

STAGING DISSIDENCE

The Free German Stage

When planning his escape from Europe, Paul Walter Jacob had every intention of continuing his career in theater.¹ Upon arrival in Argentina he made contacts with numerous antifascists in the country, most importantly Ernesto Alemann, owner and editor of the antitotalitarian *Argentinisches Tageblatt*. On January 19, 1939, the *Tageblatt* printed an article celebrating the composer Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. Written by “Paul Walter,” the piece initiated a close professional and personal relationship between Jacob and Alemann. When Jacob suggested forming a German-language stage, the *Tageblatt* owner glimpsed a possibility to deploy theater as a cohesive force among antifascists and refugees on the River Plate. Alemann’s connections to local antifascists were an invaluable source of networking for Jacob as he worked to gather

1. Jacob to Enrique Susini, December 5, 1936, PWJAK.

enthusiasm and start-up capital for the enterprise. Additionally, the *Tageblatt* ran nearly daily coverage on the troupe and printed advertisements for free. By far the most widely circulating newspaper in the anti-Hitler colony, the *Tageblatt's* support for the Free German Stage was decisive.

Paul Walter Jacob and Liselott Reger began to raise start-up capital to rent a theater, engage an ensemble, and establish reserve funds to protect the stage from premature failure. For months Jacob and Reger met with bankers, industrialists, merchants, and wealthy individuals. Potential donors were skeptical, citing the small size of the antifascist population, which, moreover, was split into several distinct groups. According to Jacob, the turning point was a presentation of Curt Goetz's *Menagerie* during a charity benefit on June 17, 1939. It was a simple production, but, having seen an actual performance, donors saw the theater's potential both as an entertainment outlet and as a community-building institution. Jacob's plan to load its repertoire with popular dramas and comedies convinced them that the troupe could attract a broad public. The fund-raising gained momentum, and by August Jacob and Reger had achieved the target sum of 5,000 pesos, equivalent to one season's wages for the entire ensemble. Most contributions came from the German-speaking Jewish bourgeoisie. The textile industrialist Heinrich Fränkel and the banking firm Shaw, Strupp, and Co. were particularly generous supporters. They received regular financial reports from Jacob, and wielded ample influence over the frequency of premieres, length of the season, and composition of the repertoire.² While Jacob and Reger oversaw administrative and artistic matters, donors shaped the original concept for the theater.

Felix J. Weil, professor of sociology at Columbia University and cofounder of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, made the final donation to reach 5,000 pesos. Jacob's correspondence with Weil, whose family ran a large grain export firm out of Buenos Aires, conveys detailed information on the theater's finances.³ In 1940 the Free German Stage employed a staff

2. Jacob to Leopold Lewin, March 1943, PWJAK.

3. Jacob to Weil, January 29, 1941, PWJAK.

and ensemble of fifteen people. The average monthly wages were 120 pesos, except for the leading man and lady, who received an extra 30 pesos. Jacob and Reger earned three average wages, or 360 pesos monthly, based on their extra workload, which included playing major roles and directing twenty premieres, as well as managing the theater's accounting, correspondence, marketing, and legal affairs.⁴

Monthly expenses, covering four premieres and twelve to fifteen performances in total, varied from 5,500 to 6,000 pesos. This paid for wages, rent for the 350-seat House of Theater, performance rights from authors, acquisition of scripts, advertising and printing, stage props, costumes, and cosmetic styling.⁵ Despite the tight budget, lists of stage props for each act of each production are quite detailed,⁶ and records of stage props and designs for each production show close attention to authenticity, placement, and proportion.⁷ With very limited capital, the FGS faced the task of putting on quality productions for audiences accustomed to theater in major European cities. It was a tall order, and the theater posted a 1,500-peso deficit for the 1940 season. This shortfall was reduced by half through a fund-raising dance, and donors covered the difference.⁸

Throughout the World War II period Jacob successfully urged backers to continue their support by connecting charity to politics, repeatedly stressing that the troupe was composed entirely of refugees whose livelihood depended on the theater.⁹ Though publicly promoted as an inclusive social space for antifascists, Zionists, and apolitical refugees, in private correspondence Jacob initially hoped the stage would become a center for anti-Hitler activists. Soliciting funds, he cited the imperative of competing against Ludwig Ney's German Theater, because the nationalist colony in Buenos

4. Jacob to Weil, January 29, 1941, PWJAK.

5. Jacob to Weil, January 29, 1941, PWJAK.

6. Stage Props, *Jean*, *Hokuspokus*, *Menschen auf der Eisscholle*, PWJA IV a) 280.

7. Photos of Gorki's *Nachtsyl*, Bayard Veiller's *Der Prozess Mary Dugan*, Fundación IWO.

8. Jacob to Weil, November 22, 1940, PWJAK.

9. Jacob to Lewin, March 1943, PWJAK.

Aires would declare a great victory should the FGS fail against their “Nazi stage.”¹⁰ This argument resonated with sponsors, who believed the FGS also proved to the Argentine population the existence of a free, humane, and civilized Germany.¹¹ The enterprise was guided by politically inspired principles of antifascist community building and competitive cultural representation vis-à-vis the Argentine host society and, especially, against the nationalist bloc. From the outset, their conflictive relationship was immanent to the identities of the Free German Stage and the German Theater, as well as many of their supporters.

The FGS’s efforts at inclusiveness also revealed tensions among anti-Nazi groups. Zionist institutions supported the stage, but its public was dominated by apolitical Jews, some of whom even resisted their Jewish identity. During the search for qualified thespians Hermann Geiger-Torel, an early and influential member of the ensemble, wrote to Kurt Hellmer, a journalist for *Aufbau* in New York. Geiger-Torel, himself a Jew, sought a leading man. To placate Zionists the actor had to be Jewish but because of pervasive anti-Semitism among other, *Jewish* theatergoers, he had to look as non-Jewish as possible, which Geiger-Torel referred to as a self-mutilation complex.¹² The letter provides an early glimpse into the challenges facing the FGS. The small size of the antifascist colony obliged it to accommodate everybody while offending nobody, an impossible task, given the the diversity of its target audience. Furthermore, this disunity existed internally among its personnel, which included Zionists, Communists, Social Democrats, Germans, Austrians, Gentiles, and refugees who were neither politically nor religiously engaged. The cast was a microcosm for the fragmented anti-Nazi colony.

Paul Walter Jacob was not the only exile with plans to establish a German theater in Argentina. Both the Troupe 38, an amateur group that put on political cabaret in the leftist Forward Club,

10. Jacob to Weil, January 29, 1941, PWJAK.

11. Alemann to Jacob, May 8, 1943, PWJAK.

12. Geiger-Torel to Hellmer, December 25, 1940, PWJAK.

and Josef Szekely's Comics' Cabaret, an artist's collective that played only sporadically, could coexist with the FGS. However, Max Wächter's German-language Stage of Argentina targeted the same public and had a similar repertoire. The population could not support two theaters, yet neither Jacob nor Wächter, who had performed with the Jewish Cultural League in Hamburg, was willing to compromise. When each declined offers to join the other, the two theaters were at an impasse.¹³

Jacob did not believe that Wächter could establish a regularly performing, professional exilic theater as he conceived the FGS. Wächter's group performed only fourteen times in ten months, which was insufficient to generate a living wage for its cast. This caused excessive turnover, which lowered the quality of its performances. The *Argentinisches Tageblatt* expressed similar misgivings in its review of Franz Arnold and Ernst Bach's farce, *The Real Jacob* (1924), asserting that Wächter's direction was inadequate and the ensemble featured too many amateurs.¹⁴ Wächter appears to have selected dramas without ensuring he had the proper personnel, which is substantiated by last-minute advertisements scrambling to fill parts by engaging "talented" amateurs.¹⁵ Jacob, who had been a representative for the Guild of the German Stage, viewed this practice as a crime against unemployed professional thespians. He argued that the purpose of an exilic theater was to

13. Wächter to Jacob, February 28, 1940, PWJAK. The FGS planned twelve presentations monthly.

14. According to Anne Lemmer, Wächter's refusal to cooperate with Jacob provoked a press campaign against the former's theater; however, her claim is questionable. Jacob first offered Wächter a place in the FGS on January 2, 1940, but as of February 23, Wächter had not replied. The *Tageblatt's* review of *The Real Jacob*, printed on January 3, could not have been motivated by Wächter's refusal, because according to Jacob himself, Wächter had not yet refused. Moreover, the paper published positive reviews of Wächter's group on February 15 and March 11. This second piece appeared well after Wächter had declined to join the FGS. There is no evidence that the *AT* systematically defamed Wächter. Compare Lemmer, *Die "Freie Deutsche Bühne,"* 24.

15. *AT*, February 24, 1940; flyer, *Liebelei*, Max Wächter Collection, Institut für Theaterwissenschaft, Universität Hamburg.

help refugees work in their chosen vocation, not to exacerbate their struggles by doling out roles to amateurs.¹⁶ Wächter also had not matched Jacob's fund-raising and could not offer the same job security. Consequently, all the professional actors in Wächter's group transferred to the FGS.¹⁷ When Jacob also wrested the House of Theater venue away from the German-language Stage, Wächter was compelled to join his competition.

The *Tageblatt* depicted this arrangement as an amicable accord,¹⁸ but in truth Wächter had yielded only under heavy pressure from the Zionist community, specifically Bernhardi Swarsensky, editor of the *Jüdische Wochenschau*.¹⁹ Wächter eventually lamented his decision and often complained about the bit parts he received. In response, Jacob questioned Wächter's claims about his acting experience and asserted there were many plays that he would not have produced if he had had no better actors than Wächter to fill the main roles.²⁰ The polemic sowed partisan strife within the ensemble. Zionists consistently sided with Wächter, while most others aligned themselves with Jacob. The chronic agitation among thespians left an indelible mark on participants. Sixty-five years later, Jacques Arndt still referred to Wächter as a "poor sap."²¹

In addition to actors from Wächter's stage, several joined the FGS from other stations in exile, some responded to advertisements, and Ernesto Alemann recruited a few more, including Hermann Geiger-Torel and Hedwig Schlichter-Crilla. A graduate of the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt, Geiger-Torel had conducted in Buenos Aires under Erich Kleiber at the Colón Theater in 1934, 1938, and 1939. He directed over thirty productions at the FGS before becoming director of at the Uruguayan national opera in 1942.²² Another key addition was Hedwig Schlichter-Crilla, who

16. Jacob to Geiger-Torel, March 27, 1940, PWJAK.

17. "Deutschsprachige Bühne in Argentinien," *AT*, January 1, 1940; "Deutschsprachige Bühne in Argentinien," *AT*, March 5, 1940.

18. "Deutschsprachige Bühne in Argentinien," *AT*, April 2, 1940.

19. Wächter to Jacob, October 11, 1942, PWJAK.

20. Jacob to Wächter, October 14, 1942, PWJAK.

21. Arndt, interview, August 2, 2006.

22. Geiger-Torel conducted in Montevideo (1943–44) and Rio de Janeiro (1945–48) and was lead conductor of the Canadian Opera Festival Association (1959–76).

had collaborated with Leopold Jessner and Julius Bab in Berlin and starred in the feature film *Girls in Uniform* (1931). An acclaimed actress, Schlichter-Crilla also acted with French companies under Louis Jouvet, Rachel Berendt, and Madeleine Ozeray in Argentina.²³ The arduous task of composing an ensemble sowed enduring conflicts. Nonetheless, when the Free German Stage held its inaugural performance it featured a full cast of experienced, professional actors.

The curtain rose at FGS on April 20, 1940, Adolf Hitler's birthday, a conscious act of reclaiming German culture from the Nazi regime.²⁴ The date was a forceful political statement but the play, Ladislaus Bus-Fekete's *Jean* (1937), was not. A simple comedy, *Jean* offered theatergoers an escape from the psychological and economic hardships of exile. Reviewers, all favorably disposed toward the new enterprise, concurred that *Jean* was something less than an antifascist manifesto. The *Tageblatt* merely described it as harmless,²⁵ but *La Nación*, a prominent Argentine paper with a discerning arts section, criticized the play as "predictable," "coarse," and "improbable."²⁶ In a subtle way, *Jean* actually did correspond to the theater's internationalist and antifascist platform. Its author, Ladislaus Bus-Fekete, was a Hungarian Jew whose works were banned in Nazi Germany. Like much of the repertoire, *Jean* evinced a calculated effort at compromise. Bus-Fekete's background satisfied antifascists and Zionists, while the work itself appealed to apolitical theatergoers, most of whom favored entertainment over politics.

The setting of the performance was also significant. The House of Theater, where the FGS played for its first four seasons, was modern and comfortable, with seating for 350 people. Available for the desirable Saturday night and Sunday matinee time slots, it was located on Santa Fe Avenue, a central thoroughfare, easily accessible from the entire city. Importantly, the building also

23. Julius Bab, "Zehn Jahre deutsches Theater in Argentinien's Hauptstadt," *Staatszeitung New York*, September 10, 1950.

24. Arndt, interview, December 25, 2008.

25. "Jean von Bus-Fekete," *AT*, April 21, 1940.

26. "Teatro alemán en la Casa del Teatro," *LN*, April 21, 1940.



Figure 3. Ensemble of the Free German Stage following its debut season in 1940.

Source: Fundación IWO, Alexander Berg Collection.

housed a residence for retired Argentine thespians. Current and future presidents of Argentina, Agustín Justo and Roberto Ortiz, attended the inauguration ceremony in 1938, at which the minister of public education, Jorge de la Torre, described the institution as a “fraternal embrace of the entire Argentine theater family.”²⁷ In this spirit, the FGS cultivated contacts in the Argentine theater world, including Pedro Pico, president of both the House of Theater and the Argentine General Society of Authors. An invaluable resource, Pico facilitated bureaucratic procedures for the procurement of visas, licensing for performances, and other municipal permits. The House of Theater suited the FGS’s public and facilitated actors’ integration into Argentine society.

27. “Inaugurado ayer el edificio de la Casa del Teatro,” *La Prensa*, January 5, 1938.

Behind the Curtain: Working at the Free German Stage

Two interlinked features dominated the Free German Stage's repertoire and schedule during the World War II period. The first was the number of productions, a dizzying 150 premieres and 500 total performances from 1940 through early 1946.²⁸ In part this explains the second notable detail: a clear majority of the plays were comedies. The FGS premiered twenty-five works yearly, one per week during a six-month theater season from April to October. It averaged eighty-five productions per season, but performed each piece only three to four times. By comparison the Players from Abroad, a German-language theater company founded in New York City in 1942, produced three to four premieres per year for a total of fifteen to twenty presentations. The rotation of pieces at the FGS was extremely fast, and the number of overall performances was extraordinarily high.

The stage established a ticket subscription system that ran in six-week cycles, and promised its audience a new premiere weekly. In time a regular work schedule emerged. Sunday mornings were free, and on Sunday afternoons the previous premiere had its third performance. Monday afternoons and evenings were devoted to initial preparations for the next piece; directors assigned roles and composed lists for props, while Jacques Arndt and Hans Schön, previously the stage manager for the German Theater in Prague, collaborated on set designs. Tuesday and Thursday mornings and evenings were devoted to stage rehearsals. On Wednesday mornings rehearsals were held again and, depending on demand, that evening the fourth and final performance of Saturday's premiere occurred. Late Thursday night and early Friday morning, Arndt and Schön assembled the props and scenery for the upcoming premiere. Fridays were devoted to two dress rehearsals, one at midday and the other in the evening, often continuing past midnight. On Saturday evenings, the group staged the premiere and first repetition

28. "Wasser für Canitoga," *FP*, May 26, 1946.

of the week's new play at 6:30 and 9:30 p.m., respectively. This schedule represents an ideal scenario—rehearsals often occurred closer together because of difficulties in acquiring materials for the stage design and preparing scripts, which actors often had to translate themselves into German. Jacques Arndt subsequently recalled Hedwig Schlichter-Crilla's frustrations:

The room where we worked was, as she said with French influences, a "room *de merde*," . . . the theater was "a theater *de merde*." We had to translate works on airmail paper, so we could make copies with carbon paper. Obviously, the last copies were very weak. She said: "these shitty papers *de merde*." We all wanted to do it differently.²⁹

Everyone at the FGS was accustomed to conditions in Europe. The duress of working longer hours under worse conditions at far less pay, and playing for an exigent and divisive audience—all amid the trauma of living as refugees—provoked acute stress and tension.

Issues of authority aggravated the strained relations in the troupe. Jacob regarded the Free German Stage as his theater and reserved the final say on all artistic and administrative matters for himself, yet others saw the stage as a collective. Finances were at the core of this disagreement. As Jacob wrote to prospective ensemble members, he could guarantee their modest wages only during the theater season. The actors, thus, were not only overworked but also had to worry about how they would survive the summer months. Together, Jacob and Liselott Reger earned three salaries, plus royalties from Jacob's journalism, so they had significantly more income than their colleagues. However, the theater's deficit also was their legal responsibility. The ensuing anxiety and misunderstandings often led to feuding between Jacob and Reger and the rest of the cast.

Over time, this discord escalated. One example is the homage that Jacob and Reger organized for the famous director, Max Reinhardt, upon his death in 1943. On November 17, 1943, over 1,000

29. Cora Roca and Jacques Arndt, "Recordando a Hedy Crilla," in Rohland de Langbehn and Vedda, *Teatro y teoría teatral*, 19–20.

people filled the sold-out Grand Splendid Theater.³⁰ An artistic and financial success, the festivities featured a lecture by Jacob, recitations by Reger, and a screening of Reinhardt and William Dieterle's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935). Jacob and Reger held the event in the name of the FGS and disposed of the revenue as they saw fit, which technically they were entitled to do. Many of their colleagues disagreed, however, arguing that Jacob and Reger could not use the FGS name without including them in the presentation and decisions about the allocation of proceeds.³¹ They expressed their disapproval to donors and even purchased tickets for the tribute independently.³² Enraged, Jacob accused Alexander Berger, the ensemble's representative, of infringing upon his authority. Jacob claimed that he and Reger had the right to act in the name of the FGS unilaterally, since they had founded the stage, and they alone were legally responsible for its financial commitments, including paying the deficit, renting venues, and disbursing wages.³³ Furthermore, he had not claimed any of the profits personally, but had used the income to finance the deficit and refurbish funds set aside to support the cast during the off-season.³⁴

The FGS accounts show that Jacob's actions benefited the entire cast, yet everyone was exhausted from the theater season, as well as the burden of world events and exile. The affair degenerated into a three-month, vitriolic letter exchange among Jacob, Berger, Reger, and another actor, Wolfgang Vacano. A competent but headstrong manager, Jacob repeatedly reproached Berger for utter cluelessness and directed numerous sardonic insults at Berger in their correspondence. Moreover, Jacob refused to apologize, insisting that all offenses came from the other side.³⁵ The belligerence eventually gave way to an uneasy peace, because nobody truly wanted the theater to fail. Nonetheless, Vacano and Reger both left the stage

30. "En memoria de Max Reinhardt," *Noticias Graficas*, November 19, 1943.

