

FOREWORD

As the reader will no doubt recognize, *Under Gentile Eyes*, the title chosen for this inquiry into some of the sundry ways in which Jews and Judaism have been represented in Christian Europe throughout the centuries, is quite blatantly an echo of Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911). While only the slightest of threads tied the Jewish world to the creator of such memorable characters as, to name but two, Lord Jim in the eponymous novel, or Kurz in *Heart of Darkness*, our title, *Under Gentile Eyes*, seems to us to epitomize with singular efficacy the intent and the criteria behind this monographic issue of «Materia Giudaica».

Yet, Conrad's rapport with Jews and Jewish culture is more nuanced, and our appropriation of that title less gratuitous than might at first appear. Born Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski in 1857 in the Ukrainian town of Berdychiv (then a part of the Russian Empire, with about 80% of Jewish population) to a noble parentage, Polish by language, family traditions, Catholic religion and fervent patriotism, Conrad was in all probability only partially immune from the generic anti-Semitism largely widespread not only within his own class but at all levels of society in the time and, particularly, in the part of Europe he grew up in. In 1918, however, when Frank Harris – a notoriously shady character, former editor of the London weekly «Saturday Review», and a literary enemy of Conrad's – publicly stated, clearly with the intention to insult, that he was a Jew, the novelist, whilst meticulously rejecting *per cartas* the allegation, «simply in the interest of truth», also added in his disclaimer that «[h]ad I been an Israelite I would never have denied being a member of a race occupying such a unique place in the religious history of mankind».¹

In 1886 Conrad had applied for, and obtained British nationality. In spite of this, to the end of his life he suffered the condition of, and was often addressed by critics as, an exile and an outsider, an “alien”, a polyglot cosmopolitan perennially aspiring to the kind of social and cultural assimilation (all entries, ironically enough, pertaining to the classic vocabulary of anti-Semitic discourse) which he eventually achieved, and enjoyed, thanks to the acquisition of, not a new passport, but a means of literary expression, the English language, the chosen instrument of the great English prose-writer he became. As shown by many of the papers in this volume, language, embodied in a wide variety of vernaculars, of popular and literary idioms, of forms and genres, reflects with striking clarity the perspective from which Christendom looked at, and “imagined” the Jews of its own particular time, but at the same time, by unquestioningly observing them through the lens of received tradition, perpetuated the stereotype of “the Jew”.

At the centre of this volume are the relations between the Jewish world (in its dimensions of material life, religious life, language, literature, music and cultural expression) and “other worlds”, particularly in Western Europe, which at times entertained fruitful relations with Jewish culture, but which also produced models of the “other” (in this case the Jew) variously connoted in terms of tolerance, satire or open hostility, even to the point of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. This complex of relations, in many ways asymmetrical, has been examined by means of historical and geographical inquiries, but above all by investigating the collective imagination, cultural representations and the concrete literary, theatrical, linguistic and musical products in which these representations take shape.

The first part (*History, Historiography, Cultural Paradigms*) opens with a reflection by Adriano Prosperi on some crucial passages in the history of the Jews in Italy, in relation to the general history of the peninsula and of its population. Veronese's and Dell'Aversano's essays touch on key issues in the relationships between the Jewish world and “other” worlds (respectively, *Cultural Paradigms in the Accusation of Ritual Murder*, and *Assimilation as a Logical Issue*.) Three other papers relate the image of the Jew to the social or cultural context in particular spaces and times, from Florence and Lucca between the

¹ *Mr. Conrad is Not a Jew*, «The New Republic», Aug. 24, 1918.

Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era (Toniazzi's paper) to Livorno in the Early Modern Era (Diana's *Attilio Milano's Unpublished History of the Jewish Nation of Livorno and his Letters on Labronic Issues (1965-1969): a Preliminary Study*) up to the Balkans between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Dell'Agata's *Paolo Sebastiano Medici, Sofronij Vračanski and the Image of the Jew in the Balkans*).

The second part is dedicated to the literary, theatrical and linguistic representations of Jews and the Jewish world in a chronological arc that goes from the Middle Ages to the Modern Age and up to the present day. The analysis ranges from medieval texts of the Iberian and French areas (Cigni's *Merlin and the Jew. An Anti-Semitic Marian Miracle in the Cantiga 108 of Alfonso X*), to the fantastic world of Sir John Mandeville (Mandeville's *Travels, Alphabets, and the Jews*), up to *The Languages of the Jews in the Italian Theatre of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Franceschini's essay) and the Spanish theatre of the Golden Age (Poggi's *Propaganda and Anti-Semitic Stereotypes in the Siglo de Oro*). The last two papers of this section finally look at the twentieth century in Germany (S. Grazzini's *From Stigma to Salvation? The Heimatlosigkeit of the Jews in Twentieth-Century German-Language Literary Discourse*) and in the Polish area (Tomassucci's *Jews and Gentiles in Borowski's Concentration Universe*).

The last part deals with *Art, Books, Music*. Liscia Bemporad invites us on *A Short Journey through Jewish Art*, A. Grazzini presents *A Rediscovered Anthology of Prints* of seventeenth-century theatrical pieces which include Jewish and Gypsy characters, while Cecchi's paper *Jewish Culture and Hebrew Language in Luciano Berio's Music* refers to the contemporary linguistic-musical world.

This monographic issue of «Materia Giudaica» is published in the context of the research project *Shem in the Tents of Yaphet. Jews and Judaism in non-Jewish places, languages and cultures*, funded by the University of Pisa. Some of the contributions in this volume develop papers already published in a previous book linked to the above-mentioned project and addressed to the Italian public.² Other articles are new. The volume as a whole, however, has been redesigned to appear in a prestigious publication such as the journal of the Italian Association of Studies on Judaism (AISG).

The presence of scholars from different fields (History, Linguistics, Literature, Visual Arts, Musicology) and the close relationship of the authors with the Interdepartmental Centre for Jewish Studies «Michele Luzzati» of Pisa University (CISE) as well as with the national and international organisations linked to it have fostered a highly interdisciplinary work and have ensured that our research has already had significant repercussions and recognition. We hope that this volume, which is the crowning but not the end of the research project, will arouse appreciation and interest at international level, but even more so, fruitful discussions and further research.

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² F. FRANCESCHINI, M. TONIAZZI (eds), *Shem nelle tende di Yaphet. Ebrei ed ebraismo nei luoghi, nelle lingue e nelle culture degli altri*, Pisa University Press, Pisa 2019.

PART I

HISTORY, HISTORIOGRAPHY, CULTURAL PARADIGMS

