I remember him as a

visitor to my parents' home, clearly enjoying the attention he commanded. He, a short figure, stood in the bend of the piano, with his elbows resting on the top, holding forth. When Hitler came to power his contact with my father became cursory and soon ceased. He was distancing himself from his former Jewish friends and trying to make it in the Third Reich. No doubt his stance could be justified by his own philosophy, that he who has the decision over the state of emergency is the effective and therefore legitimate ruler.

Was all this playing with ideas too much of a *jeu d'esprit*, too irresponsible, too remote from the harsh, explosive political realities of the time? Or was my father, as a publisher and kind of impresario, conforming to the liberal ideal of providing an arena for ideas and discussion, from which the best will always emerge? It was, of course just this ideal which many, Schmitt included, were attacking as outmoded. My father did, as far as I could judge as a child, fully support those who were the more militant defenders of republicanism and democracy. He was on friendly terms with Thomas Mann, who lived in Munich and had become a courageous defender of the republic. He had left behind most of the attitudes that had still characterized him when he wrote *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* during the first world war. I remember having to take books to his house, which my father lent him as preparatory reading for his novel on the Joseph story. Another visitor to our house, Robert Michels, famous for his pioneering work on the S.P.D., had had to move to Italy to escape the disdain of the German academic world. But my father also published, in 1921, a German translation of J.M.Keynes's *Economic Consequences of the Peace*. It was probably something of a publishing coup, for it was grist to the mill of the German campaign against Versailles. It was only to be expected that most Germans abominated Versailles, but the sense of grievance fostered by the peace treaty merged with an attitude of unreasoning denial of the defeat of 1918 to produced neurotic, vengeful nationalism. If, inadvertently, author and publisher of the *Economic Consequences* helped to mix this vicious brew, can they be blamed? I have in my possession a letter written by Keynes in August 1933, in which he castigates with utter clarity the barbarism of the Hitler regime and the disgrace it was bringing to a Germany that had claimed to be civilized. One of the last books my father published before he was compelled, by the *Reichsschrifttumskammer* of Goebbels, to leave Duncker & Humblot in 1936, was a German translation of Keynes's *General Theory of Employment*.

By the 1920s the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* was long past its heroic age and its time of major influence. Its originators, like my father's mentor Gustav Schmoller had, by the time of the

first world war, become establishment figures. I have in my possession a photograph of the 1928 congress of the association held in Zürich. My mother is in the front row, consisting of the ladies accompanying their husbands, my father at the back of the group photograph. Right in the middle is Dr. Schacht, unmistakable because of his height and the collars he was in the habit of wearing. Under his arm is a sheaf of papers, as if he had just addressed the congress. He was President of the *Reichsbank* at the time and had only recently resigned from the Democratic Party, but was about to slip his political moorings to jump on the Hitler bandwagon. Which party my father voted for was never mentioned. I could have been the Democratic Party, but the S.P.D. or the Bavarian People's Party are equally plausible guesses. The latter looked, when the Weimar Republic was in its death throes in 1932, a possible life raft amid the rising brown tide.

From what I can remember it seems to me doubtful if this rising tide engaged my father's attention to a great extent. I remember him talking about a visit he had paid to his brother Lion in Berlin, it must have been around 1929 or 1930. Lion had moved to Berlin, presumably because he found the atmosphere there in the mid 1920s much more to his taste than in Munich. Brecht, with whom he collaborated from time to time, may have persuaded him to move. It is said, but I can't vouch for it, that when Brecht and Weill were working on a version of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* Lion suggested *Dreigroschenoper*, Threepenny Opera, as a suitable German title.<sup>4</sup> By 1929 Lion was working on his novel *Erfolg*, set in Bavaria in the early twenties. It is probably the first major German novel dealing with the early rise of the Nazi party. When it was published in 1930 it became a best-selling novel, but the publication coincided with the electoral breakthrough of the Nazis. It was Lion's habit to read sections of his works in progress to his friends and he read pages from *Erfolg* to his brother during his Berlin visit. My father years later, when the Nazis were already in power, related his alarm at what he heard. The novel was clearly set to provoke those whom it satirized, who included Hitler himself, thinly disguised as Rupert Kutzner, the mechanic. After the publication of *Erfolg* in 1930 Goebbels declared that Lion Feuchtwanger would be among the first on the way out when he and his comrades came to power, and so it proved.

My father clearly did not think a head-on collision, such as his brother had taken upon himself, would serve any useful purpose. He was temperamentally much more inclined to choose a low profile. This was, on the whole, still the way he felt he could survive in Germany after 1933. It may well be that his Jewish consciousness reinforced this attitude. Jews had always

been persecuted and victimized, but survived and it would be so again. Thus he carried on at Duncker & Humblot, but taking more of a back seat, so as to offer no target to those who were now in power and to avoid damaging the firm. It may now with hindsight seem a pusillanimous attitude, an acceptance of second-class citizenship. But the signals were so confusing, more so even than the copious and highly sophisticated historical analysis of the Third Reich now portrays. As late as 1935 my father published a book on the important medieval Jewish community at Regensburg, a subject on which a distant cousin had also written with distinction. The book was written by one Wilhelm Grau and I remember him visiting my father, who clearly thought him a bright young man worth promoting. Grau was already playing a prominent role in the 'Research Section on the Jewish Question' within the *Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands*, founded by Walter Frank in 1935. A principal task of this institute was to give a spurious air of scholarly respectability to the racial and anti-Semitic ideology of the regime. Frank was a pupil of Karl Alexander von Müller, well known to my father and living not far from us, who was President of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and who took over the editorship of the *Historische Zeitschrift* from Friedrich Meinecke after the Nazis came to power. The signals were confusing indeed. My father often used the phrase *geordnete Anarchie* (ordered anarchy) about what was going on. It implied, I think, that he was aware of a profound disorder and threat, but as far as he was concerned he would stick to the values that had always motivated him, among which scholarly objectivity ranked high. This is why he published Grau.