31. FGS Ensemble to Jacob, November 19, 1943, PWJAK.

32. Vacano to Berger, December 12, 1943, IWO.

33. Jacob to Berger, November 22, 1943, PWJAK.

34. Jacob to Vacano, November 23, 1943, PWJAK.

35. Jacob to Berger, January 12, 1944, PWJAK.

after the 1943 season. Since Reger handled much of the business administration, she was unwillingly caught up in the altercation. Disillusioned, Reger relocated to Montevideo, where she worked on the *Voice of the Day* and at the theater The Comedy.³⁶ In 1946 she and Jacob were divorced. As she was a cofounder of the Free German Stage and director of over forty plays, the group lost one of its most energetic and influential members with her departure.

The Reinhardt fracas reached an exceptional degree of imbroglio, but the friction itself was not anomalous. The FGS's cast and public, as well as its donors and supporters in the media, were all rife with infighting. These groups' contrasting religious, political, and commercial agendas conflicted from the outset, and eventually spawned acerbic rivalries, which at times were eclipsed only by the mutual opprobrium of all parties toward Nazism. The fractious relations within the antifascist colony resulted in patterns of attrition, dysfunction, and disenfranchisement that markedly weakened the Free German Stage's efficacy to forge and sustain a united cultural front against German nationalism in Argentina. Cognizant of this dilemma, Paul Walter Jacob repeatedly invoked the comic genre as theatrical therapy to lower levels of stress and enmity. The next section evaluates the mixed results of his strategy.

Comedies: "Laughter, Ladies and Gentlemen, Is Stronger Than Tears"

As stated above, the Free German Stage performed far more comedies than any other dramatic genre. This did not escape the attention of critics near and far, including Julius Bab, who noted the prevalence of comedies, some of them quite lowbrow, with mild censure.³⁷ Yet, the theater did not neglect serious drama. In its first five years, it staged Ibsen, Schiller, Gorki, Maugham, Sudermann, Katajew, Zweig, Herzl, Ardrey, Holz and Jerschke, Hellman,

36. Reger to Berger, January 7, 1944, IWO.

37. "Deutsches Theater in Argentinien," *Staatszeitung und Herold*, May 16, 1948.

Capek, Rolland, Pirandello, Kaiser, and Schnitzler, as well as several religious dramas. This equals the totality of plays performed at the New Yorker Players from Abroad over the same time span. The FGS played far more serious dramas than exilic theaters in New York, Shanghai, Mexico City,³⁸ or Montevideo.³⁹

Nonetheless, from motivations ranging from pragmatism to psychology, the troupe presented overwhelmingly more comedies than serious dramas. The rapid rotation of pieces left scant time for elaborate planning. For example, the cast began preparations for Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine* (1941) eight months before the premiere.⁴⁰ It was impossible to do this for more than a few dramas per season. The FGS lacked adequate time and personnel to present complex dramas for a public accustomed to seeing polished productions in European cultural centers.

Considering that theatergoers and cast alike were grappling with a horrific past, troubled present, and uncertain future, the physiology of humor also informs the prevalence of comedies at the FGS. Aristotle's *Poetics* posits laughter as a benign, cathartic form of discharging excess emotion or tension, and scientific research links his theory to concrete physiological phenomena. According to William Fry of Stanford University Medical School, laughter involves a rapid, prolonged acceleration of the heartbeat, which is invigorating during laughter and facilitates relaxation afterward. Laughing benefits the respiratory system as well. Guffaws catalyze heavy breathing, evacuating residual, carbon dioxide-laden air in exchange for new, oxygen-rich air. The improved air exchange replaces sluggishness with renewed mental verve. Laughter also produces catecholamines, chemicals that stimulate the nervous system. Together with improved air exchange, catecholamines trigger alertness and enhance cerebral functioning. Finally, laughing stimulates the secretion of endorphins, the body's natural anesthetics. If

38. Maaß, *Repertoire der deutschsprachigen Exilbühnen, 1933–1945*, 114–155, 69–73, 40–41.

39. Fritz Pohle, *Emigrationstheater in Südamerika abseits der "Freien Deutschen Bühne,"* Buenos Aires, 28–29.

40. Jacob to Hellman, December 26, 1941, PWJAK.

external problems—of which refugees in Argentina had many—are provoking internal effects, such as a headache, a funny comedy is an effective remedy.⁴¹

In addition to its physical benefits, humor is a boon to the psychological health of oppressed individuals and communities. Holocaust survivor, neurologist, and clinical psychiatrist Viktor Frankl has argued that humor is essential to maintaining a healthy outlook on life, especially for individuals suffering from depression, self-doubt, and fear.⁴² The person with a sense of humor can never be fully dominated, even by a government that imprisons him, for his ability to laugh at the situation will enable him to preserve a measure of personal freedom, at least in thought and spirit. Frankl, who survived Dachau and Auschwitz, said of the camps: “In the fight for self-preservation, humor more than anything else in the human make-up can afford an ability to rise above any situation.”⁴³ Humor has been considered a fundamentally social phenomenon for centuries. Its communal character can be witnessed in cinemas and theaters everywhere—the fuller the house, the easier spectators are brought to laughter. Spreading from person to person, laughter also has a cohesive effect. Smiling and chuckling together, even if only at a piece of absurdity, brings people together and unites them at least temporarily.⁴⁴ A vitalizing force at the Free German Stage, humor was conducive to community building. Even the silliest plays played a serious role in helping refugees withstand the anguish of exile.

Brandon Thomas’s *Charley’s Aunt*

A rollicking, wildly successful farce, *Charley’s Aunt* first premiered in London on February 29, 1892, and compiled a record-breaking original run of 1,466 performances. At the time of the FGS’s premiere on October 11, 1941, Thomas’s play had established itself as

41. Fry and Salameh, *Humor and Wellness in Clinical Intervention*, 125–133.

42. Frankl, *Doctor and the Soul*, 204.

43. Frankl, *Viktor Frankl Recollections*, 97.

44. Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 115.

the second most-performed English drama in the world, surpassed only by *Hamlet*.⁴⁵ The well-timed event was staged shortly after the 1941 release of a Hollywood cinematic adaptation, starring Jack Benny. A surefire selection to generate robust ticket sales with an eye toward the lean summer months ahead, the play could be easily dismissed as a simple maneuver to fill seats; however, the presentation merits a closer look. It demonstrated the importance of humor for the morale of the refugee population, while also proving that even an irrelevant farce could be modified to include political elements.

Between scenes *Charley's Aunt* features musical interludes, and, without changing the plot, it was in these spaces that the FGS grafted its own perspective onto the script. Wolfgang Vacano replaced the original score with musical sketches, which altered the tenor of the play by adding a personalized undercurrent of nostalgia and political commentary. The published edition of *Charley's Aunt* opens with the "Eton Boating Song."⁴⁶ At the House of Theater, however, a portly Jewish man dressed in a pleated woolen skirt and frumpy blouse rushed in front of the curtain and, accompanied by a merry piano, addressed the audience directly:⁴⁷

Yes! Smoke, ladies and gentlemen, smoke!
Smoking makes us feel so swell,
everyone likes to have a drag
regardless of where we dwell.
People, they run and they die,
they lie and might even love,
it all happens by the by,
and the only thing left is smoke.⁴⁸

Lord Francourt Babberly, already disguised as Charley's Aunt and played by Paul Walter Jacob, began on a light note, flaunting his celebrity and building a rapport with the audience. Then,

45. "Charleys Tante in der FDB," *AT*, October 9, 1941.

46. Brandon Thomas, *Charley's Aunt* (London: Samuel French, 1935), 9.

47. Photographs, *Charley's Aunt*, IWO.

48. PWJA VI a) 280.

in the fourth line, the Aunt's identity blurred. With a darkening tone and faint cognizance of the present, Vacano's song gradually moved away from the fictional farce and approximated the actors and audience at the House of Theater. The lyrics were ambiguous, but many spectators also had been on the run, some had witnessed death personally, and nearly all of them had seen their past lives vanish like a whiff of smoke. The merry piano imposed a jovial mood, but serious undertones mounted:

I frolicked and felt content
on every continent,
learning languages on a spree
ja ja, yes yes, sí sí, oui oui.
But now travel is travailing!
Where can you get a visa?
And no ship sets sailing!
With no money to spend,
the world's a dead end.
But I know a trick for that
Just say you're luggage or freight
belonging to a diplomat—
you'll get into every state!

Jacob moved steadily closer to the spectators' own biographies, straddling the line between his performative and phenomenal identities. Hurriedly, Jacob's version of Charley's Aunt had learned the languages most commonly spoken by the emigrant audience. Her song—the difficulties of finding safe passage, the frustrated attempts to acquire a visa, and the exorbitant prices of procuring entry to foreign countries—told of a desperation that everyone in the auditorium had experienced firsthand. Finally, the Aunt cynically joked about a global hypocrisy in which freedom and safety are determined by connections, rather than justice. Paul Walter Jacob sang a story not about his character but about himself, his cast, and his audience. On the other hand, still cross-dressed, he invoked humor as a distancing mechanism. The incongruity between his performative and phenomenological selves provoked his audience to see humor in his narrative, enabling these refugees, at least

to some extent, to put themselves above the tribulations of exile. Through humor Jacob initiated a confrontation with the past, a first step toward building the psychological fortitude necessary to surmount the challenges of the present.

The ditty concluded with the illustrious, irrevocable past of Charley's Aunt:

Charley's Aunt is my name,
across the globe spans my fame.
For half a century
I have performed on stages
in every country,
earning extravagant wages!
By thousands I reeled them in
with Guido Thielscher in Berlin.
Ladies and gentlemen, you know it well,
back then I always felt so swell.
Everybody loved me
from sea to shining sea,
But things have changed since then,
and all that's left is smoke.

Maintaining the tension between his role and his true self, Jacob narrated the play's trajectory, particularly its run in Berlin with the popular actor Guido Thielscher. In so doing, he tantalized emigrants with an idealized version of their own European lives. In Europe they, too, had been wealthier, enjoyed more prosperous careers, and often led fulfilling social lives. In exile most were poor, lonely, and worked outside their former professions. The Aunt did not shy away from the facts—nothing remained of their European pasts, only smoke. Nobody in the audience knew how close she was to the terrible truth.

In print, these final verses are strikingly somber for a song that introduces a riotous comedy. The context, however, belies the text. The ditty was sung by a heavyset, balding, well-respected artist and intellectual, but now he wore a pleated skirt, ruffled blouse, pink tights, and curly wig. Moreover, Jacob was not giving a scholarly lecture, but was singing along to a jolly piano. The humor followed

Schopenhauer's theory of incongruity, according to which laughter is caused by a mismatch between conceptual understanding and perception of the same object.⁴⁹ Through this incongruity Jacob taught his audience, at least occasionally, to view their struggles through the lens of humor. Moreover, he revealed that their sadness and sufferings need not be solitary. Their experiences as refugees were common to the actors, audience, and even the famed Doña Lucia d'Alvadorez, Charley's Aunt. For all their individual sorrows, the crowd could laugh together and gain solidarity through humor.

The FGS altered neither the original plot nor dialogue of Thomas's benign situational comedy, in which the problems created in the first two acts are resolved in the third as multiple pairs of lovers come together, concluding with a carefree, happy ending.⁵⁰ Before the third act, the published text calls again for the "Eton Boating Song," but at the House of Theater Jacob sang another ditty instead:

An emigrant recently arrived by sea,
 he was unfamiliar with this country.
 But the others, who have been here quite a while,
 they welcomed and cared for him like a child.
 They helped with words and with deeds.
 A car, a house—he's got all he needs!
 The Charity also gives him money every day.
 I don't know if it's true, but that's what they say.⁵¹

Far more direct, this song was a quixotic vision of how refugees' lives might be, were their dilemmas so easily resolved as in a play like *Charley's Aunt*. Ideally, the refugees on- and offstage at the House of Theater also would have been greeted and supported by "the others"—that is, earlier waves of German emigrants, the nationalist, so-called old colony. Instead of helping, however, nationalist Germans shunned, reviled, and menaced refugees. The

49. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Idea*, 1:76.

50. "Charleys Tante," *JW*, October 17, 1941.

51. PWJA VI a) 280.

"Charity," or the Jewish Philanthropic Society, did assist new arrivals, but it was overwhelmed by their numbers and provided only minimal financial aid. The arrival in Uruguay of Jacques Arndt, outfitted with nothing but ten dollars and illegal documents, more closely resembled the struggle of most emigrants, who had to re-start life from scratch. Jacob's ironic parody contrasted the adversity of life outside the theater with the carefree fictional narrative within it, again winning humor by its incongruity. The tune concluded with self-reflexive cognizance of this disaccord, a lyrical wink betraying awareness of emigrants' struggles while refusing to relinquish hope and, especially, humor.

As the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* remarked, the unconventional roles in Thomas's drama created a space for younger actors such as Jacques Arndt und Walter Lenk to enjoy the blithe days of student life, which they had been denied as Jewish teenagers imperiled by Nazism.⁵² Relations in the ensemble were often strained, so the cast was amused at the sight of their headstrong boss playing the cross-dressing Lord Francourt Babberly, often sniggering visibly onstage.⁵³ The laughter was contagious, spreading throughout the audience and into the newspapers. One reviewer took up the narrative of Vacano's introductory ditty, favorably comparing the guffaws to previous versions he had seen in Europe.⁵⁴ The *Zionist Jüdische Wochenschau*, too, joined in the fun, joking that "Doña Lucia de Alfajores, pardon, Alvadores" had lost none of her youthful charm.⁵⁵ Only emigrants to Buenos Aires would understand the play on words, which conflated the protagonist's surname, Alvadores, with an Argentine delicacy, pastries of cookie and caramel called *alfajores*. Such localized humor was a cohesive force among emigrants; it demonstrated that they were a community bound by experiences, customs, and cultural markers unique to themselves.

The FGS received many grateful letters for *Charley's Aunt*. One, addressed to the cast and the audience, noted that Thomas's droll,

52. "Charleys Tante," *AT*, October 10, 1941.

53. "Montevideo Gastspiel," *AT*, March 19, 1942.

54. "Charleys Tante," *AT*, October 10, 1941.

55. "Charleys Tante," *JW*, October 17, 1941.

fun-loving Aunt was, in a sense, a relic of spectators' former, happier lives in Europe. Written by Peter Bussemeyer, a journalist for the *Tageblatt*, the private letter wistfully recalled better and safer days, lamenting that if anything remained of the past it was bitter memories of an easier time, when one could cross borders with neither passports nor mortal fear. In Buenos Aires, the writer continues, Charley's Aunt would never be more than an "ersatz-Aunt." She could not restore the winsome days of Guido Thielscher in Berlin. For many emigrants, remembering the past underscored the misery of today. Yet the letter only feinted nostalgia to confront the present. Insisting that emigrants must not succumb to grief and loss, Bussemeyer argues that their current situation, represented by Jacob's ersatz-Aunt, is not futile. After all she still brought four couples together and caused the entire theater to erupt in guffaws; she continued to be a very comforting ersatz-Aunt. Seeing the farcical figure onstage, this theatergoer attributed an earnest function to Charley's Aunt offstage. By means of comedies, theatergoers and ensemble—"we"—had recovered the most buoyant and enduring of human sentiments—joyous, unrestrained, infectious laughter. The Aunt's most valuable accomplishment, the letter concluded, was to have conveyed one decisive, edifying truth to the refugee population: "Laughter, ladies and gentlemen, is stronger than death and tears."⁵⁶ All dramas are pliant when subjected to the dynamics of theatrical performance. Even the most unlikely of genres, the farce, can become relevant, resolute, and political.

In its presentation of *Charley's Aunt*, the FGS purposefully and effectively utilized comic theater as a restorative memory machine. Mutual participants in the presentation, refugee theatergoers and thespians were compelled to confront their traumatic past, learn to view it from a sounder perspective, and rekindle a sense of humor and hope that fortified them for the future. In the instance of Thomas's farce, the FGS harnessed the energy of live theater to build emotional grit and togetherness by depicting a shared past in a dramatically familiar, if still physically foreign, context. Yet,

56. Peter Bussemeyer to Jacob, October 18, 1941, PWJA VI f) 293.

performing history unleashes theatrical energies that are volatile and varied.⁵⁷ Neither the Free German Stage nor the rival German Theater proved capable of consistently channeling their force.

Carl Rössler's *The Five Frankfurters*

The greatest box-office smash at the FGS was Carl Rössler's idyll of the Rothschild family, *The Five Frankfurters* (1911), which was presented ten times in Buenos Aires and Montevideo from 1941 to 1944. Between laughs, Rössler's drama addressed issues of Jewish identity and integration that were the object of vigorous debate among Argentina's German-speaking refugees. Rössler's portrait of Frankfurt's famous Jews' Alley endowed the sold-out premiere with poignant kinship. Describing the atmosphere before the first curtain as akin to a family reunion, the *Jüdische Wochenschau* invoked images of tightly knit Jewish communities in Europe and Argentina.⁵⁸ In neither place were Jews as close as the paper suggested, yet this incarnation of Jewish traditions onstage, carefully reconstructed amid exilic disruption, enabled the invention of such intimacy.

To a degree, the destruction of European Jewish culture inspired its cultivation in exile and catalyzed a dynamic, if divisive, campaign for religious and cultural preservation among Jews in Buenos Aires. The Free German Stage supported this effort by reenacting European Jewish memory and community through theatrical performances, such as *The Five Frankfurters*. Its depiction of Jewish religious and cultural continuity was spatially anchored in Frankfurt's Jews' Alley, ever present through the windows of the Rothschild family residence. Jacques Arndt's mise-en-scène, in which individual space was made impossible through overlapping stacks of porous dwellings, bolstered this tightly bound religious family architecturally.⁵⁹ The image of kin was reinforced by the trajectory of Rössler's drama, whose main characters are Gudula Rothschild,

57. Rokem, *Performing History*, 25.

58. "Die fünf Frankfurter," JW, June 27, 1941.

59. Sketch, *The Five Frankfurters*, JAC.

and her five sons. Their travels from abroad to a reunion in the alley evoke a suspended diaspora. Portrayed as precious, precarious, and corruptible, throughout much of the play Jewish identity and community are jeopardized by the widening cultural and religious gaps of different generations.

Spatially, the plot moves along two axes: the (imagined) autochthonous, which is personified by the aging Gudula and depicted physically by Jews' Alley, and the diasporic, represented by the migration and integration of the five brothers into external Christian society, which threatens to efface their Jewishness. The play begins in the Rothschild home, where the youngest brother, Jacob, who lives in Paris, meets Gudula. His refined, cosmopolitan bearing contrasts markedly with his mother, who enters with prayer book in hand and dressed in an orthodox Jewess's ankle-length, long-sleeved, black dress. She has come from the temple, where she was commemorating the death of her father. In this place of worship and memory, the family's genealogy is palpable across generations.⁶⁰ Gudula's worship represents a performative practice that maintains religious and familial continuity. Living memory, conveyed by mnemonic materials, such as speech, image, and gesture, transmits culture from one generation to the next by means of restored behavior. Mnemonic materials principally give expression to (1) genealogies, particularly of leading families, and; (2) practical formulas of daily living and special observances, particularly those deeply imbued with "religious magic."⁶¹ Gudula's ritualized commemoration of her father's death, visions of her own Kaddish, and the Frankfurter dialect evince and vitalize her social and religious heritage.⁶² By contrast, Gudula senses that her worldly sons' links to Jewish mnemonic materials are in peril.⁶³

The ensuing scenes, in which the Rothschild brothers display alienation from the living memory embodied by their mother,

60. Promptbook, *The Five Frankfurters*, 3, PWJA VI j) 350.

61. Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 58.

