



Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 17

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Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No. 17

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Selected topics

Adam von Trott's story (at some length)

Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff meets Marx

IB's attitude towards non-Western civilisations: Japan, India

Aldous Huxley

'Jewish Slavery and Emancipation' and why IB didn't reprint it

Keith Joseph, Arthur Koestler, T. S. Eliot

Namier on the Jews

T. S. Eliot and Wilhelm Busch

Busch's 'Naturgeschichtliches Alphabet'

Korney Chukovsky

IB's piece on Tippett

Side A

GC In the last meeting you stopped at a certain point and said, 'In the next meeting I have a story to tell you about von Trott.' The context was that I asked you about your relations with David Astor, about your articles at *The Observer* and so on, and you thought that David Astor was disappointed that you were not too friendly with ...

IB Not ...

GC ... friendly enough.

IB Well, I'll tell you the story.

GC What's the whole story of your relations with von Trott?

IB Right. I met von Trott I should say in 193... – either 1931 or 1932. I rather think at the beginning of 1932. When he was in his second year, I think, as a Rhodes Scholar, in Balliol. We were introduced by a friend of mine called Anthony Rumbold, Sir Anthony Rumbold of the Foreign Office, who was a friend of mine in some way. Anthony asked me to lunch with him, and I met him and I thought he was charming. He was very good-looking, he was very agreeable. He was lively, he was intelligent, he was quite serious, fundamentally, and he was one of the most agreeable people one could know, and one of the most cultivated. So we made friends. He was supposedly studying PPE, therefore philosophy, and so we used to go for walks and talk about philosophy, and other things. Also he was a great friend of my friend Shiela Grant Duff, who was at that time an undergraduate student in Oxford, who was a great friend [of], and subsequently what's called 'on intimate terms' with, my friend Goronwy Rees, who was a veritable scamp, but certainly a great friend of mine, to whose deathbed in fact I went, in London, in spite of everything, and he was very fond of me. He was a great friend of hers. She was a friend of Douglas Jay, who was my colleague in All Souls. She in turn had met von Trott somewhere. Von Trott in fact proposed marriage to her, which she didn't accept, because I think she was in love with Goronwy, in fact. Or maybe she wouldn't anyhow. Anyway, we met. And we used to go for walks, and I remember, whenever I asked him a question to which he didn't have a ready answer, he would say, 'At this point I fall back on Hegel', like a sort of net stretched under a man who is climbing a pole in case he slipped. As I hadn't read any Hegel, I didn't quite know how helpful this was. But he was full of humour, wit, and very handsome, and the highest compliment the English could pay him

was to say, 'You look like an Englishman.' An Englishman can't say more than that. He had some American blood, I think, of John Jay.¹ But anyway, his father was a Minister of Education under the Kaiser. They came from the Rheinland, from Westphalia, more from Kassel, that sort of neighbourhood. He had a brother who was a Communist, and another brother about whom I don't know very much. He was a Social Democrat at that time, a member of the Party. And in fact was very friendly with a man called – who afterwards became a refugee, a German refugee who hated de Tocqueville. What was his name – he had a bookshop. No, I've completely forgotten. Anyway ...

GC In London?

IB No.

GC In London?

IB He was at Oxford for a bit, not in London, I think, the bookshop. He was a German, an ordinary German Jewish socialist, who was a great friend of von Trott, certainly. Anyhow, he was a Social Democrat. Well, we were on very good terms, and – that's Aline. Let's stop for a moment. [...] We were great friends. I remember, when I was elected to All Souls, he was the first person to congratulate me, and I thought he was a man of very great charm, and a good character. Then came – we were definitely friendly, great friends, so much so that I kept on persuading him to come in for All Souls after he had done his examination, which would have been the end of 1932. No, I did mine [then]; 1933, I suppose. And then Christopher Sykes reprinted some of these letters in his biography of von Trott. Rather – I think they are rather gushing. Aline says they sounded as if we had a homosexual

¹ US Founding Father (1745–1829). Trott was Jay's direct descendant.

relation. That was not so. Neither of us was, and that didn't exactly arise. Anyway – love letters. There was no doubt we were great friends. I don't know how intimate, but anyway very familiar.

Then in 1933, just after Hitler came, he went to Germany for Easter, for the Easter vacation. Then he came back, and Collingwood, the philosopher, gave a party for him. There was nobody he didn't know. Von Trott's acquaintance in England was Lothian, Cripps, Lady – the Astor family because of David. David was a – more or less contemporary at Balliol. And he absolutely adored him. For David he was an absolute icon, he was the best man he'd ever known and he worshipped him. Then, wait a minute, who else did he know? He knew the Warden of All Souls, Adams, he was a friend of – he met Chamberlain, I don't know if he was a friend, but he met him at Cliveden, certainly. Chamberlain said, 'That's what we must build a new Germany out of; neither Nazis nor refugees. But a good young German like this.' So he certainly met him. Friend of Cripps. He was a friend of Rowse, who claimed to be in love with him; he was a friend of Collingwood, of an ancient historian called Mrs Henderson² – it goes on like that. I mean he boxed the compass: he was a friend of everybody on all sides. Certainly he knew Lord Halifax, I don't say well, but he had access to these people. And then he came to this party, and we surrounded him, naturally, and we said, 'What is it like?' About Germany. He said, as I recollect, 'My country is very very sick.' But no more than that. He didn't say the Nazis were terrible or not terrible. 'My country is very sick', as if it was some disease which had sprung up on it.