In 1936 my father was finally compelled to withdraw from Duncker & Humblot. Even before this he had devoted his time increasingly to the affairs of the beleaguered Jewish community. As early as 1930, well before the Third Reich therefore, he had taken over the editorship of the *Bayerische Israelitische Gemeindezeitung*.<sup>5</sup> When he took it over it was not much more than an information bulletin, appearing, as far as I remember twice monthly, but under his editorship it became much more than that. It brought articles on a broad range of cultural, literary, contemporary and historical interest, many of them written by my father himself. Although it was not on the scale of the major Jewish journals that appeared in Germany, such as the *Jüdische Rundschau*, the *C.V.-Zeitung* and *Der Morgen*, in which my father also published, it reached a comparable level of academic standing. It continues to command the attention and interest of scholars today. For my father the editing of this paper, which he carried out with only occasional help from a secretary, became an absorbing and enjoyable hobby. It gave him a means of expressing his ideas on almost anything that caught his interest, current



events, books and personalities in the public eye, matters that engaged him as a scholar. It was by no means confined to Jewish themes.

When my father was forced out of Duncker & Humblot in 1936, he was therefore able to make a relatively easy transition to playing a role in the cultural life of German Jewry. This cultural life took on a new meaning and intensity as the Nazi regime inexorably forced Jews out of their previous existence within German society. It was a phenomenon that has again commanded much recent attention from scholars. My father became a kind of adult educator. He ran what was called a Jewish *Lehrhaus*, where he conducted courses and gave lectures. He travelled widely all over Germany in the same cause. It may now be thought this cultural blossoming under the shadow of death produced a false sense of security. There were not many who anticipated that there was annihilation at the end of that road. My father, as far as I can now recall it, thought that German Jewry should, could and deserved to survive, as it had done since time immemorial and that he was playing his part in ensuring that it would do so. Such sentiments, however illusionary they may now appear to be, were common. They were similar to those in the S.P.D., who in 1933 thought that, if the party had survived Bismarck, it could also survive Hitler.

In November 1938 *Kristallnacht*, the Nazi pogrom against the Jews in Germany, put an abrupt and brutal end to these illusions. My father, in common with many others, was carted off to the Dachau concentration camp. As soon as he was gone his large library was ransacked by Gestapo officials who were bibliographical experts and finished up with the SS organization *Ahnenerbe*. Miraculously, my father was let out of Dachau just before Christmas 1938. It was thought that with his name, because of his brother Lion so notorious for the Nazis, he would never come out again. I remember him telling me that in such a situation, in the brutality of a concentration camp, the only possibility of survival is not to draw attention to oneself. As ever, there was an element of 'ordered anarchy' in the procedures of the regime, otherwise he might not have come out. Never in strong health the experience nearly killed him, as it was. I remember him lying in bed, his head shaven, as all concentration camp inmates were, covered in frostbites. It was time to leave Germany as quickly as possible. Fortunately our relations abroad were able to obtain for us a visa to enter Great Britain. I was sent ahead in February 1939 and my parents followed in May. They were able to take some of their physical belongings, in so far as they had not, like the library, been confiscated, but nothing else.

My father's life in exile and in war-time Britain was something of an anti-climax. There was little he could do that was at all comparable to his previous role, being deprived of the linguistic and cultural context which had been his lifeblood. Intellectually he remained very much alive and took a keen interest in his new habitat and in the English language. He did some teaching and lecturing and concerned himself with the publication of works by German-speaking authors who were then practically unknown in the Anglo-Saxon world. I remember a correspondence he had with Robert Musil, who was then marooned in Switzerland and whose *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* had not yet been translated into English. He followed the progress of the war closely and the final total collapse of the Third Reich was an immense satisfaction to him. As the Allied armies penetrated deep into Germany towards the end of the war he helped in the recovery of German archives, travelling as an officer of the U.S. Army. He was thus among the first civilians to get a sense of the moral and material destruction the war had wrought upon Europe. After the war he might well have played a role again, which would have entailed his return to Germany, but he died at the age of 61 in July 1947. My father did not become a victim of genocide or war, but what happened to him illustrates just as powerfully the insanity and monstrosity of Hitler's rule. To their shame the German mandarins who were his friends and colleagues failed to prevent this slide into barbarism.

### Notes

1. Heike Specht, *Die Feuchtwanger Familie in München. Von der Ansässigmachung bis zum Jahr 1933*. Magisterarbeit der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 1999.
2. Wilhelm von Sternburg, *Lion Feuchtwanger – Ein deutsches Schriftstellerleben*, Berlin, 1984.
3. Joseph W. Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt. Theorist for the Reich*, Princeton University Press, 1983.
4. Marta Feuchtwanger, *Nur eine Frau. Jahre – Tage – Stunden*, München, 1984, p.199.
5. Inga-Clairie A. Pahl, *Jüdisches Leben im Spiegel der Bayerischen Israelitischen Gemeindezeitung von 1933 bis 1938*, Magisterarbeit der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 1998.
6. Max Gruenewald, 'Critic of German Jewry. Ludwig Feuchtwanger and his *Gemeindezeitung*', *Leo-Baeck-Institute Yearbook XVIII*, London, 1972, pp.75-92.

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