62. The Jewish Rössler wrote in German, and many spectators in the House of Theater spoke no Yiddish.

63. Promptbook, *The Five Frankfurters*, 3.

confirm her fears. When Salomon arrives from Vienna, he heads straight to the stock exchange in Frankfurt's center, circumventing Jews' Alley outside the city walls. He and his brothers then pressure their mother to relocate outside the alley; however, Gudula adamantly recounts an entire life cycle of the family—her marriage, the birth of her children, and her husband's death—as bonds of identity that hold her fast to the Rothschild family home. Her sons, contrarily, prioritize acculturation in Christian society. When Salomon tells his family that the Austrian Kaiser has bestowed the title of baron on the Rothschilds, only Gudula and Jacob demur. Gudula references institutionalized anti-Semitism, specifically recent urban laws in Frankfurt prohibiting Jews from public sidewalks, when she recalls that the same royal family forced her father to jump into a ditch as their coach drove past.⁶⁴ Jacob cites the rally cry of widespread pogroms just three years before the play's setting in 1819: "Hepp! Hepp! Death and ruin to all Jews!"⁶⁵ While audiences at the House of Theater shuddered at this clairvoyant vision of European Jewry's catastrophic future, onstage Jacob's brother Nathan retorted that the aristocratic title would protect the family.⁶⁶ Committed to joining the German nobility, Salomon divulges his plan to exploit the Duke of Taunus's need for a loan to pressure him into marrying his daughter, Löttchen, arguing that marriage will consolidate the Rothschilds' ascension into the aristocracy. When Jacob raises concerns, Salomon's response encapsulates his willful alienation from his Jewish roots: "You're *meschugge*!!"⁶⁷ Whereas his mother uses mnemonic tools, such as language, to effect cultural preservation and social continuity, Salomon inverts this usage and deploys the etymologically Yiddish term *meschugge* to sever the Rothschilds from their Jewish lineage.

The brothers' visit to the Duke of Taunus, however, confirms that dissonance between Jews and Gentiles persists. Before the Rothschilds arrive, the nobles express varying degrees of anti-Semitism,

64. Fuchs, "Concerning the Jews of Frankfurt," 20.

65. Rohrbacher and Schmidt, *Judenbilder*, 263.

66. Promptbook, *The Five Frankfurters*, 10.

67. Promptbook, *The Five Frankfurters*, 12.

exposing their hopes for fuller integration and acceptance as illusory. The Duke's majordomo, Fehrenberg, charges that the inhabitants of Jews' Alley are a competing, parasitic society.⁶⁸ In a dialogue struck from the promptbook, the Duke's uncle, Count Moritz, evokes contemporary Nazi propaganda by insinuating that Jews are sexual predators, and then barricades his daughter from the brothers as if they were a virus. In retaliation, the Duke sternly reproaches the Count for his anti-Semitism. He also remarks to Eveline, a minor, Gentile character, that his uncle belongs in the eighteenth century, whereas he himself should have been born 100 years later. In the published edition of the play these are crucial scenes, because the distinction they illustrate conveys the drama's clearest hope for future tolerance. Though childish and egotistical, the Duke is open-minded, and he accepts Salomon's proposition. He would never marry Löttchen were it not for her fortune, but the compliments he pays to her even before Salomon's proposition also give the impression that he is not motivated by money alone. Furthermore, his acceptance is contingent on the condition that his daughter consents of her own free will. The Duke's willingness to marry Löttchen reflects self-interest *and* a progressive attitude toward Jewish-Gentile relations.

Salomon's ambitions cause distress in the Rothschild household. The marriage would require Löttchen to convert to Christianity and discontinue the family's generational presence at the temple, thus breaking irrevocably with the mnemonic materials and living memory that Gudula preserves. Salomon dismisses her conversion as a formality, and his brother, Karl, views baptism as a superficial maneuver whose social gains justify any religious concessions.⁶⁹ The family's debate depicts the vulnerability of Jewish identity within a larger constellation of intercultural relations, social ambitions, and commercial interests. The transmission of Jewish religion and culture across generations is enshrined in traditional, ritualistic events, such as marriages. In Löttchen's marriage the synagogue, a mnemonic space intrinsic to Judaism, will be replaced

68. Promptbook, *The Five Frankfurters*, 15.

69. Promptbook, *The Five Frankfurters*, 16.

by the church. Christian traditions will supplant sacred Jewish rituals. Gudula describes her grandchild's wedding, a Christian ceremony in a Christian mnemonic space, as an act of abandonment. According to Gudula, the introduction of a Gentile would disrupt the family's genealogy, corrupt its identity, and cost the Rothschilds their blessing. Metonymically representative of the greater Jewish community, the Rothschilds' faith is inextricably linked to their family—both would be endangered by fully intercultural, familial relations with Gentiles.

Despite its divisive impact, Salomon is determined to push the marriage through. This sets up the drama's decisive final scenes, which were unedited in the FGS's promptbook. The Duke arrives in the alley, proposes to Löttchen, and, although the marriage would force her to renounce her religion, rejoices over the fusion of the two faiths as a sign of progress. The timing of his remarks, just before receiving a loan of one million florins, casts doubt on his sincerity. Gudula rejects his views along with her new title of baroness, saying she is an elderly Jewess, not nobility. Gudula's unwavering sense of Jewish identity convinces Löttchen to reject the Duke, explaining that he has come a century too soon. Instead, she marries her young uncle, Jacob. Rejecting the notion that Jews are eternal wanderers, she argues that her "home" is in Jewish faith and culture.⁷⁰ She neither confirms nor dismisses the possibility of integration in the long term, but by marrying Jacob, Löttchen commits to preserving her family's Jewish heritage. Gudula praises the choice as a return to community, tradition, and thus, happiness. Finally, Salomon capitulates and affirms his mother's triumph as proper and just.

The published edition of Rössler's *The Five Frankfurters* can be interpreted as a patient appeal for full integration. The Kaiser's decree and the Rothschilds' business relationships demonstrate functional interaction between Jews and Gentiles in legal and professional spheres. The divergent perspectives of several older characters (Gudula, the Count) and their younger counterparts (Salomon, the Duke) indicate momentum toward more complete

70. Promptbook, *The Five Frankfurters*, 34.

integration. Even as Löttchen refuses the Duke's hand, she admits the possibility of mixed betrothals in the future. Rössler warns that such intimate integration risks cultural and religious alienation, but he never categorically denounces bonds between Jews and Gentiles in the familial sphere.

The Free German Stage's revisions to *The Five Frankfurters* accentuated the warnings. Although he was an important supporting character in the published version, Liselott Reger's adaptation omitted the Count. In an attempt to shield theatergoers from his insults, she also deleted passages that distinguish between the Count's virulent anti-Semitism and the Duke's more moderate attitude. Without these scenes, the Duke's other progressive comments, all made in the Rothschilds' company, can be discounted as self-interested and disingenuous. Furthermore, if the spectator is unaware of the Duke's remarks in act 2, Löttchen's explanation for refusing the Duke's proposal, "You're too early, wait another century," loses its purport. In an unabridged presentation her words would reference the Duke's own ideas, independently corroborate them, and—poignantly positioned in the drama's final scene—indicate an affirmation of fuller future integration. Reger's deletions render Löttchen's words incongruent, even brusque and sarcastic. The outcome of a Jewish marriage inside Jews' Alley validates Gudula's vehement opposition to all forms of acculturation. Salomon, an enthusiastic supporter of assimilation, accedes to his mother's conservative convictions. Unlike the published play, the FGS's presentation of *The Five Frankfurters* decisively rejected closer relations between Jews and Gentiles.

Current world events influenced the reception of *The Five Frankfurters* in Buenos Aires. Emigrants at the House of Theater, most of whom were Jewish refugees, had seen efforts at integration fail disastrously. European Jews' hopes for admission into Gentile society had indeed, as Gudula prophesied, led many of them to stray from their cultural heritage and religion, a sacrifice that had met with calamitous results. Zionists argued that Nazism was cogent evidence against assimilation and in favor of a return to Jewish values. Reactions in local media advocated a corresponding interpretation of the play. The *Jüdische Wochenschau* posited

the Jewish community anchored in Jews' Alley, and isolated from Christian society, as a model for future generations of Jews. Its reviewer also lauded Gudula's resolute adherence to tradition as an inspiration for a new, devout, exilic community.⁷¹ Writing for the *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, the exiled Jewish author Balder Olden interpreted Rössler's drama as the beginning of Jewish emancipation. Praising Rössler's "entirely" Jewish philosophy, Olden criticized Salomon as a naive assimilationist, and, like the *Wochenschau*, he upheld the figure of Gudula as a model for contemporary Jewish audiences.⁷² In its review, the *Diario Israelita* referred to the Free German Stage as a German-language Jewish theater, both misinterpreting its title and neglecting the Gentiles in the troupe.⁷³ Reception of *The Five Frankfurters* in 1941 stridently affirmed Jewish identity, and buttressed efforts to build a faith-centered community that excluded other emigrant groups.

Performed ten times from 1941 to 1944, Rössler's drama, and its reception, permit the tracking of developments within the refugee population against the backdrop of a single play. Upon its first presentation, Zionists viewed the play as an appeal to traditional Jewish values and an unmitigated indictment of integration, positions that did not correspond to the cultural affinities and religious practices of antifascist Gentile and moderate Jewish theatergoers. By 1944, this divergence had degenerated into unconcealed conflict. Amid reports of genocide in Europe, a position of uncompromising animosity toward all Gentile Germans gained currency among Zionists in Argentina. Most actors at the FGS, by contrast, believed in the possibility of a reformed, multicultural postwar Germany, putting them at odds with some spectators, especially Zionists. When the troupe produced *The Five Frankfurters* in 1944 to celebrate Rössler's eightieth birthday and its own 100th premiere, the cast seized the occasion to disseminate a message of tolerance and inclusion. On bilingual programs, they wrote a letter to "Papa Rössler" on behalf of the entire FGS community,

71. "Die fünf Frankfurter," JW, June 27, 1941.

72. "Brief an Carl Rössler," AT, June 21, 1941.

73. "Die fünf Frankfurter," *El Diario Israelita*, June 27, 1941.

“public, thespians, and director.” Contradicting Olden’s analysis of Rössler’s “entirely” Jewish philosophy, the letter hoped for a new Germany guided by the dramatist’s liberal, tolerant, and cosmopolitan attitude.⁷⁴ During the festivities Paul Walter Jacob thanked numerous supporters, but, conspicuously, not the Zionist *Jüdische Wochenschau*. The letter and speech reflected fallout between moderate Jewish and Gentile antifascists on the one hand, and Zionists on the other.

The final performance of *The Five Frankfurters* engendered stark dissension among Jewish refugees.⁷⁵ One theatergoer took offense that the company had written its letter to Rössler on behalf of the entire audience and underlined what he considered to be the most offensive passages, including the hope for a “happy future.”⁷⁶ Rabbi Günter Friedländer, cofounder of the *Jüdische Wochenschau*, complained that Jacob publicly allied himself with the religiously neutral press organs to the detriment of the Zionist *Wochenschau*. It was hard to believe, he continued, that this behavior was not politically motivated. After specifically citing the production of *The Five Frankfurters* as the immediate impetus for his reproaches, Friedländer demanded that the “Jewish” Free German Stage alter its posture.⁷⁷ From 1941 to 1944, the reception of Rössler’s *The Five Frankfurters* reveals marked deterioration in relations between Zionists, who renounced Europe altogether, and antifascists, who were convinced that a reformed postwar Germany was possible. Divergences are traceable to the drama’s premiere, yet by its final presentation interactions among public pillars of the refugee population, including the FGS, the *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, and the *Jüdische Wochenschau*, were increasingly characterized by open animus.

Rössler’s *The Five Frankfurters* and Brandon Thomas’s *Charley’s Aunt* underscore the capacity of dramatic performances to vitalize the past and bring individual experience to bear on collective

74. Program, *The Five Frankfurters*, May 24, 1944, PWJA VI b) 281.

75. Spectator (signature illegible) to Jacob, May 26, 1944, PWJAK.

76. Rodolfo Rauscher to Jacob, May 26, 1944, PWJAK.

77. Friedländer to Jacob, June 2, 1944, PWJAK.

projects of identity formation and community building. Depictions of distant and recent history at the FGS deviated from published editions of the works. The ensemble deliberately put the personal, polemical, and often private topics of memory, solidarity, integration, and future prospects onstage, sharing them with its audience and catapulting them into public discourse. The ensuing conversations were charged with mercurial theatrical energies that could both cohere and cleave the nascent communities under construction. Recognized by all as a puissant player among the emigrant population's grappling factions, the FGS struggled to steer its sway. Some presentations potentiated polemics in ways that were unintended and even antithetical to the theater's own objectives.

Pedro Pico and Samuel Eichelbaum's *The Nutshell*

The Free German Stage was founded with the explicit aim of fostering intercultural inclusion and integration through theater. The ensemble advocated internationalism through its repertoire: within its first four months of performances, it presented dramatists of six different nationalities, almost all of whom were banned in Nazi Germany, and was reviewed in the German, Spanish, English, Yiddish, Hungarian, and Czech press.⁷⁸ Many luminaries of the Argentine theater world also attended productions at the FGS. Playwright/director Chas de Cruz spoke for many: "As an Argentine, I am proud that it is in my country that this enterprise undertakes its magnificent labor."⁷⁹ At the same time as they enable intercultural communication, dramatic performances also make visible the play of difference and identity between immigrant and host cultures. Presentations often blended Argentine and German cultural markers. Before the performance of Carl Rössler's

78. "Jean, Lustspiel von Ladislaus Bus-Fekete," *JW*, April 26, 1940; "Dos Funciones de Teatro Alemán Ofrecerán Hoy," *Noticias Gráficas*, April 27, 1940; "Free German Stage," *Buenos Aires Herald (BAH)* April 9, 1940; *Di Presse*, August 13, 1940; "Független Német Színház," *Délamerikai Magyarorság*, July 20, 1940; "Lidé Na Kre," *Czechoslovakia Libre*, July 22, 1940.

79. Cruz to Jacob, August 16, 1948, PWJA VI h) 299.

The Five Frankfurters on July 9, 1941, Argentina's independence day, the theater played the Argentine national anthem. Midway through the hymn the curtain rose to reveal the set for the first scene of the drama—the Rothschild family home in Frankfurt's Jews' Alley.⁸⁰ Such occasions were interactive sites of willingness for and resistance to integration. The FGS showcased successful interculturalism, but it also exposed disharmony between the refugee population and their Argentine hosts.

A landmark in the integration of German and Argentine cultures onstage was the FGS's production of *The Nutshell* (1922) by Pedro E. Pico and Samuel Eichelbaum on June 28, 1941, the first performance ever of an Argentine drama in German. Both dramatists were widely respected figures in the local theater world. A prolific playwright whose oeuvre is dominated by comedies with a leftist political tilt, Pico also served as president of the House of Theater and the Argentine Authors' Association. The son of Jewish immigrants from Russia, Samuel Eichelbaum was a dramatist, journalist, and critic for many influential publications in Argentina, including *Caras y Caretas*, *La Nación*, and the *Jüdische Wochenschau*. Eichelbaum was one of the most renowned writers of his generation and won Argentina's exalted National Drama Prize in 1957.

The Nutshell is not a famous play, so some foregrounding is useful. In the early twentieth century, it was common for Argentine men to be married to women of high social standing and simultaneously carry on affairs with women of a lower class. Eichelbaum and Pico imagined that such an affair could hold a moral dilemma whose outcome is tragic and comic at once. The drama's protagonist, Ricardo, marries Maria Victoria, a wealthy heiress, without ending an ongoing romantic relationship with a poor schoolteacher, Alicia. Comfortably married, Ricardo is ready to terminate the affair when Alicia becomes pregnant. When the child is born, and his marriage with Maria Victoria remains infertile, Ricardo realizes that the pull of Alicia's squalid shack, the "nutshell," is stronger

80. "Die zweite Spielzeit der Freien Deutschen Bühne," *AT*, July 9, 1941.

than his legitimate, luxurious, but childless home. Maria Victoria fights for Ricardo, but without malice toward her rival. Ricardo hesitates, but then his son falls gravely ill. As the child lies sick in bed, Ricardo realizes that his paternal instincts surpass all other affections. For her part, Maria Victoria knows the child's death would signify her triumph, but she never utters such a malevolent wish. The baby's rescue is her perdition, and when she learns her husband's son will survive, an afflicted Maria Victoria exits the scene with tragic grace.

The production of *The Nutshell* brought Argentine customs and moral values closer to a public still adapting to its new environs. *La Nación* described the choice as daring. It considered that in a subtle but profound way, the play's plot and especially its conclusion presented to recent immigrants a world that was particularly Argentine.⁸¹ *La Nación* believed that Ricardo's abandonment of his wife, although she does him no wrong, rendered the play foreign to European spectators. Moreover, this action goes unpunished. The *Jüdische Wochenschau*, too, viewed *The Nutshell* as a fundamental departure from European values. As the play was set in Argentina, its reviewer asserted, neither the drama's outcome nor Ricardo's actions needed to adhere to European morality or social norms. Instead the plot turns on one man's search for happiness, which he finds in fatherhood. Law and order are subordinate to parenthood, and the Argentine spirit holds sway.⁸² Writing for the *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, Balder Olden argued that in the context of modern European literature Ricardo's actions are non-conformist precisely because he finds happiness by founding a family. Olden accounted for this divergence by contrasting American and European visions of nationhood. Citing the nineteenth-century Argentine political theorist Juan Bautista Alberdi, he argued that a new nation's path to growth and greatness passes through the health and proliferation of its families. Olden found this principle reaffirmed in *The Nutshell*, in which the good of the nuclear

81. "Teatro Alemán Independiente," *LN*, June 19, 1941.

82. "Die Nusschale," *JW*, July 4, 1941.

family trumps all other concerns.⁸³ This transitional drama conveyed crucial contrasts between Europe and Argentina to emigrant theatergoers, with the intention of facilitating their adaptation to the latter.

Both Pico and Eichelbaum attended the performance in person and received ovations after the second and third acts. Pico wrote an open letter to theatergoers, which was printed in programs for the event. Expressing his wish that the production would trigger a vibrant exchange between “German and Argentine brothers in art,” Pico posited live theater as a form of communication powerful enough, in his opinion, to overcome the barrier of language.⁸⁴ Addressing the audience directly, Eichelbaum saw in theater a conduit to intercultural understanding among artists and spectators.⁸⁵ A bilingual production, the program featured Pico’s note in Spanish and summarized the play and its reception in both languages. In the Argentine daily *Crítica*, Liselott Reger promoted the upcoming performance as proof that the true spiritual and cultural Germany, that of Heine and Goethe, was united with other nations by humanist values that could never be extinguished.⁸⁶ At the event itself, Paul Walter Jacob emphasized the troupe’s goal that art would bring all nations together in a new egalitarian spirit of the future.⁸⁷ Confronting the German embassy in Buenos Aires, polyglot antifascist artists from host and immigrant cultures envisioned and strove to create an intercultural society characterized by tolerance, awareness, and cooperation.