There's no doubt that he was always anti-Nazi. That can't be denied. At all times. Whatever he may have done or not done. That he disliked the Nazis is certainly quite clear. So nobody pressed him. And after he took Schools in the summer of 1933, he went back to Germany. Did not sit for All Souls. The only person who

² Isobel Munro, wife of Charles Henderson.

didn't like him was Fisher, the Warden of New College, who didn't trust him, who just thought he was somehow untrustworthy. Everybody else liked him very much. Maurice Bowra, who claimed to like him, in fact didn't like him very much. But that's another story. Very popular at Balliol. Certainly Lindsay liked him very much – the Master. So conservative, socialist, liberal – he knew everybody. And then – nothing happened. He went to Germany, he must have practiced the law, in the court of Kassel. But I didn't hear from him, nobody heard – at least I didn't hear from him then. He may have written to other people. But he had a Jewish mistress called Diana Hubback, who is half Jewish. Her father was a man called Hubback, who was killed in the First World War, and her mother was the daughter of somebody called Sir Meyer Spielman, who was a rich Jewish businessman, a banker, who gave me my Siddur for my bar-mitzvah, in the new West End Synagogue, Sir Meyer Spielman. And she was a rather sort of free spirit who was head of Morley College,³ and a feminist and so on. And her daughter, who is very probably still alive, who is now called Diana Hopkinson, was deeply in love with him, and he used to invite her to his family home – I don't know whether in Kassel or in a place called Hanau, which is where the family came from. And she used to – didn't want to be seen in the daytime too much, because she looked very Jewish, although she doesn't think she does. And he didn't want to be – take too many risks. There was no doubt they had an affair, although he did not propose marriage to her; there was a certain tension between her and Mrs – the then Miss Grant Duff, now called Grant Sokolov,⁴ being married to a Russian.

GC Shiela?

IB Shiela. She wrote a book about Czechoslovakia and ...

³ She was Principal of Morley College 1927–49.

⁴ Sokolov Grant.

GC Yes, I know her.

IB An autobiography and so on. Great friend of mine too, to this day.

Then – I forget why I didn't think about him very much – in 1934 a letter appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*. [*sounds like* Before it once begin.] The *Manchester Guardian* had a very brave foreign correspondent in Germany called Freddie, F. A. Voigt ('Voght' in German), V-O-I-G-T. 'Voigt' in English. No doubt he was a man of German origin. But he was brave because he wore a beard and dark spectacles and every kind of disguise and penetrated into quite a lot of places in Germany, and produced horror stories about the Jews, and about others. And he was really very honest and a very vivid correspondent. Greatly trusted by liberals like me, who trusted the *Manchester Guardian* in general. It was an excellent liberal paper, in those days. He reported – I never saw the article – that justice, in the court of Kassel, to which apparently he went was not exactly even-handed so far as Jews were concerned – it was clearly weighted against them. It was not exactly a matter of surprise in 1934. There was a letter in the *Guardian* signed by von Trott, in which he said: 'I am a lawyer, practising in court, and I can assure you that Jews are treated exactly – with perfect justice.' Denied it. Well, maybe it was so in Kassel – who can tell? – but that's not the point. It wasn't meant to be a specific account of the court at Kassel, which nobody wanted to know about. And this was countersigned⁵ – the letter – by a Dr Selbie, who was Principal of, I think, Manchester College [in fact Mansfield], to which von Trott had gone before he went to Balliol, because he took an interest in religious matters, saying, 'Mr von Trott is a very honourable man;

⁵ Not exactly. W. B. Selbie wrote a letter on 2 March, published on 5 March, in which he refers to Trott's 'sound judgement and scrupulous fairness and truthfulness'.

what he says ought to be believed' – it was a kind of certificate. Well, that rather distressed me, because I thought, whether he was a social democrat or not, the implication was that the Jews were not as badly treated as was maintained. I didn't write, but I complained to people all round, saying I thought it was very wrong. I dare say I feel this this view as a Jew particularly, I said, but I think it's – for someone of those convictions, why did he do it? I mean, maybe Kassel is all right, and Hamburg is not, Hamburg is all right, Munich is not. I mean really. What is the point of saying that Jews are being treated as equals?