Many emigrants resisted their efforts. They sought in theater a retreat from the challenges of integration, preferring escapism and nostalgia to engagement. The *Jüdische Wochenschau* took its readership to task for lackluster attendance of *The Nutshell*, arguing that the future consisted either in integration with Jewish Argentine society or, hopefully, aliyah to Eretz Israel. It was

83. “*Die Nusschale*,” *AT*, June 30, 1941.

84. Program, *Die Nusschale*, June 28, 1941, PWJA VI b) 281.

85. “*Die Nusschale*,” *AT*, June 30, 1941.

86. “Teatro Alemán Independiente,” *Crítica*, April 13, 1941.

87. “*Die Nusschale*,” *AT*, June 30, 1941.



Figure 4. Scene from the 1943 production of *Abie's Irish Rose* by Anne Nichols at the Free German Stage.

Source: Fundación IWO, Alexander Berg Collection.

convinced that Jews had nothing to gain from longing for their past lives in Europe, and scorned any possibility of rapprochement with European nations. Therefore, *The Nutshell* should have resonated with Jewish refugees: "One might have expected" that this presentation "would meet with broad understanding, enthusiasm, and approval." The editor Bernhardi Swarsensky reprimanded theatergoers for their inexplicable reluctance to exit well-trodden paths, choosing to support sanguine portrayals of an illusory, idealized past instead of welcoming attempts to move in a new direction.⁸⁸ Audience polls corroborate the *Wochenschau's* criticism; for the 1941 season *The Nutshell* received only 3.2 percent of the vote for favorite production.⁸⁹

88. "Die Nusschale," *JW*, July 4, 1941.

89. Audience poll 1941, *PWJA* VI f) 293.

Resisting the Lighter Muse

To the chagrin of Zionists, politically engaged antifascists, and the FGS cast, theatergoers consistently chose light European comedies over political and religious dramas. Comedies played buoyant psychological and social roles among refugees, and some of them, like *The Five Frankfurters* and *The Nutshell* or even Anne Nichols's *Abie's Irish Rose* (1922), also explored more complex sociopolitical and religious themes, yet the Free German Stage was obliged to favor this genre to such an extent that political and religious activists grew disgruntled. On May 4, 1940, two weeks after the stage's inauguration, Liselott Reger affirmed in an interview to the *Tageblatt* that the cast wanted to perform the German classics and political dramas. However, Reger continued, the FGS was an independent professional theater beholden to the mandates of the ticket office. If certain groups wished to see a specific genre, she advised, they had to ensure that such dramas were well attended.⁹⁰

The theater's attempt to include the German classics in its repertoire represents an early example of this conundrum. Considering its humanist agenda and the large number of plays it produced, it is surprising that the FGS did not put on Lessing once during World War II. An early draft of the schedule for its inaugural season in 1940 included *Minna of Barnhelm*; however, Jacob ultimately opted to replace *Minna* with Schiller's *Mary Stuart*.⁹¹ Jacob probably made Lessing's drama his first choice because he suspected the classics would be a tough sell to his audience. He reasoned that, because it was a comedy, there would be less aversion to *Minna* than to tragedies. However, memories of a government-funded guest performance of *Minna* by the celebrity ensemble German Drama in Buenos Aires in 1934,⁹² and the popularity of *Minna* in Nazi Germany—Hans Schweikart's film *The Girl from Barnhelm* (1940) was released that same year—appear to have led to the replacement of Lessing's drama with *Mary Stuart*.

90. "Kulturträgerinnen unter uns: Die Frau mit den drei Berufen," *AT*, May 4, 1940.

91. "Spielplan 1940," *PWJA* VI, f) 293.

92. See chapter 4 for the ensemble German Drama.

As the *Tageblatt* noted in previews, *Mary Stuart* was an artistic and commercial “experiment.”⁹³ The presentation was a test to gauge whether further productions of the classics were commercially viable. By staging the classics, the FGS endeavored to build an audience beyond the antifascist population. It hoped that not only recent emigrants but also “native-born and longtime residents”—an unequivocal reference to the nationalist population, often called “the old colony” because most of its members had arrived before 1933—would attend dramas such as *Mary Stuart*.⁹⁴ By all accounts, the event was an artistic success. The *Jüdische Wochenschau* reported that long, demonstrative applause emphasized the deep impression that Schiller’s tragedy made on “everyone who saw it.”⁹⁵ This concluding qualification shows that despite numerous appeals, attendance of the production was disappointing. Nationalists saw the Free German Stage as ideological anathema. Meanwhile, refugees appear to have rejected Schiller as a propagandized dramatist whose works emblemized the literary traditions of a nation that had ostracized and assailed them. Furthermore, theatergoers consistently shunned the tragic genre. Always just a few box-office failures from bankruptcy, the theater did not stage the German classics again until the postwar period.

Emigrant media organizations recognized the difficulty of the FGS’s position, but they refused to absolve it from all responsibility. Two vigorous critics were the political group and journal *Das Andere Deutschland* and the Zionist *Jüdische Wochenschau*. Despite broad support for the FGS in the refugee population, already in August 1940 *Das Andere Deutschland* began expressing reservations about the amount of light entertainment in its repertoire. Aware that the theater would not survive if it prioritized politics over ticket sales, the journal indirectly reprimanded theatergoers for favoring comedies.⁹⁶ As time passed, its patience waned. Following the 1941 season *DAD* stated outright that it was displeased by the lack of agitprop

93. “Maria Stuart,” *AT*, July 14, 1940.

94. “Maria Stuart,” *AT*, July 11, 1940.

95. “Maria Stuart,” *JW*, July 19, 1940.

96. “Ein Sieg auf der Kulturfront,” *DAD*, August 1940.

theater in the FGS's program, insisting that any "free German stage" had certain inexorable obligations as an anti-Nazi institution. The antifascist mouthpiece also chastised the so-called comedy public, which it accused of striking against political presentations.⁹⁷ Finally, *DAD* advised that in 1942 it expected more political dramas.

The *Jüdische Wochenschau* initially refrained from criticizing the Free German Stage, believing it morally imperative to support Jewish artists. It also recognized and valued the psychological uplift and community-building function the theater provided to all Jewish refugees. Eventually, however, it too grew exasperated. When, in 1943, the stage put on A. A. Milne's comedy *Mr. Pim Passes By* (1919) to celebrate ensemble member Josef Halpern's forty-fifth career anniversary, the *Wochenschau* questioned why a worthier work had not been chosen for the occasion.⁹⁸ Reviews disclosed widening divergences between the uncompromising *Wochenschau* and the more indulgent *Argentinisches Tageblatt*. Earlier, both publications had accepted laughter as an end unto itself. In two years' time, the *Tageblatt's* posture had changed only slightly. When the FGS played Ludwig Hirschfeld's comedy *The Swedish Match* (1933) on June 11, 1943, the *Tageblatt* praised the performance and made no reproach to an audience looking for nothing but laughs.⁹⁹ The *Wochenschau* demurred. It castigated the troupe for stagnating in plays that were neither innovative nor inspirational, but squarely pinned the blame on a public that chose shallow comedies over serious dramas. Caustically invoking refugees' struggles, it wondered "if this crowd's nerves are so shot that it's happy for any joke that lets it laugh."¹⁰⁰ The *Wochenschau* was no longer willing to accept the past as a reason to evade the present.

Two weeks later, after the premiere of Elmer Rice's *Flight to the West* (1940), the paper approved the selection while advising that this presentation should initiate a run of provocative period plays, lest the Free German Stage should fail to live up to its name,

97. "Freie Deutsche Bühne," *DAD*, December 1941.

98. "Mr. Pimm kommt vorbei," *JW*, May 7, 1943.

99. "Das schwedische Zündholz," *AT*, June 6, 1943.

100. "Das schwedische Zündholz," *JW*, June 11, 1943.

especially in such a year as 1943.¹⁰¹ The *Tageblatt*, on the other hand, reiterated that both contemporary political dramas and simple comedies had a place in the repertoire. Both papers had critical words for the audience, however, betraying varying degrees of impatience. The *Tageblatt*, which hitherto had abstained from criticizing theatergoers, gave them a gentle slap on the wrist for their distaste for anything that was not a comedy from yesteryear. Its critic patiently speculated that in time the FGS would inspire its audience to antifascist activism, citing Rice's North American compatriots as an example of isolationists who had been convinced to combat Nazism.¹⁰² The *Jüdische Wochenschau* did not mince words. Accusing Jewish emigrants of egoism and apathy, the paper denounced spectators for closing their eyes to the sufferings of others, "satisfied enough to have saved their own precious lives." Dismissing apolitical, less religious Jews as worthless for the construction of a better future—let alone for influencing a theater's program—the *Wochenschau* warned that their posture risked exclusion from the refugee community.¹⁰³

Nonetheless, most theatergoers continued to favor benign comedies, and their predilections did indeed shape the repertoire. After *Flight to the West*, which was more successful in the media than at the ticket office, the FGS presented Ladislaus Fodor's comedy *Dr. Juci Szabo* (1926). Whereas the *Tageblatt* emphasized the cast's acting and the audience's enthusiasm,¹⁰⁴ the *Wochenschau* decried the choice as a regression and disparaged Fodor's piece as superfluous and outmoded. It saved its most scathing criticism for theatergoers:

This review should be entitled: "Criticism of the Audience." This is the formula for many reviews lately. . . . The FGS serves theatergoers, who desire nothing but comedies. They enjoy themselves more easily than at the cinema, where one at least must read the subtitles or understand the language.¹⁰⁵

101. "Flug nach dem Westen," JW, June 25, 1943.

102. "Flug nach dem Westen," AT, June 20, 1943.

103. "Flug nach dem Westen," JW, June 25, 1943.

104. "Dr. Juci Szabo," AT, June 26, 1943.

105. "Dr. Juci Szabo," JW, July 2, 1943.

The *Wochenschau* suggested the theater conduct an audience survey, claiming that the comedy public endangered the whole enterprise, but comedies consistently outdid most serious dramas in audience polls.¹⁰⁶ The ultimate barometer was the box office, and here comedy was king.

Numerous political and religious groups argued that the disproportionate number of simple, profitable comedies in the FGS's repertoire compromised its objectives of community building, integration with Argentine society, and competition against the nationalist German presence in Argentina. Though correct to a degree, this evaluation is myopic. First, serious dramas and even some comedies stoked tensions within the anti-Hitler population. Second, quite a few comedies were about more than ticket sales and escapism. Light humor provided an imperative psychological uplift for audience and ensemble alike. It contributed to community building, at least among the so-called comedy public, which comprised most theatergoers. Comedies such as *Charley's Aunt*, *The Five Frankfurters*, and *The Nutshell* blended laughter with serious psychological, social, and political issues. The latter play in particular helped the stage to construct crucial networks with influential figures in the local Argentine entertainment industry. In the first two, performing history in the theatrical present provoked emotive discussions about coping with the trauma of racial persecution and the travails of the refugee experience, as well as debates on the interlinked themes of identity, religion, and integration.

Finally, in the last analysis, the FGS simply would not have survived without popular, profitable comedies. Without them, the enterprise almost certainly would have gone the way of other emigrant ensembles in the United States, Mexico, Palestine, and China—all of which either quickly failed or performed very irregularly.¹⁰⁷ For its refugee ensemble, this would have been a disastrous, perhaps even mortal setback. The great risk, of course, was that the theater would succeed as a business but fail elsewhere. Aware

106. Audience polls 1940–1942, PWJA VI f) 293.

107. Maaß, *Repertoire der deutschsprachigen Exilbühnen, 1933–1945*, 40, 60–64, 69–73, 95–116.

of this dilemma, the company tried to strike a balance. Paul Walter Jacob's polemical strategy from Wuppertal, to fund serious drama through profitable comedies, was the *modus operandi* in Buenos Aires. Though they were a comparatively small proportion of its repertoire, the FGS staged far more literary, political, and religious dramas than any other exilic theater. Moreover, without its anti-fascist opponent, the Nazified German Theater would have stood alone. Decades later, Jacques Arndt subordinated all the compromises and shortcomings to a single, transcendent accomplishment: throughout World War II, the only professional, anti-Nazi, exilic theater worldwide was the Free German Stage in Buenos Aires, Argentina.¹⁰⁸

Confrontation and Conflict: Political and Religious Dramas, 1940–1945

An outspoken Social Democrat, Paul Walter Jacob vigorously defended his political convictions in the progressive Forward Club and the antifascist radio program *The Voice of the Day*, as well as in the political journal *Das Andere Deutschland* and the *Argentinisches Tageblatt*. As manager of the Free German Stage, however, Jacob's approach to politics was extremely cautious. The stage had to navigate the interests of distinct, often conflicting groups, including financial backers, antifascist activists, and Zionists. Plus, its cast was composed of actors with divergent political and religious views. In addition to tensions within the refugee population, the enterprise was subject to the politics, laws, and whims of Argentine authorities, which generally were unfavorable to antifascist organizations. Furthermore, the larger, wealthier, nationalist colony and official representatives of the Nazi government in Buenos Aires were antagonistic to the stage. The German embassy could harm the troupe in Argentina and also caused its members to fear retaliation against their families in Europe.¹⁰⁹

108. Arndt, interview, 2008.

109. Jacob to Pauly, August 27, 1942, PWJAK.

Caution dictated Jacob's approach even before the FGS's debut, initially scheduled for August 1939. As he recalled, all preparations had been made when the outbreak of war in Europe provoked the postponement of the inauguration until the following April. During this crisis, donors, ensemble, and administration alike were concerned about potential repercussions from Argentine authorities. Of the four Argentine presidents during World War II, Roberto Ortiz (1938–42) was the only pro-Allies head of state. Scholars have argued that should have caused Jacob to feel a measure of security, yet the volatility of Argentine politics meant a profascist regime could come to power at any time.¹¹⁰ Already in 1939 Ortiz suffered from severe diabetes, which eventually blinded him and forced him to cede the daily execution of his office to the vice president, Ramón Castillo, in July 1940. A fascist sympathizer, Castillo officially assumed the presidency in 1942, and under his authority Argentine politics shifted drastically to the right. Jacob and his sponsors also feared disruption by the nationalist German population, such as the riots that the German consulate had organized to sabotage productions of Ferdinand Bruckner's *Race* at the Comic Theater in 1934.¹¹¹ A similar affair at the House of Theater would have had cataclysmal consequences for the nascent FGS.

When the FGS opened in 1940, its guarded approach to tentedious drama continued even as it simultaneously attempted to placate political organizations, such as *Das Andere Deutschland*. Although *DAD* showed comprehension of the financial complexities facing the stage, it expected political agitprop theater. *DAD* enthusiastically promoted Maurice Rostand's pacifist drama *The Man I Killed* (1930), scheduled for April 1940, as an appeal for German-French fraternity and reconciliation, "a goal that we all desperately desire."¹¹² Bitterly disappointed when Jacob abruptly

110. Pohle, "“Paul Walter Jacob am Rio de la Plata: Der Kurs der FDB—eine exilpolitische Gratwanderung,” 40; Trapp, "Zwischen Unterhaltungsfunktion und der Erwartung politischer Stellungnahme." Both Pohle and Trapp note infighting among refugees, but do not consider other threats to the stage.

111. Willi Köhn to MP, December 18, 1934, Band R55, Akte 20553, BB.

112. "Freie Deutsche Bühne," *DAD*, March 15, 1940.

replaced Rostand's play with Ibsen's *Master Builder* (1892), *DAD* speculated that a section of the FGS public had threatened to boycott *The Man I Killed* because they opposed its pacifist message.¹¹³ In this context, the wording "we all" from its preview can be read as a preemptive effort to counteract protests against the play.¹¹⁴ The conflict surrounding Rostand's drama pitted believers in the fundamental moral integrity of Europe, such as *DAD*, against others who had permanently renounced Europe and especially Germany—namely, Zionists. Sensing this as a warning of future confrontations, *DAD* urged immediate dialogue, identifying the debate as a decisive, fundamental question.¹¹⁵ As early as 1940, conflicting views on issues of collective German guilt portended the polarization of the refugee population. Jacob later remembered the affair as a major altercation with his cast, public, and political associates.¹¹⁶ Divisions among refugees, though yet to fully erupt, were already widespread on both sides of the curtain. Furthermore, promotions of Ibsen's drama as a timeless work relevant to all spectators in all countries also reflect efforts to mollify hostilities.¹¹⁷ The replacement of *The Man I Killed* with *Master Builder* represented a calculated move away from divisive contemporary politics toward universal, enduring moral questions.

Contemporary political dramas also risked inciting Argentine authorities and nationalist Germans, obliging the FGS to line edit its promptbooks and omit any potentially polemical material. When the stage produced Bruno Frank's comedy *Storm in a Teacup* (1930) in 1940, Jacob deleted several passages, including probably the best-known line of the play, in which an older lady, speaking to a judge about her mixed-breed dog, blurts: "Well, it's nothing for Hitler anyway." Jacob explained: "Neither our political friends nor our Jewish friends understood, but I knew that if Hitler were named on a foreign-language stage in Buenos Aires, the

113. "Abgesetzt!" *DAD*, May 15, 1940.

114. "Freie Deutsche Bühne," *DAD*, March 15, 1940.

115. "Abgesetzt!" *DAD*, May 15, 1940.

116. PWJA VIII c) 454.

117. Jacob, *Sieben Jahre Freie Deutsche Bühne in Buenos Aires*, 29.

police would ban the Free German Stage the next day.”¹¹⁸ Already splitting his public into distinct groups, Jacob unequivocally stated that concerns about running afoul of the Argentine government motivated this self-censorship. The FGS took care to avoid political controversy during its infancy, because this was the surest strategy of preventing trouble with local authorities *and* of circumventing quarrels among refugees. Passages naming Hitler directly, even in a comedy like *Storm in a Teacup*, were deemed too hazardous for the new enterprise. With the lone exception of Vilém Werner’s *Men on Ice* (1936), which is more concerned with generational conflict and moral decay than current politics, during the entire 1940 season the FGS did not produce a single play written after 1933.

Nonetheless, it was impossible for the theater to elude all controversy. Even before the debut of the FGS, *La Nación* introduced the troupe as artists who were forced to suspend their work on stages in Germany.¹¹⁹ With an ensemble composed entirely of European refugees, most of whom were Jewish, it was a fait accompli that the group would be viewed as an antifascist entity. Moreover, as *La Nación* noted, the actors had claimed a political platform by naming themselves the Free German Stage. Local press outlets compelled them to choose sides. Before the theater’s inauguration, the British *Buenos Aires Herald* sent a journalist to verify that the FGS was an anti-Nazi stage. During an interview with the *Herald*, Liselott Reger and Hermann Geiger-Torel took unequivocally antifascist positions on international events. Geiger-Torel declared that the cast stood with the British against Nazi Germany. Reger, who had acted in Czechoslovakia from 1928 to 1938, debunked the German propaganda effort leading to the 1938 Munich Agreement: “There was no repression. . . . Masaryk and Benes allowed all German expression there. To say the Czechoslovakia ill-treated its German minority was a lie.”¹²⁰ In these declarations, the FGS affirmed its antifascist principles and indicted Nazi German diplomacy to a publication outside the refugee colony and in a language

118. PWJA VIII c) 454.

119. “Ofrecerá su primera función hoy el Teatro Alemán Independiente,” *LN*, April 20, 1940.

120. “Free German Stage,” *BAH*, April 9, 1940.

spoken far more widely in Argentina than German. Word spread quickly.

German ambassador Edmund von Thermann included a clipping of the article in a report to Berlin, describing Geiger-Torel's and Reger's comments as poisonous to the new Germany. The embassy's report included analysis of banned authors in the FGS's repertoire, as well as of the theater's advertising, ticket sales, and its potential to impact the greater Argentine public and theater scene. From Thermann's perspective, the greatest danger the group posed to Nazi interests was as a facilitator of integration between refugees and their Argentine hosts. Thermann evaluated the ability of the FGS to influence Argentine theater and mainstream opinion as low, claiming Argentines knew it represented an insidious anti-German propaganda campaign by Jewish emigrants, yet the ambassador's own report undercut his conclusion.¹²¹ Although he argued that the FGS would be ineffective because few Argentines spoke German, Thermann noted that FGS productions were often reviewed in *La Prensa* and *La Nación*, two of the nation's most widely read newspapers, with a combined daily circulation of 450,000.¹²² Including the *Herald* interview, Thermann's dispatch proved that the Spanish- and English-language press already covered the theater. The ambassador also mentioned that one actor, Walter Szurovy, was married to an opera singer at the Colón Theater. Though it was not included in Thermann's commentary, through cursory research Nazi officials could learn that Geiger-Torel and the actress Hedwig Schlichter-Crilla's brother, Viktor Schlichter, were well-known figures in the Argentine music scene. Finally, as a public institution and residence for local actors, the House of Theater was conducive to interaction with Argentine theater personalities. Thermann was dismissive, but his report might have raised concerns among his superiors in Germany.

Six weeks later, the Propaganda Ministry wrote to the Reich Theater Chamber blacklisting the FGS as a "Jewish enterprise"

121. Thermann to FO, October 4, 1940, Band R55, Akte 20553, BB.

122. In 1936 *La Prensa*'s circulation was 230,000; *La Nación*'s was 220,000 weekdays and 340,000 weekends.

and forbidding German publishers to send it any materials.¹²³ Then, in early 1941, an anonymous source accused Reger and Jacob of tax evasion. Only after Argentine financial regulators had scrutinized FGS accounting books, receipts, and contracts was the cast granted permission to perform the next season.¹²⁴ No direct proof exists that Nazi supporters or officials made the denouncement, but circumstances suggest suspicion of these groups. There were altercations among refugees, but an indictment of the entire theater for tax evasion would have served nobody and risked collateral damage. By contrast, the German embassy had connections to the Argentine police and fiscal authorities. During fund-raising activities, antifascist organizations repeatedly warned Jacob to be wary of Nazi chicanery.¹²⁵ Local adversaries reported on the FGS to Berlin and may have intervened against it on several occasions. Ambassador Thermann's dispatches also indicate that as the FGS gained recognition in local media and built relationships with Argentine artists, the embassy might have been provoked to intensify its campaign against the theater.

Nazi officials in Argentina and Europe took the FGS seriously, and especially worried that the antifascist troupe could weaponize integration against their interests in the region. For his part, Paul Walter Jacob feared that the nationalist population would mobilize its partnerships with Argentine institutions to attack his enterprise. As antifascists and nationalists antagonized each other, the FGS worked to cultivate intercultural networks as leverage against opposition. An example was the grand tribute for the legendary director Max Reinhardt upon his death in 1943. Although its aftermath was marred by infighting among cast members, the event was a resounding intercultural artistic and financial success.¹²⁶ Held on November 17, 1943, this spectacle of solidarity with refugee artists was attended by many celebrities of Argentine stage and screen,

123. MP to President of Reich Theater Chamber, November 21, 1940, Band R55, Akte 20553, BB.

124. Jacob to Berger, November 22, 1943, PWJAK.

125. PWJA VIII c) 454.

126. See above, pages 000–000.

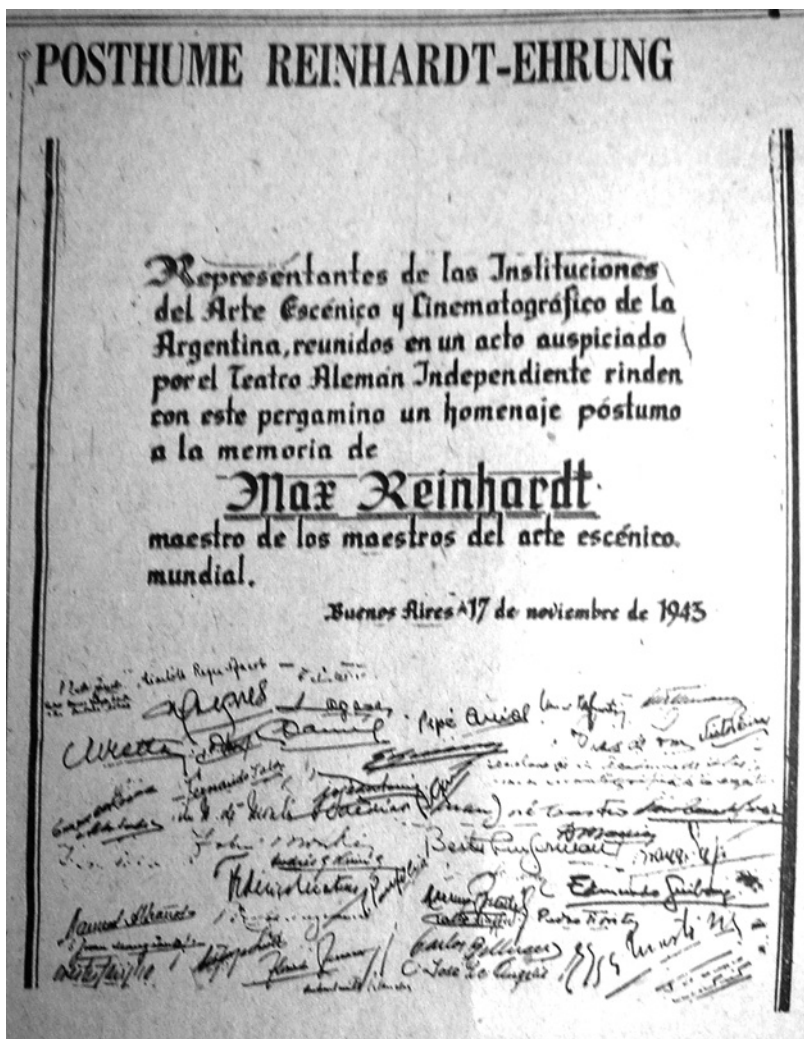


Figure 5. Signatures of Argentine attendees at the tribute to Max Reinhardt on November 17, 1943.

Source: Argentinisches Tageblatt, November 17, 1943. Biblioteca Nacional Doctor Mariano Moreno—Argentina.

such as actresses Delia Garcés and Juanita Sujo, critic Chas de Cruz, actor and director Enrique de Rosas, producer Manuel Peña Rodríguez, as well as screenplay-writer, director, and producer Alberto Zavallía.¹²⁷ The event garnered the FGS notoriety in the Argentine entertainment industry, which was critical to creating the intercultural alliances the stage needed to survive. Despite their political differences, all blocs in German Buenos Aires recognized the power of integration and eventually utilized theater as a tool to achieve it.

The specter of attacks by German officials was not the only motivation to diminish conflicts with Nazi sympathizers. Like emigrant literati Balder Olden and Paul Zech, Paul Walter Jacob distinguished between local German nationalists and the German embassy, regarding many of the former as victims of propaganda and intimidation.¹²⁸ Personally convinced that theater would play a major role in reeducating Nazi supporters, as an entrepreneur he also realized that the enterprise's profits would increase significantly if it could draw audiences from throughout German Buenos Aires. As early as 1943, he began planning for this opportunity.¹²⁹ Jacob wanted to avoid an overly confrontational course with nationalist Germans because he believed the political and financial future of the FGS was hitched to both German colonies in Argentina. During World War II, the troupe could not stay afloat without backing from antifascists and Zionists, as well as from less politically and religiously engaged emigrants, so it worked to reduce infighting among these groups. Furthermore, it had to withstand aggression from the German embassy and local profascist groups. With an eye toward the postwar period, however, it also strove to achieve tenable relationships, or at least avoid open conflict, with the Argentine authorities and nationalist Germans. This daunting balancing act caused the theater's approach to political drama to be characterized by utmost caution.

It was not until 1942, when much of the Americas became directly involved in World War II, that the FGS began to put on

127. "En memoria de Max Reinhardt," *Noticias Graficas*, November 19, 1943.

128. "Deutsches Schauspiel 1934," *Argentinisches Wochenblatt*, June 9, 1934.

129. Jacob to Berger, November 22, 1943, PWJAK.

contemporary tendentious plays. It opened the 1942 season with Robert Ardrey's *Thunder Rock* (1939), its first presentation of a US-American playwright as well as its first serious contemporary drama. Antifascist and Zionist media organizations greeted this development enthusiastically. The Communist *Volksblatt* approved the choice and pressed for more agitprop theater. The paper asserted that it was incumbent upon Paul Walter Jacob to bring the wishes of his public in line with the moral obligations of performing exilic theater.¹³⁰ By meeting this challenge, the *Volksblatt* concluded, he could achieve greater loyalty among theatergoers, thereby improving ticket sales. Upon closer scrutiny, this strategy reflected an overly sanguine outlook. The *Jüdische Wochenschau's* reviewer focused exclusively on the moral relevance of *Thunder Rock*, explaining that Ardrey depicted current dilemmas, which should not be withheld from those who did not attend the production.¹³¹ This hinted at poor ticket sales, and even the *Volksblatt* acknowledged unsatisfactory attendance. Its arts section featured an exuberant review, but its youth page bemoaned empty seats and a dearth of younger spectators.¹³² Despite mobilizing readers to vote for political dramas,¹³³ the *Volksblatt* was disappointed that *Thunder Rock* received just 6.6 percent of the vote in audience polls for the 1942 season.¹³⁴ The media did not convey the preferences of theatergoers, who still avoided tendentious plays.

Now in its third season, the Free German Stage had established itself as a popular cultural institution and entertainment venue by catering to a public that clearly preferred the lighter muse. As American nations became militarily involved in the war, however, its cast felt increasing pressure to put on more political plays.¹³⁵ In September 1942 *Das Andere Deutschland* served as a forum for Paul Walter Jacob and Hans Jahn, editor of *DAD's* arts section, to

130. "Leuchtfener von Robert Ardrey," *Volksblatt*, May 7, 1942.

131. "Leuchtfener," *JW*, April 24, 1942.

132. "Jugendseite," *Volksblatt*, May 7, 1942.

133. "Fragebogen der F.D.B.," *Volksblatt*, November 1, 1942.

134. "Publikumsabstimmungen über den FDB Spielplan 1942," *AT*, November 22, 1942.

135. PWJA VIII c) 455.

exchange opinions about exilic theater. Though neither named the FGS directly, the title of Jacob's response, "Free German Theater—Today," left little doubt as to the subject of their discussion. Writing first, Jahn acknowledged that a refugee ensemble faced intimidating challenges, but he also insisted that such a theater had the ability to advance ideas that could not be expressed elsewhere and in a way that no other medium could. It must not shirk this duty. Displeased with the ratio of comedies to political dramas, Jahn addressed theatergoers. Showing sympathy for thespians whose livelihood depended on ticket sales, he scolded audiences for boycotting political dramas, forecasting the harsh judgment history would pass on "emigrant spectators."¹³⁶ In response, Jacob reiterated the case for lighter fare, emphasizing that comedies have an uplifting psychological influence on refugees. Next, departing from earlier, somewhat equivocal statements, Jacob argued that an exilic theater also must stage authors "who courageously confront our times and our world. As reflections, appeals, and accusations these plays speak to thespians and theatergoers directly."¹³⁷ Unlike in 1940, Jacob now recognized a duty to put on political plays, provoke audiences to grapple with current events, and catalyze them to action.

Jacob's deeds supported his words. In addition to *Thunder Rock*, the FGS staged *The Lamb of the Poor* (1929) by Stefan Zweig, who had twice visited Argentina before committing suicide in Brazil. In Argentina, under General Ramón Castillo's fascist military regime, Lieutenant Fauré's cry "Down with the dictatorship! Long live the republic!" represented a bold provocation.¹³⁸ The FGS had deceived the censor by deleting Fauré's lines from the summary of the play it submitted to the Argentine police.¹³⁹ Unlike its diluted rendition of *Storm in a Teacup* two years earlier, this production kept Zweig's play intact, including its most controversial passages.

In *DAD* Jacob also set forth the political convictions underpinning his evolving position on tendentious drama. Even in 1942, he

136. "Das Emigrantentheater und sein Publikum," *DAD*, September 1942.

137. "Freies Deutsches Theater—heute," *DAD*, September 1942.

138. PWJA VI j) 36.

139. PWJA VIII c) 455.

wrote, it still had not penetrated the collective consciousness that the truly revolutionary forces of the day were also the real conservatives. Hitler's enemies were striving for the preservation, rescue, and continued development of cultural, scientific, and artistic values. Contextualized in the pages of *DAD*, an antifascist publication, Jacob's words were unambiguous. By defining antifascists as conservatives, he rejected the Zionist position that German culture was inherently flawed. Fascism represented a recent corruption of the values of a nation that, in his view, was historically and fundamentally good. Nazism represented aberration, not essence. More explicitly, performing German-language theater in exile manifested faith in a restored and renewed postwar Germany.¹⁴⁰ As manager of the FGS, Jacob accommodated divergent viewpoints, but his declarations in *DAD* flatly contradicted the Zionist platform. Instead of evading religious and political themes, by 1942 Jacob was willing to engage with current political events and confront his public.

This new course was fraught with peril. In taking on Nazism and factions within the refugee colony, Jacob jeopardized the Free German Stage as a community-building institution. His new strategy found favor with international groups of antifascists in Buenos Aires, but it was sure to exacerbate the strife simmering in the emigrant population, as well provoke the ire of Nazis and German nationalists. In publicly standing with antifascists, Jacob no longer prioritized inclusion and restraint above all else. The deployment of dramatic presentations as divisive, politically charged events escalated partisanship among Argentina's German speakers. Bitter and hardened, the resultant polarization would prove very resistant to reconciliation.

Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine*

A clarion call for US-American intervention against Nazism, Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine* (1941) won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for best play of the 1941 season and was selected by President Roosevelt for a command performance

140. "Freies Deutsches Theater—heute," *DAD*, September 1942.

at the National Theater in Washington, D.C., in January 1942. In 1943, Warner Brothers produced *Watch on the Rhine* as a feature film starring Bette Davis and Paul Lukas, who won an Academy Award for best actor. Paul Walter Jacob referred to the Free German Stage's rendition of Hellman's drama as a watershed event, which made the Argentine theater world view the FGS cast as equals. Simultaneously, he remembered it as probably the most polemical presentation of the entire exile period.¹⁴¹

In December 1941, Jacob wrote to Lillian Hellman requesting her permission to put on *Watch on the Rhine* in German. He was searching, he explained, for a programmatic drama to "proclaim the antifascist position of our group."¹⁴² Events between Jacob's letter to Hellman and the premiere rendered the selection more daring. During this period several countries bordering Argentina, including Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay, officially entered World War II. The United States exerted heavy pressure on Argentina to follow suit. Hellman's purpose in *Watch on the Rhine*, as the family matriarch, Fanny, says in the final scene, was to shake naïve, noninterventionist US-Americans "out of the magnolias" and make them aware of the threats fascism posed for their country and the world.¹⁴³ This message dovetailed with the aims of anti-fascists and Zionists, who were frustrated by emigrants' passivity. On the other hand, in a country under a profascist authoritarian regime with a large population of German nationalists, as well as official representation from Germany, Hellman's directive courted retribution. Having read and edited the script, Jacob decided that preparations had to be secretive.

To reduce the risk of preemptive actions on the part of nationalist Germans and Argentine authorities, Liselott Reger obscured the drama by translating its title to *The Unvanquished*. All advertisements referred to the play as either *The Unvanquished* or Spanish translation, *Los Invictos*, and most also omitted Hellman's name.¹⁴⁴ Next, Jacob wrote to the *Argentinisches Tageblatt's* theater critic. After divulging that the piece was indeed *Watch on the*

141. PWJA VIII c) 455.

142. Jacob to Hellman, December 26, 1941, PWJAK.

143. Hellman, *Four Plays*, 330.

144. PWJA VI c) 289.

Rhine, Jacob explained that the volatile situation in Buenos Aires had provoked him to camouflage the play. He requested that the preview consist only of an announcement of the upcoming premiere, specifically warning against mentioning its plot and political tilt: "If the other side finds out, we can expect disturbances."¹⁴⁵ The *Tageblatt* obliged, and the premiere occurred as scheduled.¹⁴⁶

Hellman's play unfolds in the Farrelly family home near Washington, D.C., in 1940. The matriarch, Fanny Farrelly, presides over a household whose inhabitants include her adult son, David, and a couple formed by an American friend of the family, Marthe, and her husband, Teck de Brancovis, an opportunist Romanian count, who collaborates with the German embassy. Forced into a loveless marriage with Teck, Marthe is engaged in a budding romance with David that brightens the drama with a campy subplot. The action begins when Fanny's daughter, Sara, returns home with her three children and husband, Kurt Müller, a German engineer, with whom she has been living in Europe. Suspicious, Teck searches the Müllers' room and finds money intended to finance underground antifascist operations in Germany. Shortly thereafter, Kurt learns that a fellow resistance fighter has been arrested in Berlin, and he resolves to return to Germany to assist him. Aware that Kurt will be in peril if the Nazis discover him, Teck demands \$10,000 to keep silent, so Kurt kills him. Throughout the drama Fanny and David are reluctant to recognize the menace of Nazism, but now, finally convinced, they agree to hide the body and help Kurt escape.

The Unvanquished was eminently suitable for the environment of Buenos Aires in 1942. The Farrelly household is a diasporic space in which natives share ground with foreigners, who comprise supporters and victims of Nazism. Like the Argentine capital, the Farrelly home is territory in play, wedged among opposing groups who vie for influence. The FGS believed Hellman's drama would resonate among its public and bolster antifascist movements in Argentina; however, it also realized the play could stir controversy among refugees. While the translated title served to hide the

145. Jacob to Reinhard Pauly, August 27, 1942, PWJAK.

146. "Südamerikanische und deutschsprachige Erstaufführung von *Die Unbesiegten*," AT, August 28, 1942.

drama from nationalist Germans and the Argentine censors, Liselott Reger's translation of the original script incorporated numerous changes targeting the local audience. Notably, her translation was void of religious references. For example, she changed the name of Kurt's wife from Sara to Judith. Since a 1938 Nazi decree required all Jewish females to carry the name of Sara, theatergoers might have believed Kurt's wife was Jewish, which was not Hellman's intent.¹⁴⁷ Kurt's story about how he became an antifascist was edited, too. In Hellman's script, Kurt brings this monologue to its climax by quoting Martin Luther: "I say with Luther, 'Here I stand. God help me. Amen.'"¹⁴⁸ Reger included these lines, but Jacob, who directed the production, subsequently cut off the monologue directly before the reference to Luther.¹⁴⁹ The FGS closely edited its depiction of Kurt and his family to emphasize the potential in each person, regardless of religion, nationality, or political affiliation, to respond to the call of conscience and fight Nazism.

German antifascists in Argentina were convinced that despite Nazi crimes, German culture and character were not inherently bellicose or racist. Organizations such as *Das Andere Deutschland* avowed time and again that an extensive underground anti-Hitler resistance network existed in Germany. The anti-Nazi resistance fighter Kurt Müller, a Gentile, lent credence to this thesis.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, Kurt retains a sense of patriotism where, as he says, it is appropriate.¹⁵¹ Hellman's contention that true German patriots rejected National Socialism dovetailed with Jacob's own views, but the two versions of the play diverged profoundly on Nazi culpability. Reger's translation of one conversation is so irreconcilable with the English original that it is expedient to cite both, beginning with Hellman's text:

Kurt: We may well some day have pity. They are lost men, their spoils are small, their day is gone. (*To Teck*) Yes?

147. Second Ordinance on the Implementation of the Law on the Change of Family Names and First Names, August 17, 1938.

148. Hellman, *Four Plays*, 277.

149. *Die Unbesiegten*, PWJA VI j) 329, 14.

150. *Die Unbesiegten*, PWJA VI j) 329, 32–33.

151. *Die Unbesiegten*, PWJA VI j) 329, 34.

Teck: (*slowly*) You have an understanding heart. It will get in your way some day.

Kurt: (*smiles*) I will watch it.¹⁵²

Reger's German text, translated into English, reads:

Kurt: They are lost men, their spoils are small, their day is gone. (*To Teck*) Yes?

Teck: (*slowly*) You have an understanding heart, Mr. Müller. Things will turn out the way you expect.

Kurt: We'll make sure of it.¹⁵³

Some of the slippage could be mistranslation rather than willful deviation but, in either case, theatergoers in Buenos Aires saw a profoundly different version of this scene than that witnessed by North American audiences. First, Reger deleted Kurt's line about "pity" for National Socialists. As refugees performing for spectators who had suffered persecution under Hitler in Europe, the Free German Stage was unyielding on questions of Nazi culpability. Second, Teck's and Kurt's comments on the latter's "understanding heart" are conflictive. In Hellman's dialogue Kurt's sense of empathy is a potential vulnerability, but the translation shows only a keen and confident perception of the struggle between Nazis and antifascists. Further, in the original play Teck doubts an antifascist victory. In the German production, by contrast, both men agree that antifascism will triumph. A warning to Nazi officials and collaborators, these lines likely intended to boost the morale of antifascists, whose situation in Argentina was precarious.

Although Hellman's depiction of Germans and Nazi collaborators is nuanced, she does not downplay the danger that Nazi officials represent. The true menace in the play is the German embassy in Washington, D.C. Viewers never see the agents—they remain ominous figures lurking offstage, much as most refugees experienced Nazi officials in Buenos Aires.¹⁵⁴ All real peril in the

152. Hellman, *Four Plays*, 316.

153. *Die Unbesiegten*, PWJA VI j) 329, 33.

154. "Nazidiplomaten in Südamerika," *AT*, July 23, 1941; "Naziverschwörungen," *AT*, August 12, 1941; "Nazitätigkeiten in Argentinien," *AT*, August 28, 1941.

drama emanates from the embassy. German diplomats enable Teck to discover Kurt's identity, and their presence provides the count with leverage to blackmail him. The embassy's illicit business with a contraband munitions dealer conveys its involvement in larger-scale machinations. Hellman's portrayal of the German government's parasitic arm in the United States bears uncanny parallels to Nazi diplomats in Argentina. In October 1943 Oscar Alberto Hellmuth, a German-Argentine carrying an Argentine diplomatic passport, was intercepted at Trinidad by British forces while on a secret mission to Germany. In collusion with German officials in Buenos Aires, the fascist president of Argentina, Pedro Pablo Ramirez, had sent Hellmuth to Berlin to purchase German weapons and smuggle them to Argentina. The event, which rendered Argentina a pariah in the Americas, manifested the insidious influence that Hellman claimed Nazi diplomats exerted on host countries.¹⁵⁵

An influential political drama, Hellman's play is also accessible family entertainment. The Müller's children synthesize moments of comic relief with a compelling motive for antifascist activism—the future of the world's youth. Nine-year-old Bodo communicates his father's *weltanschauung* with a simple vocabulary and an endearing delivery. The drama's romantic relationships also contributed to its appeal. Kurt's passionate farewell kiss to Judith resembles a Hollywood love story, and the final scene in which Marthe and David affirm their love is more dime-novel romance than political theater. Reviewers from the *New Republic* to the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* lamented this subplot as a dispensable concession to mainstream audiences, yet Hellman's self-proclaimed goal was to galvanize ordinary citizens to fight Nazism, and these scenes served that end.¹⁵⁶ Other dramas with similar intent, such as Ardrey's *Thunder Rock*, made fewer concessions but had limited reach. The FGS put on *Thunder Rock* for 550–600 people; attendance

155. "Erklärungen des nordamerikanischen Staatsdepartements," *AT*, July 28, 1944; "Pressestimmen über Argentinien's Politik," *AT*, August 10, 1944; "Wirtschaftskrieg gegen Argentinien," *AT*, August 19, 1944.

156. "*Die Unbesiegten* von Lillian Hellman," *AT*, August 31, 1942.

of *The Unvanquished* numbered in the thousands.¹⁵⁷ *The Unvanquished* won polls for favorite drama of 1942 with 23 percent of the vote, a huge proportion given that twenty-five dramas were in the running.¹⁵⁸

The biographical overlaps among Hellman's characters, the cast, and theatergoers added poignancy. On November 14, 1942, the FGS presented *The Unvanquished* to a sold-out audience at Uruguay's national opera house with the young actor Frank Nelson playing the role of Bodo for the first time. Although he was instructed to wear a brave face as Kurt leaves in the final scene, the departure evoked such overwhelming memories of Nelson's own flight from Europe that he began to sob onstage.¹⁵⁹ In this scene Nelson's semiotic body, rooted in dramatic text and representing Bodo Müller, disappeared amid the true tears of his phenomenal person, his bodily being-in-the-world, thus violating the boundary differentiating the character being played and the actor's own body.¹⁶⁰ Transgression against the phenomenal/semiotic boundary can cause concern for the physical or emotional integrity of the actor, thus violating the rules of theatrical performance. The audience should feel compassion for the character within the framework of the fictional work, but not for the actor himself. In case of the contrary, the relationship between the spectators and the actor changes profoundly, becoming less professional and more personal.

Nelson was so appalled by his outburst that he was ashamed to face the crowd after the final curtain, but the audience empathized with him.¹⁶¹ They reacted to Nelson as refugees who had suffered firsthand the anguish of departing from loved ones without knowing if a reunion would ever take place. When the director dragged Nelson back onstage, he was greeted with an ovation. His mistake as an actor added solidarity to the theatrical spectacle.

157. "Theater und Literatur," *DAD*, October 1942.

158. "Die Publikums-Abstimmung über den FDB-Spielplan 1942," *AT*, November 22, 1942.

159. Roca, *Días del Teatro*, 189.

160. Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, 4–5.

161. Roca, *Días del Teatro*, 189.

The *Tageblatt* noted the strong resonance among the public,¹⁶² and Paul Walter Jacob later remembered the evening as the most emotional of his career.¹⁶³ Unlike Jacques Arndt's miscue a few years earlier, Nelson's error launched decades of success as an actor in South America. In Vienna a racially exclusive community rejected Arndt's phenomenal identity as a Jew; however, the spectators-cum-community in Uruguay empathized with Nelson as fellow refugees.

The Müller family's life as impoverished refugees on the run overlapped with that of thespians and theatergoers alike. In one scene Kurt Müller merged his biography with the many anonymous emigrants on the River Plate, referring to himself as a "*not famous exile*."¹⁶⁴ By adding italics absent from the original script, the FGS willfully emphasized these parallels. Most spectators, including many Jews, identified with the Gentile Müllers, whose travails recalled their own. Referencing Kurt's background as an exiled antifascist activist, Paul Walter Jacob claimed that the play was the FGS ensemble's "self-portrayal."¹⁶⁵ Not everybody agreed with him.

Zionists and antifascists clashed over Hellman's drama, and especially over the character of Kurt Müller. In a programmatically worded review, the *Tageblatt* declared that all emigrants thanked Hellman for clarifying that the fronts of World War II also ran through Germany.¹⁶⁶ The implication that Zionists were among those who should be thankful met with a vehement retort from the *Jüdische Wochenschau*. Whereas Jacob, Nelson, and others felt that the drama verged on biography, the *Wochenschau* argued that it rarely bridged the gap between truth and fiction. Describing Müller as pure fantasy, the reviewer caustically dismissed the notion a large antifascist movement in Germany: "In reality a duplicitous Romanian count is not necessary to betray the few righteous fighters of a truly different Germany. There are millions of

162. "Die Unbesiegten," AT, November 21, 1942.

163. Jacob, *Sieben Jahre Freie Deutsche Bühne*, 48.

164. *Die Unbesiegten*, PWJA VI j) 329, 15.

165. PWJA VIII c) 455.

166. "Die Unbesiegten," AT, August 31, 1942.

Germans who do the same work, but cheaper.” Accusing Hellman of naivete, the paper asserted that it was no coincidence that a US-American had written the play—German authors knew there was no antifascist underground. In conclusion, the reviewer indicted the “overwhelming majority” of the German nation for supporting atrocities against Jews.¹⁶⁷ The *Wochenschau* contradicted antifascists, who insisted that ordinary Germans were victims, not perpetrators, of Nazi crimes.

The review did not go unanswered. The *Tageblatt* validated the play, claiming that Hellman’s thousands of pages of notes attested to the thoroughness of her research.¹⁶⁸ *Das Andere Deutschland*, incensed by what it felt to be a direct attack on its legitimacy, was more confrontational. It flatly rejected the *Wochenschau*, asserting that its reviewer knew nothing of the thousands of imprisoned and tortured dissidents in Germany. The only explanation for such ignorance was that he had not fought Nazism himself, and was guilty of exactly the posture Hellman rebuked in her drama. If the reviewer had not actively resisted Nazism, he shared the blame for its rise.¹⁶⁹ Rather than ceasing to put on the drama, the FGS deployed Hellman’s play to honor antifascist activism and encourage dialogue. Further presentations commemorated the German actor Albert Bassermann’s birthday, the fifth anniversary of the death of Thomas Masaryk, and raised funds for prisoners at the Gurs concentration camp in France.

Paul Walter Jacob celebrated Bassermann as the thespian representative of Hellman’s “unvanquished” antifascist Germans.¹⁷⁰ A colleague of Otto Brahm, Leopold Jessner, and Max Reinhardt, the German Bassermann protested the spread of militant nationalism before emigrating to Switzerland and then the United States with his Jewish wife, Else Schiff. Speaking at the performance, Jacob reiterated his belief in a reformed postwar Germany by wishing that soon a new world would greet the famous actor. Next, the

167. “*Die Unbesiegten*,” *JW*, September 4, 1942.

168. “Lillian Hellman,” *AT*, September 16, 1942.

169. “Ein Unglücklicher,” *DAD*, October 1942.

170. “Bassermann zum 75. Geburtstag,” *AT*, September 6, 1942.

cast came before the curtain, read a birthday card to Bassermann, and then passed the letter around the theater so spectators could sign it, congratulate Bassermann, and, in so doing, imply their own approval of Jacob's antifascist platform.¹⁷¹ Weeks later the actor responded gratefully, closing with "Pereat Hitler."¹⁷² Bassermann ratified an intercontinental solidarity based on opposition to Hitler, sentiments the *Tageblatt* reinforced by publishing both letters in its Sunday edition.¹⁷³

The Free German Stage next put on *The Unvanquished* to honor Thomas Masaryk, founder and first president of Czechoslovakia. The audience included well-known members of the local Czechoslovakian, Hungarian, Austrian, German, Dutch, French, English, and US-American populations. In its review, the *Buenos Aires Herald* noted that many members of the ensemble had emotional bonds to Czechoslovakia, "the last European country where they could play theatre freely."¹⁷⁴ Writing for the *Tageblatt*, Paul Walter Jacob extolled Masaryk as a universal model for leadership, guided by truth, tolerance, and courageous dignity. Jacob expressed solidarity with Czechs in Buenos Aires by hoping that a liberated Czechoslovakia would effect the broader European renaissance, "in which we will never cease to believe."¹⁷⁵ The presentation acclaimed Masaryk, another "unvanquished," and exhorted the diverse emigrant population in the Argentine capital to reaffirm antifascism in his memory. Staged just three months after Czech freedom fighters had assassinated Reinhard Heydrich, the acting governor of Bohemia and Moravia and head of the Reich Main Security Office, the Masaryk commemoration was poignantly timed. Proceeds went to the local Czech envoy for the reconstruction of the town of Lidice, destroyed by the Nazis in retaliation for Heydrich's assassination.¹⁷⁶ Propelled by the shared spectacle of live theater, an international

171. "Bassermann-Ehrung der F.D.B.," *AT*, September 7, 1942.

172. Bassermann to Jacob, September 30, 1942, PWJAK.

173. "Bassermann dankt der F.D.B.," *AT*, October 18, 1942.

174. "Tribute to Late Czech President," *BAH*, September 18, 1942.

175. "In Prag vor fünf Jahren," *AT*, September 14, 1942.

176. František Kadeřábek (Czech envoy to Argentina) to Jacob, September 18, 1942, PWJAK.

antifascist community confirmed its commitment to a resurgent postwar Europe.

On October 17, 1942, the FGS staged *The Unvanquished* for an unprecedented fifth performance in as many weeks. Displaying solidarity with victims of Nazi persecution, ticket sales went to aid internees in the Gurs concentration camp in Vichy France. The secretary for the Gurs charity, Carlos Hirsch, sent the cast a letter of gratitude, signed by all members of the organization's advisory board, including Bernhardt Swarsensky, editor of the *Jüdische Wochenschau*.¹⁷⁷ Hirsch expressed reservations about Hellman's drama, but his approach was measured. Performing *The Unvanquished* to support causes that resonated among all members of the refugee population, the FGS at least temporarily persuaded antifascists and Zionists to moderate their tone.

In November the troupe traveled to Montevideo, Uruguay, for its annual guest performance, featuring a final production of *The Unvanquished*. Though it did not endorse Hellman's directive, the *Wochenschau's* preview praised the fund-raising performances and encouraged its Montevidean public to attend the drama.¹⁷⁸ Instead of stoking tensions with antifascists, the paper called for candid dialogue about *The Unvanquished*, which was less risky in democratic Uruguay than in authoritarian Argentina.¹⁷⁹ The FGS invited theatergoers to remain after the final curtain for an open exchange of opinions about the play.¹⁸⁰ By providing a space and impetus for its public to meet, converse, and engage in debate in person, the cast aimed to foster constructive dialogue and initiate reconciliation among emigrant blocs. Nonetheless, despite such efforts, ultimately the fallout from such tendentious dramas deepened divisions in German Buenos Aires.

Hellman's blend of political messaging, simple comedy, and romantic melodrama garnered the Free German Stage unprecedented attendance and fame. Perhaps more than any other play,

177. Hirsch to Jacob, October 17, 1942, PWJAK.

178. "Theater in Montevideo," JW, November 1942.

179. PWJA VIII c) 455.

180. "Die Unbesiegten," AT, November 21, 1942.

The Unvanquished bore witness to the capacity of theatrical energies to potentiate polemics, activate audiences, and construct and cleave community. Charity presentations united emigrants of multiple nationalities and faiths in spiritual and material support of antifascism. Individually and collectively, the FGS cast drew from these intercultural alliances to surmount political and professional challenges in the years to come. Yet, these were costly achievements. By elevating disputes about German identity, anti-fascist activism, collective guilt, and the possibility of a reformed postwar Germany to the theatrical stage, the FGS publicized and hardened hostilities among refugees. The act of fomenting solidarity among certain groups was contingent on the exclusion of others. While uncompromising Zionists were implicitly pushed to the fringes of the community being built, supporters of Nazism were explicitly ostracized and attacked. The dramatic depiction of the fight against Hitler mobilized antifascists and nationalists alike.

Retribution

While the Free German Stage worked with mixed success to transform the infighting about *The Unvanquished* into a constructive debate among refugees, the reactions of nationalist Germans were beyond its control. In an earlier report to the Foreign Office, Ambassador Thermann had indicated that his greatest concern was the troupe's ability to reach beyond German-speaking refugees.¹⁸¹ The ambassador had deemed this to be unlikely, but after three seasons of steady coverage in diverse media the stage had successfully disseminated its anti-Nazi message to a broader audience. In consequence, German and Argentine authorities appear to have retaliated. The Nazi government had already denaturalized Paul Walter Jacob for his journalistic activities in 1938.¹⁸² On October 3, 1942, Jacob learned in a communiqué from the Dutch Red

181. Thermann to FO, October 4, 1940, PWJAK.

182. "Bekanntmachung," *Deutscher Reichsanzeiger und Preußischer Staatsanzeiger*, April 20, 1938.

Cross that he had suffered another, more painful injustice. On September 18, 1942, just three weeks after the debut of *The Unvanquished*, his parents committed suicide while facing imminent arrest and deportation by the Gestapo. Perhaps worse, the documentation from the Red Cross included a wire stating that his parents had waited for news from Argentina to no avail.¹⁸³ Jacob had sent letters, but evidently they had never arrived. He never knew how they might have influenced his parents. There is no direct evidence that Jacob's work with the FGS was connected to the accusations against his parents; however, the timing and circumstances of their deaths are suspicious.¹⁸⁴ Neither Jacob nor the ensemble ever discovered whether the events were related, but the tragedy intensified the psychological weight on the actors, many of whom had family in Nazi-controlled territory. According to Jacques Arndt, who lost contact with his mother in 1941 and later learned that she had been murdered in the Shoah, the cast seriously considered dissolving the stage when they received word of Jacob's loss.¹⁸⁵

As the FGS raised its profile outside German Buenos Aires, Nazi officials correspondingly increased support for Ludwig Ney's German Theater. On December 4, 1942, the embassy wrote to Berlin requesting subventions of 4,000 reichsmarks for Ney's stage. The request, which the Ministry of Propaganda quickly approved, contrasted the German Theater with the FGS's repertoire featuring many playwrights prohibited in Germany. Thermann falsely argued that Ney warranted funding because large numbers of Argentines attended the German Theater's presentations of genuine German culture.¹⁸⁶ Emphasizing the German Theater's cultural legitimacy and propagandistic potential, the embassy reinforced it as a foil against the FGS. The proximity of a competing theater whetted the political edge of antifascist and nationalist groups.

183. Dutch Red Cross to Jacob, October 3, 1942, PWJAK.

184. Fanny Jacob to siblings, PWJAK. The undated letter is placed between correspondence from September 30 and October 3, 1942.

185. Arndt, interview, 2008.

186. Thermann to FO, December 4, 1942, Band R55, Akte 20553, BB.

The FGS incurred further adversity in January 1944, when it was evicted from the House of Theater.¹⁸⁷ Ostensibly, the motive was a reform in municipal regulations for theaters, which, following a spate of fires, now enforced a stricter safety code. Although the FGS had played there for four full seasons, the auditorium was not officially licensed as a theater, and the necessary reforms were prohibitively expensive. Turnover in the institution's administration also worked against the troupe. Pedro E. Pico, coauthor of *The Nutshell*, had resigned from his position as president of the House of Theater in 1943. Moreover, Arturo Mario, a renowned actor and manager of the House of Theater, died that August. Mario had secured the venue for the FGS in 1940 and was an invaluable contact for the stage as it navigated a foreign theater world. For months after Mario's death, theater programs for the FGS featured a bilingual notice mourning his passing.¹⁸⁸ These were its last productions at the House of Theater.

In addition to the regulations and the new administration, several actors wondered if other, unknown reasons motivated the expulsion of the company. As fascism gained currency among Argentina's military regimes, Jacob worried about the passage of decrees that could render further performances impossible.¹⁸⁹ There is no incontrovertible evidence that Argentine authorities or the German embassy intervened against the FGS, but there are reasons for suspicion. Jacob received hate mail throughout his time in Argentina; however, during 1943 and 1944 there was a spike in intimidation by nationalist Germans.¹⁹⁰ These letters came on the heels of a tense encounter between Jacques Arndt and the vice president of the House of Theater, Pascual Carcavallo.¹⁹¹ The FGS urgently desired to continue using the auditorium, because the chances of finding a suitable substitute were slim. In January 1944

187. Jacob to Ensemble, January 15, 1944, PWJAK.

188. "Programmheft zu *Der Mann, der zum Essen kam*," PWJA VI b) 281.

189. Jacob to Ensemble, February 19, 1944, PWJAK; Jacob to Ensemble, March 17, 1944, PWJAK.

190. Anonymous to Jacob, May 26, 1944, PWJAK.

191. Jacob to Arndt, January 22, 1944, PWJAK.

Jacob offered to pay the rent for the coming season in advance, thus providing capital for the necessary renovations. Jacob entrusted Arndt, who spoke better Spanish, with presenting the proposal to the House of Theater administration. When Arndt met Carcavallo, the latter preempted Arndt and said all attempts were futile. The House of Theater had had problems with government agencies because of the FGS, and it would not allow the company to play there again. When Arndt explained that the advance rent would solve such problems, Carcavallo intimated that renovations were not the issue: "We no longer will allow . . . any foreign groups in this building. We are a public institution, we receive state subsidies, and it is, under the prevailing circumstances, impossible to maintain the status quo."¹⁹² He insisted that Arndt remove all stage props from the premises immediately, lest he have more trouble with the authorities.¹⁹³ Instead of the municipal regulations, Carcavallo disclosed that the motive for evicting the FGS was government pressure against foreign-language theaters at the venue. Since the House of Theater was partly a state-sponsored institution, the government's intervention was decisive. This is striking because during the 1943 and 1944 seasons Ludwig Ney's group played at the National Theater, which also received public funding. The FGS may or may not have been specifically targeted, but these cases indicate that the rules against foreign-language theaters were not applied consistently. The Free German Stage would perform occasionally in unlicensed, privately funded auditoriums, but for the duration of World War II it never again played at any other state-sponsored locale.

This was a major blow, because replacing the House of Theater was impossible. Its size, central location, availability for weekend presentations and midweek rehearsals, and inexpensive daily rent were a singular combination. The FGS could not afford to rent any theater for the full season, and weekend prices for licensed auditoriums were prohibitive.¹⁹⁴ It finally arranged eight weeks of

192. Arndt to Jacob, January 20, 1944, PWJAK.

193. Arndt, interview, 2006.

194. Jacob, *Sieben Jahre Freie Deutsche Bühne*, 65.

performances at a ballroom in the north of the city. This was a solution beset with problems, including fewer presentations per piece, less desirable time slots, scant storage space, no on-site rehearsals, higher rent, and an inconvenient location.¹⁹⁵ Jacob was so desperate for an alternative that he offered a 100-peso reward for anyone who could find another locale—to no avail.¹⁹⁶

Meanwhile, despite the growing likelihood of a German defeat in the war, the FGS faced strong headwinds under the overtly fascist regime of General Edelmiro Farrell, who took power in February 1944. Not only were Farrell's politics antithetical to the ensemble, but under Allied pressure Argentina had broken off diplomatic relations with Germany that January, causing increased restrictions on all German-language media and entertainment. The stage now required a police permit for each production, which further problematized securing a venue.¹⁹⁷ The volatile environment impacted its repertoire, too. After the 1943 season the FGS ceased performing political dramas. Amid such adversity Jacob openly doubted the enterprise's viability. The troupe could only begin its fifth season with an initial eight-week cycle of performances, beyond which there were no guarantees.¹⁹⁸

Days before the 1944 season premiere, Jacob issued an unprecedented public appeal to theatergoers. Proud to announce that the FGS would launch its fifth year with its hundreth premiere, an astounding number, Jacob also posited the coming season as a proving ground for the FGS's value to the refugee community. He warned that its days were numbered if attendance for its first ticket cycle declined.¹⁹⁹ In desperate straits, the ensemble barely managed to play regular functions for the full 1944 season. It eventually relocated from the ballroom to the House of Catalonia, which was at least a true theater, though situated in the San Telmo

195. Jacob to Ensemble, March 17, 1944, PWJA 1944.

196. "Hundert Pesos-Prämie der F.D.B.," AT, March 26, 1944.

197. Jacob to Ensemble, January 15, 1944, PWJAK. The authorities did not enforce these measures on Ludwig Ney's German Theater.

198. Jacob to Ensemble, February 19, 1944, PWJAK.

199. Appeal to the audience of the Free German Stage, PWJA VI b) 281.

neighborhood, far away from the Belgrano district, where most refugees lived. Furthermore, it was not licensed for regular theatrical productions, so the FGS could play there only twice weekly. The enterprise finished the season with a deficit, but attendance was sufficient to keep it afloat.²⁰⁰ Importantly, Argentine theater organizations began to recognize the FGS's achievements and sought its participation in administrative and celebratory functions. The Argentine Actors Association expressed a "special interest" that the cast attend its annual award gala, and the Artistic Cultural Association invited the cast to its meetings with the explicit motive of integrating them in the local theater community.²⁰¹

In November 1944 the Free German Stage honored the German actor Conrad Veidt, who had died in Hollywood on April 3, 1943. Best known for his portrayal of Cesare in Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), Veidt was a vocal antifascist who emigrated in 1933 to protect his Jewish wife, Ilona Preger. The commemoration, held in the cavernous Grand Cinema Splendid, was crucial for the FGS, which needed a strong showing at the box office to salvage its balance sheets.²⁰² Thanks to collective efforts by the local theater and film industry, the event was a resounding success. The intercultural production featured the French opera star Jane Bathori; Ulises Petit de Murat, a poet, screenwriter, and Veidt's colleague; influential film and theater critic Chas de Cruz; and the famous singer and actress Berta Singerman. Many other Argentine celebrities attended the commemoration, which also included a speech by Paul Walter Jacob and a screening of Lothar Mendes's film *Jew Süß* (1934), starring Veidt in the title role.²⁰³ The event found a strong media echo.²⁰⁴ The film magazine *Cine*

200. Jacob to Albert Maurer, November 10, 1944, PWJAK.

201. Argentine Actors Association to Jacob, October 14, 1944, PWJAK; Artistic Cultural Association to Jacob, August 1, 1944, PWJAK.

202. Jacob to Maurer, November 30, 1944, PWJAK.

203. Unlike Veit Harlan's film of the same title, Mendes's *Jud Süß* is true to Lion Feuchtwanger's 1925 novel.

204. "Homenaje se tributó a Conrad Veidt," *Antena*, November 30, 1944; "Homenaje a Conrad Veidt," *El Plata*, May 14, 1944; "En memoria de Conrad Veidt," *Revista Familiar Israelita del Uruguay*, May 15, 1944.

reprinted Jacob's entire speech, which concluded: "Everything that he did during the final decade of his life was done to demonstrate to the world his convictions against racial persecution."²⁰⁵ Veidt reflected the FGS's antifascist platform, and the illustrious guests at the event represented the international public's ringing approval.

In crisis, the FGS's many accomplishments came to the fore. Its integration into the local theater scene enabled the ensemble to win pivotal local and international support. Despite tensions among Zionists and political antifascists, audiences visited less comfortable, distant venues in sufficient numbers to sustain the enterprise during the tenuous 1944 season. Furthermore, after it finished the year with a large deficit, the emigrants and Argentine celebrities raised funds to save the theater. Despite worsening altercations with Zionists and German nationalists, its perseverance demonstrated that the Free German Stage had become an intercultural institution that was fundamental to the refugee community and increasingly interwoven with the national theater scene.

The Free German Stage: An Anti-Jewish Theater?

In a 1943 letter to the Jewish Cultural Society, Paul Walter Jacob asserted that the Free German Stage was indisputably a Jewish theater. Its public was overwhelmingly Jewish, its cast was 90 percent Jewish, and 80 percent of the authors in its repertoire were Jewish. Nonetheless, profound divergences existed on questions of Jewish identity among refugees.²⁰⁶ The FGS struggled and ultimately failed to reconcile the postures of antifascist groups and moderate Jewish theatergoers with those of Zionist institutions, including the Zionist Forum, the Jewish Cultural Society, and the *Jüdische Wochenschau*.

At the close of the 1941 season, the *Wochenschau* congratulated the FGS on two years of performances, but then contended that its success was not attributable to broad support from German Buenos Aires. The paper put Gentile Germans, regardless of

205. "Conrad Veidt," *Cine*, December 14 and 29, 1944.

206. FGS Ensemble to JCS [Jewish Cultural Society], August 12, 1943, PWJAK.

political affiliation, in a separate colony, which was reluctant to visit the exilic theater. The *Wochenschau* designated the entire anti-Nazi population as Jewish and claimed that without its support the FGS would fail. Praising Jacob for employing Jewish refugees, the paper argued that Jewish organizations were obliged to aid these artists in the off-season, but not Gentile thespians. It then warned: "We expect adherence to Judaism and a Jewish way of life from all Jews, but especially from those who are themselves dependent on Jewish solidarity."²⁰⁷ Having defined Jewish identity according to a Zionist view, which, for example, excluded Arthur Schnitzler from the ranks of Jewish playwrights, the *Wochenschau* asserted that FGS's repertoire must represent these values. It was incumbent on the company to present dramas that rejected European culture and advocated a return to the principles of Judaism as a guide for life. Otherwise, Zionists threatened to withdraw their support. During the 1942 and 1943 seasons, the FGS paid Zionists heed. It put on several plays with Jewish themes, including Nathan Bistritzky's *That Night* (1938), Hans Rehfisch and Wilhelm Herzog's *The Dreyfuss Affair* (1929), and J. Aialti's *Father and Son* (1943), and took part in events sponsored by the Theodor Herzl Society, the Jewish Cultural Society, and the Zionist Forum. Some actors joined these organizations as a gesture of solidarity, yet onstage such efforts were divisive. Dramatic depictions of Zionist interpretations of Jewish identity sowed discord, not solidarity.

On November 9, 1942, the FGS presented the American premiere of *That Night* by Nathan Bistritzky, a Jewish author living in Palestine. Organized by the Zionist Forum and Karen Kayemeth Leisreal to raise funds for Kfar Argentina, a group working to establish an Argentine moshav in Palestine, the event also memorialized the 1938 November pogroms. The program featured an image of a sapling growing inside the skeleton of a razed synagogue, thus visually associating the November pogroms with the Zionist mission. Inside, spectators found essays by the movement's foremost figures admonishing Jews to make aliyah, that is, resettle in their

207. "Kleine Chronik," *JW*, November 1, 1941.

natural and spiritual home of Eretz Israel. Other contributors, such as Hugo Benedikt of the local Bar Kochba organization, chastised refugees for neglecting their spiritual roots, failing to learn from the past, and risking further persecution in the future. In “The Incurrigibles and Us,” Hugo Lifezis buttressed Benedikt’s argument with the case of Hermann Oppenheim and Josef Ticho, leaders of UNION, the assimilationist opposition to Zionists in Vienna, who had to be rescued and resettled in Palestine after the German annexation of Austria. In their example Lifezis saw a moral imperative for Zionists: if Jews had not learned from history’s lessons that assimilation is annihilation, then Zionists were obliged to rescue the incorrigibles “*against their will*.”²⁰⁸ According to Lifezis, the Zionist mission need not match the disposition of emigrant Jews. As an independent theater, the Free German Stage had a contrasting perspective. It had to cater to the predilections of its public; otherwise insufficient attendance would cause the enterprise to become insolvent.

The selection of Bistritzky’s *That Night* reflected Lifezis’s position. Although theatergoers clearly preferred comedies, Bistritzky’s drama follows the model of a Greek tragedy. *That Night* dramatizes the eve of the Roman conquest of Jerusalem, provoking the Jewish diaspora from Israel. Bistritzky blames this disaster on the Jews themselves. Infighting, egoism, and spiritual decay splintered the Jewish people and their leaders in an hour that demanded unity and sacrifice. Bistritzky eternalizes the rabbi of Israel, Jochanan ben Sakai, who prophetically sees that the Jewish future is galuth. Feigning death, the rabbi encloses himself in a coffin to elude the Romans’ attack, preserving the proud, unyielding Jewish spirit needed for a second Jerusalem.²⁰⁹ *That Night* culminates in a double tragedy—Sakai’s daughter mourns her father’s false death as the Romans make their final assault on Jerusalem.

The play was harsh medicine for an involuntary patient, and both Argentine Jews and refugees spurned *That Night*. The *Jüdische Wochenschau* lamented that Bistritzky’s play proved how

208. Program, *That Night*, PWJA VI b) 28 (emphasis in original).

209. “*In jener Nacht*,” AT, November 9, 1942.

far Zionists were from persuading most Jews in Argentina to espouse the Zionist agenda. Sadly, Jews had not advanced a single step in the past millennium. The same selfishness, partisanship, and decline in piety continued to fester, hindering the realization of a second Jerusalem.²¹⁰ Private reactions betrayed similar disillusionment. In a letter to Karen Kayemeth Leisreal, the Zionist Forum bemoaned: "The balance is morally and financially shameful."²¹¹ The Forum had advertised in the *Wochenschau*, *Jiddische Zeitung*, *Mundo Israelita*, and *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, and on radio. It distributed 10,000 flyers, sent 120 formal invitations to Jewish organizations, and peppered street corners with posters. The results were abysmal—40 percent of the tickets went unsold, and the Forum calculated that only seventy Argentine Jews in total attended *That Night*. At a loss to explain this lack of support, the Forum reasoned that many Argentine Jews spoke Yiddish and thus could have followed the dialogue. An aversion to German, the language of Herzl, Max Nordau (cofounder of the World Zionist Organization), and Einstein, was incomprehensible. Finally, Bistritzky's commitment to Jewish faith and unity should have appealed to all Zionists in Buenos Aires. Instead, the opposite had occurred: "This was an opportunity to show togetherness. What happened? NOTHING!!!"²¹² Although offstage the Forum had trusted in a multinational community of like-minded allies, onstage *That Night* exposed the factional relations between Argentine and German-speaking Zionists.

Attendance among Jewish refugees was hardly better. Only 580 of them bought tickets, numbers that, had they endured for a full month, would have bankrupted the FGS. Bistritzky's drama flopped so badly that plans for a guest performance in Montevideo were scrapped.²¹³ While the Forum felt that painful memories of the November pogroms accounted for refugees' absence, the organization itself also was to blame.²¹⁴ The fiasco of *That Night* indicated

210. "In jener Nacht," JW, November 13, 1942.

211. Zionist Forum to Keren Kayameth Leisreal, November 18, 1942, PWJAK.

212. Zionist Forum to Keren Kayameth Leisreal, November 18, 1942, PWJAK.

213. Jacob to Friedländer, August 20, 1943, PWJAK.

214. Zionist Forum to Keren Kayameth Leisreal, November 18, 1942, PWJAK.

that Zionists' sharp tone alienated most Jewish refugees and that genre played a major role in bringing spectators to the theater.

The following year, mounting reports of the mass extermination of European Jews heightened awareness of the Shoah in South America. In this historical context, Zionists in Argentina redoubled their efforts to win over more Jewish refugees. In August 1943 the Jewish Cultural Society sponsored the FGS's production of the world premiere of J. Aialti's drama *Father and Son*, which had appeared a year earlier as a serialized novel in *Di Presse*, a local Yiddish newspaper. Set in occupied Paris, the play centers on a young resistance fighter, Sokolowski. After a bomb he detonates kills several Nazis, the Gestapo gives notice that fifty civilians will be executed unless the perpetrator is reported to the police. When Sokolowski's name is divulged, his father is arrested and sentenced to death if his son does not surrender by dawn. When the younger Sokolowski moves to turn himself in, his mother tells him that his father wishes to die so he can continue fighting. The play closes with the surety of the father's execution and his son's determination to avenge his death.

Across the media spectrum reviews of the cast in *Father and Son*, like those for *That Night*, were positive. The *Diario Israelita* noted the biographical parallels between the play and the actors, and *Di Presse* gushed over an unforgettable performance.²¹⁵ The *Jüdische Wochenschau* demurred, criticizing what it considered to be a superficial depiction of Judaism, but otherwise its review was affirmative.²¹⁶ The *Tageblatt* and the Communist *Volksblatt* joined in the accolades, wishing the FGS packed houses.²¹⁷ Spectators did not cooperate. The weak attendance came as no surprise to Paul Walter Jacob, who had put on Aialti's play only to placate Zionist organizations. Writing to Rabbi Günter Friedländer, coeditor of the *Wochenschau*, Jacob reiterated that dramas favored by Zionists consistently repulsed audiences. It was no coincidence that

215. "Vater und Sohn," *Di Presse*, August 24, 1943.

216. "Vater und Sohn," *JW*, August 27, 1943.

217. "Ein Zeitstück von J. Aialti," *Volksblatt*, September 1943; "Vater und Sohn," *AT*, August 22, 1943.

Father and Son had drawn the fewest spectators of any drama for the entire season, because promoting Jewish content always resulted in lackluster ticket sales. Jacob concluded that Zionists did not represent most refugees, and he retaliated against pressure to stage more specifically Jewish plays: "How should we show 'greater consideration' for Jewish audiences if they, as ticket receipts clearly show, want nothing to do with plays that speak to their Jewish interests?"²¹⁸ According to Jacob, *That Night* and *Father and Son* failed because of their Jewish content. Friedländer evidently lacked a counterargument, since he never answered Jacob's letter, yet an explanation existed. Aialti and Bistritzky flopped because of their somber tones and grim plots, not only their Jewish content.

Although theatergoers preferred entertainment over politics and religion, the most successful dramas, Carl Rössler's *The Five Frankfurters* and Lillian Hellman's *The Unvanquished*, combined elements of all three. Rössler and Hellman weaved humor and romance into plots that addressed serious issues of Jewish identity and antifascist activism, respectively. The FGS premiered over 100 dramas from 1940 to 1945, and ticket sales for these two plays far exceeded all others. Their unmatched success indicates that theatergoers favored dramas that addressed political and religious themes over benign, irrelevant farces.

As the *Argentinsches Tageblatt* observed, Bistritzky's *That Night* made no concessions to audiences, and Aialti's merciless, almost cruel mode of expression depicted a world of injustice, suffering, and death.²¹⁹ Carl Rössler, by contrast, lightened his treatment of Jewish integration with comedy and romance. Despite his sacrifices for the antifascist cause, Hellman's Kurt Müller plays the piano, enjoys a joke, and, above all, loves his family with warmth and tenderness. Bistritzky and Aialti's protagonists lacked this balance. Rabbi ben Sakai deliberately feigns death before his own daughter, and Sokolowski is a hardened combatant who expresses cold

218. Jacob to Friedländer, August 20, 1943, PWJAK.

219. "In jener Nacht," AT, November 9, 1942; "Vater und Sohn," AT, August 22, 1943.

insensitivity toward life.²²⁰ He loves his father, but leaves him facing execution. As the *Diario Israelita* put it, when the curtain fell on Aialti's *Father and Son* the elder Sokolowski's Jewish piety earned him mortal punishment.²²¹ The dark review intimated that Sokolowski's murder was the collective fate of the Jewish people. A brooding drama that offers scant hope for resolution of the myriad of excruciating dilemmas it presents, *That Night* culminates in the certainty that God's chosen people will spend thousands of years in the anguish and dispersion of galuth. In the final lines of Rössler's *The Five Frankfurters*, by contrast, Salomon kneels at his mother's side and anticipates his daughter's Jewish marriage with tears of joy. Bistritzky's Rabbi Jochanan ben Sakai, scuttled away in a casket as Jerusalem burns, cuts a depressing figure in comparison.

One theatergoer's letter to Paul Walter Jacob contextualized audiences' aversion to tragedies in the psychology of living as a refugee. After Nazi persecution, flight from Europe, and struggle in exile, the writer, Mr. Talpa, wished only "to stop crying!"²²² For him and his peers visits to the theater were holidays, and on such occasions they preferred "cake" to "hard bread." Simple comedies and serious dramas alike could win over an audience; it just depended on fulfilling the public's emotional needs. Most important of all was the connection between the actors and their audience. Successful plays, Talpa explained, engendered intimacy, empathy, and affection between performers and spectators. Most refugees were tired of conflict, so they found the confrontational rhetoric of the Zionist Forum off-putting. They had little appetite for the elder Sokolowski's somber march to death and his son's aloofness. They did not empathize with such characters; thus the essential bond between thespians and theatergoers was absent. *Father and Son* and *That Night* were too harsh and despondent for a public whose prevailing wish was to cease crying. When offered "hard bread" instead of "cake," most refugees preferred to stay at home.

220. "In jener Nacht," AT, November 9, 1942; "Vater und Sohn," AT, August 22, 1943.

221. "Vater und Sohn," *El Diario Israelita*, August 22, 1943.

222. Talpa to Jacob, February 25, 1945, PWJAK.

The debacle of *Father and Son* culminated a full year of alterations among the FGS and Zionist organizations. Zionists were frustrated with the stage's reluctance to perform more religious dramas and resented Jacob's alignment with antifascists. The FGS actors countered that they had participated in events at Jewish organizations, volunteered in presentations for Jewish charities, and observed all Jewish holidays, even though this harmed their commercial interests.²²³ The cast felt Zionists not only had failed to recognize their efforts at cooperation but were antagonistic toward the FGS. Jacob accused Bar Kochba and the Jewish Cultural Society of scheduling activities to compete with his enterprise, even claiming that they hired artists with links to fascist groups in lieu of supporting fellow refugees.²²⁴ In August 1943, an administrator at the Jewish Cultural Society accused the FGS of being an anti-Jewish theater and objected to the presence of Gentiles in the troupe.²²⁵ Although the board of directors later denounced the comments, Jacob and his cast maintained that this unforgivable "Jewish Nazism" was pervasive at the Society.²²⁶ After years of failed productions and quarrels the Free German Stage, Jewish Cultural Society, and Zionist Forum decided that their differences were irreconcilable. Jacob canceled his membership in the Jewish Cultural Society, and the cast did not cooperate with Zionists for the remainder of the World War II period.

Performances about historical and current events directly disclose their ideological preferences within the specific social and the cultural context in which they have been created and presented.²²⁷ The reception of this position gauges the tenability of the tenor and political perspective presented onstage. In the context of Buenos Aires during the Second World War, audiences supported depictions of Jewish identity and antifascist activism, themes that

223. FGS Ensemble to JCS, August 12, 1943, PWJAK.

224. Jacob to Curt Zacharias, September 14, 1943, PWJAK.

225. FGS Ensemble to JCS, August 12, 1943, PWJAK.

226. Arturo Nussbaum and Enrique Frohmann to Jacob, August 20, 1943; Jacob to JCS, September 14, 1943, PWJAK.

227. Rokem, *Performing History*, 24.

contributed to the formation of a resilient community of emigrant and native artists and theatergoers. The same spectators spurned Zionists' aggressive dogma and their choice of the tragic genre to advance it dramatically. Exposed and magnified by theatrical controversies, disputes among refugees became so intractable that the Free German Stage decided it could only prosper as an intercultural community-building institution by excluding Zionist organizations.

Franz Werfel's *Jacobowsky and the Colonel*

The FGS garnered glowing reviews and full houses for its production of the German-language premiere of Franz Werfel's *Jacobowsky and the Colonel* in the Americas.²²⁸ In Werfel's self-described comedy of a tragedy, set during the Nazi invasion of France in June 1940, a German-speaking Jewish businessman, Polish Catholic colonel and his orderly, and a Frenchwoman—Jacobowsky, Stjerbinsky, Szabuniewicz, and Marianne, respectively—embark on a perilous and hilarious series of adventures in a race against time to escape their Nazi pursuers. Over and over, Jacobowsky's savvy survival skills save them from disaster. Jacobowsky leaves the group after an envious Stjerbinsky challenges him to a duel, but the four are reunited in the coastal town of St. Jean de Luz, where an undercover officer in the British navy is waiting to take Stjerbinsky to England. All appears for naught when he insists that only two places are free in the ship, but then Marianne decides to join the French resistance and Stjerbinsky refuses to abandon his antagonist-cum-comrade. The happy ending is complete when the officer finally agrees to take Jacobowsky along.

Jacobowsky's improbable escape, and the many individual miracles sitting in the theater that evening in Buenos Aires, reflected a special talent that Ottmar Ette terms "knowledge for surviving."²²⁹ While fortunate, Jacobowsky's escape also is earned. A blend of wit, optimism, and affability is the basis of his survival skills. Some critics have accused Werfel of an excessively blithe approach to a

228. "Werfels *Jacobowsky und der Oberst*," AT, September 5, 1945.

229. Ette, *Zwischen Welten Schreiben*, 42.

dire moment in history, but his protagonist's wit has a serious role in this drama.²³⁰ As previously noted, the Holocaust survivor, neurologist, and clinical psychiatrist Viktor Frankl has theorized that humor can afford the ability to overcome extreme psychological duress.²³¹ Jacobowsky deploys humor to reduce potentially overwhelming situations to more manageable proportions, comparing the bombardment of Paris to a toothache, for instance. A vitalizing force for himself and those around him, Jacobowsky's humor is inextricably linked to his resilient optimism. He sees two possible outcomes for every dilemma, one of them always good. Stranded on a pier as the Gestapo closes in from behind, Jacobowsky holds fast to his belief in free will. Cyanide capsules in one hand and pills against seasickness in the other, he has two final possibilities and opts against suicide. Only after this final act of optimism does British commander Wright, convinced of his courage, offer him a place on his ship.

Neither Jacobowsky nor audiences at the FGS were immune to the hardships of exile; however, evidence suggests that like Werfel's protagonist, theatergoers attempted to bear this trauma with a smile. Not only did they cultivate humor and optimism by attending comedies, but refugees also tried their hand at germinating cheer as well. At their 1943 theater ball, the troupe played a ditty written by a fellow refugee, entitled "Optimism." The merry tune describes an emigrant who, like Jacobowsky, does his best to buoy his spirits, "unflaggingly hoping that everything will get better soon."²³² "Optimism," and other similar skits and songs penned by refugees, indicate that survival strategies on- and off-stage overlapped. Refugees in both contexts strove to stay upbeat, aware that if they succumbed to depression their chances of triumph were slim.

In Buenos Aires, too, Werfel's happy ending provoked criticism. The Socialist newspaper, *Freies Wort*, protested the drama's outcome: "Unfortunately the six million murdered Jacobowskies were

230. Wagener, *Understanding Franz Werfel*, 112.

231. Frankl, *Viktor Frankl Recollections*, 97.

232. PWJA VI a) 280.

not so clever.”²³³ Yet, the dramatist depicts the escape as narrow and unlikely. Upon reaching St. Jean de Luz, Jacobowsky’s two possibilities comprise variations of his death; his optimism has vanished. The Nazis arrest far more characters than they overlook, such as the many guests at Marianne’s hotel and dozens of people in the Café Mole. Furthermore, the seventeen suicides reported by the Gestapo represent the many victims who died in flight, compared to only two who can flee to safety. Historically and in Werfel’s drama, many refugees did not make it out of France, but others did, including hundreds of spectators in the House of Catalonia.

The links between Werfel’s exilic drama and German-speaking exiles in Buenos Aires were uncanny. Jacob, whose family name recalls Werfel’s protagonist, played the leading role. As he narrated Jacobowsky’s biography in the opening scene, Jacob essentially was telling his own life story. Acculturated Jews in pre-1933 Germany, Jacob and Jacobowsky grew up mistakenly convinced that they were Germans, and for both, their enthusiasm for German culture provoked the Nazis’ ire.²³⁴ At the time, Jacobowsky and Jacob each were on their fifth fatherland and shared several stations of exile, including Paris and Prague. Jacobowsky’s purchase of two expensive visas to an exotic, landlocked country paralleled the exorbitant prices that Jacob and fellow actor Ernst Wurmser paid for passports to Paraguay and Bolivia, respectively. When an official burns Jacobowsky’s papers, this was another bitter yet familiar situation for many thespians and theatergoers. Earlier that year Fred Heller, an exilic author and collaborator with the FGS, had published a collection of stories about emigrants who restarted life from scratch, *Life Begins Again*.²³⁵ Perhaps nothing underscored the linkage among such disparate refugees more than the nullification of their former identities by Nazi persecutors.

Preparing to play the reactionary, bellicose Polish Catholic Colonel Stjerbinsky, the Jewish Jacques Arndt had the sensation

233. “Franz Werfels *Jacobowsky und der Oberst*,” *Freies Wort*, November 1945.

234. “Jüdische Mimen nicht mehr gefragt,” *Essener National Zeitung*, March 30, 1933.

235. Heller, *Das Leben beginnt noch einmal*.

of reading a dramatized version of his own flight from the Nazis.²³⁶ Several reviewers referred to Arndt and Stjerbinsky as opposites; however, the *Jüdische Wochenschau* noted that both were refugees.²³⁷ Under the pressures of exile, differences may give way to novel, often improvised similarities. On Nazi wanted lists, both Stjerbinsky and Arndt adopted analogous tactics to remain hidden in plain sight, such as engaging in role playing. Werfel introduces elements of metatheater at numerous junctures in *Jacobowsky*. When a German patrol confronts the four refugees, Stjerbinsky deceives them by playing a ward from an insane asylum, participating in a metatheatrical spectacle performed for German soldiers-cum-spectators onstage before an audience of refugees-cum-theatergoers. Throughout their escape, Stjerbinsky conceals his identity as a Polish colonel. These scenes evoked Arndt's path across Germany years earlier, when he played the part of a Hitler youth to hide his identity as an absconding Jew. Arndt and Stjerbinsky had distinct backgrounds and conflicting morals, yet when they were forced into the role of refugees their survival tactics matched to a remarkable degree.

In the immediate aftermath of the Shoah, not all media in Buenos Aires were receptive to the inclusive intent of Werfel's play. The *Jüdische Wochenschau* welcomed the play's focus on the victims of Nazism, but it saw this group exclusively as Jews and ignored the many Gentile refugees, including the Tragic Gentleman, the Intellectual, and the Monk, whose descriptive names signal their representation of a diverse civilian population.²³⁸ As its title implies, both the Jewish Jacobowsky and the Catholic Stjerbinsky are essential to the drama. Their cooperation embodies Werfel's wish for interfaith harmony, also symbolized by the Wandering Jew and the Monk pedaling their tandem bicycle. Werfel's protagonists mirrored the cast of the FGS, an institution founded on intercultural

236. Arndt, interview, 2006.

237. "Franz Werfels *Jacobowsky und der Oberst*," *Freies Wort*, November 1945; "*Jacobowsky und der Oberst*," *AT*, September 21, 1945; "*Jacobowsky und der Oberst*," *JW*, October 2, 1945.

238. "*Jacobowsky und der Oberst*," *JW*, October 2, 1945.

antifascism and religious tolerance. In a letter to the Jewish Cultural Society, the ensemble declared: "Jewish and Gentile colleagues in our small company will stay loyal to the last. We are proud that 'racial' and religious prejudices play no role in our small enterprise. We all work together as like-minded artists."²³⁹ In the spirit of the FGS's own political convictions, the *Tageblatt* posited *Jacobowsky* as an appeal for human rights and respect for diversity. Just six months after World War II, Werfel's drama provided moral guideposts to prevent such a catastrophe from recurring.²⁴⁰ Despite the confident tone of their letter, however, the religious tolerance among the FGS's actors was always tenuous. Within and beyond the refugee colony, German Buenos Aires continued to be suffused by an intractable animosity that foretold the challenges of heeding Werfel's directive in the postwar period.

Some postliminary scholarship has perceived anti-Semitic "stereotypes" of the calculating, ingratiating Jewish businessman in Werfel's protagonist, yet no trace of such misgivings existed among thespians, theatergoers, and media in Argentina.²⁴¹ In 1995, the Viennese Court Theater invited Jacques Arndt to attend a commemorative presentation of *Jacobowsky's* premiere in Buenos Aires. Decades after his expulsion from Austrian stages, Arndt returned as a guest of honor. When asked to compare the productions, he replied that the essential difference was one of community. At the Free German Stage actors and spectators had shared a theatrical event that evoked mutual, real-life experiences. In Buenos Aires, Arndt mused, Werfel's drama was performed by Jacobowskies for Jacobowskies.²⁴² The refugee population did not see stereotypes; they saw themselves.

The spiritual kinship between Paul Walter Jacob and S. L. Jacobowsky endured far beyond the 1945 production.²⁴³ In 1947,

239. FGS Ensemble to JCS, August 12, 1943, PWJAK.

240. "Dichter sterben," *AT*, August 29, 1945.

241. Steiman, *Franz Werfel*, 174; Schwarz, "Franz Werfel und das Judentum." (lecture, Wiener Werfel-Symposium, Vienna, 1990)

242. Arndt, interview, 2006.

243. "*Jacobowsky und der Oberst*," *AT*, September 21, 1945.

the emigrant magazine *MMM* ran an article on Jacob entitled "Paul Walter Jacob-owsky."²⁴⁴ Some of his closest friends henceforth began their letters "Dear Jacobowsky."²⁴⁵ Others referenced Jacob's role in the drama when discussing their personal lives.²⁴⁶ Perhaps because of this lasting, intimate association, Jacobowsky became Jacob's defining role. When Dortmund's city theater put on Werfel's drama in 1960, the West German Broadcasting service reviewed Jacob's portrayal in biographical terms: "There is a level of sorrow so high that afterward nothing worse can come. Jacob has reached this decisive point, and that is why he so endearing."²⁴⁷ While this critic found Jacob's past disarming, other friends and colleagues believed that he was haunted by the insurmountable trauma of persecution, exile, and stymied reintegration.²⁴⁸ Marvin Carlson's neologism, "ghosting," describes how actors can become trapped in certain roles by their audiences' memories.²⁴⁹ Since his performative role as Jacobowsky so closely overlapped with his phenomenal person, Jacob was associated with this role on- and offstage. Historical plays, such as *Jacobowsky and the Colonel*, enable ghostly figures from the past to reappear onstage.²⁵⁰ The actors depicting such figures are in a sense repeating history, prolonging and deepening its resonance in the present. Playing Jacobowsky time and again, Jacob repeated a fictionalized history that was his own biography. Onstage he performed the imagined historical event of a refugee's flight from France, yet, ghosted by his role inside and outside of theater, he also was continually reliving his real experiences as a refugee.

Jacob remigrated to Germany for good in 1951, becoming general director of the Dortmund theater system. He also founded a children's theater program in Dortmund, launched a prosperous

244. "Paul Walter Jacob-owsky," *MMM*, March 1947.

245. Fritz Busch to Jacobowsky, January 28, 1946; Maurer to Jacobowsky, December 24, 1946, PWJAK.

246. Jacob to Fränkel, December 28, 1945, PWJAK.

247. Naumann, *Ein Theatermann*, 197.

248. Naumann, 203–234.

249. Carlson, *Haunted Stage*, 7.

250. Rokem, *Performing History*, 6.

career on German television, and played on stages across the Continent, including Barcelona, Lisbon, Nice, Antwerp, and Vienna. In Europe he enjoyed more artistic freedom, disposed of greater resources, and commanded higher wages than in Buenos Aires. Still, he never felt at home in postwar Germany. His alienation reflects Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's provocative statement: "Home is to have escaped."²⁵¹ According to the director Imo Wilimzig, even among close friends Jacob never overcame the psychological repercussions of this estrangement, which caused chronic loneliness.²⁵² Over and over Jacob requested the role of Jacobowsky for guest performances,²⁵³ and attempted several times to return to the renamed German Stage in Buenos Aires.²⁵⁴ He seems to have sought a way to recapture a sense of exilic solidarity that, like his native country, he had lost. Jacob later reflected that although he had not been aware of it at the time, his years in Argentina were also the peak of his career: "I never again felt the way I did with these people. We had a spiritual, indeed, I would almost say, existential bond. Our fates were all at each other's mercy."²⁵⁵ Despite the abundant acting talent in Germany he claimed he could never cast *Jacobowsky* there, nor hope for the impact it had in Buenos Aires.²⁵⁶ Jacob's comments are tinged by nostalgia. In addition to professional success, his years in exile were characterized by fear, feuding, and personal tragedy. Nonetheless, Jacob eventually grew certain that the Free German Stage represented an irretrievable sense of community and artistic achievement. In the alchemy of exile and return, Jacobowsky's ghost was relentless.

251. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 86.

252. Naumann, *Ein Theatermann*, 227.

253. Raoul Alster to Jacob, January 16, 1962, PWJAK.

254. Jacob to Willy Bodenstein, August 8, 1963, PWJAK.

255. PWJA VIII c) 455.

256. PWJA VIII c) 455.