David Astor, who heard that I was saying these things, was extremely angry, and immediately told von Trott that I had stabbed him in the back, had been very disloyal, and was saying terrible things about him. I didn't know this, but about a year after, I should think, maybe later than a year, maybe 1934, 1935, von Trott reappeared in England. He persuaded the Rhodes Trustees to allow him to go to China. It certainly can't have been on the [?] of Cecil Rhodes. And anyway, they did finally – Lord Lothian liked him very much; he was the chairman, I think, of the Rhodes Trustees. Anyway, he was sent off to China. He came to see me in All Souls, and more or less said, 'I understand what you feel. I fully understand. Maybe I shouldn't have written the letter, but I do assure you in that court it really was quite decent. I thought, well, why should the Germans be accused – enough crimes already – of something they weren't guilty of? But I do see that someone like you would be very distressed, and I feared my other friends wouldn't like it at all. In fact, I don't think I should have done it.' At least that's what he said to me. So I graciously forgave him. And then he said he was going to America en route to China, or to America from China, I can't remember which, and would I give him a letter of introduction to Felix Frankfurter, who had been in Balliol in 1933 himself? He didn't meet him, but he thought he was a person to know. Which I did. I then got a letter from Mrs Frankfurter saying, 'I met your friend. I think he's too handsome

and too ambitious not to be rather dangerous.’ That was just – hits the mark. They were great friends of David Astor, [?] at least Frankfurter was. So all that went very well.

A letter from me, a letter from David. Then he went to China. I don’t know what he did there. But Gore-Booth, who was later head of the Foreign Office, who had been in the British Embassy in China then, told me in Washington, when I met him there – he was a contemporary of mine at Oxford – but certainly in the Embassy they thought he was a Nazi agent, which I am sure is not true. But anyway they didn’t know where he stood. It wasn’t clear what he was doing or why he was in China. He may have tried to persuade – I don’t know – people there. He was engaged in some kind of political activity, otherwise it wasn’t clear what he was doing in China anyway, but I never did know. He had met people there, something to do with something.

Then I remember that Felix told me that President Roosevelt used to tease him about being seen in the company of German agents, because the FBI certainly followed him. By this time, I think he must have been in the German Foreign Office, or shortly after, anyway – which he joined. But then again nothing happened. And he reappeared in Oxford in 1938. I was brought to dinner in All Souls one Saturday night by Humphrey Sumner, who was later Warden, who was a don at Balliol. Like everybody else there, he thought he was marvellous – which in a way he was – and I remember Lionel Curtis, who was an *éminence grise*, had to dinner that night a man called Helmut Moltke, Graf Helmut, who was afterwards also killed by Hitler, who was a kind of religious – he was part of the Goerdeler conspiracy. They didn’t appear to know each other. I didn’t want – it seemed to be silly to say, ‘Freiherr von Trott, do you know Graf von Moltke?’ So I did nothing. But he – I had a long talk with him, and he said, ‘This is the last moment. Unless the Allies surround Germany and do something, the game is up. We shall probably have a war and Hitler will be in power.’ Anyhow he talked in a very anti-Hitler way to me and said,

‘Something must be done about the Allies – the English and the French must take steps against Germany, they must threaten them in some way.’ He didn’t say there were Generals in the plot or anything, not to me at least. But no doubt he did represent that party at that time.

GC He did.

IB Probably. I don’t know. He didn’t say it to me, but the likelihood is that he was one of those Germans who were to do with the dissident people in the Army, in the Foreign Office, who tried to get rid of Hitler by having a putsch against him, with foreign help. They didn’t think they could do it without it. David Astor and other people have always believed that it was silly of the English, I mean narrow-minded and blind, not to have helped these people. Well, it’s possible there was a plot, there certainly was something like – I don’t know which – some of the Generals did – the Marshals had to commit suicide afterwards. But the idea of persuading the Chamberlain government, which is what they were trying to do – Kordt, who was in the German Embassy, who was very brave, who went to see Churchill, and everything – the idea of having a naval demonstration off – I don’t know what, the Kiel canal, or Hamburg or whatever, in order to frighten the Germans, so that the Generals would say, ‘This means war. We’d better get rid of Hitler’, was not on. You can imagine the British Conservative Government suddenly rising against Hitler, who hadn’t [?] – most of them hoped he would take Russia, as a bulwark against Communism. Anyway, that’s why I think it was grotesquely unrealistic, however well intentioned. There’s a book now, by a man called Braun, B-R-A-U-N – he’s a Fellow of Merton; he’s a Jew, certainly – saying the British Government was mad not to do it – violent attack on unconditional surrender, violent attack on not dealing with good Germans. Good conservative right-wing Germans would have saved East Prussia from the Russians and

everything else. Anyway, but I'm not on that side. And it's a silly thing to say. We knew the atmosphere, the kind of people involved. You can say, 'Well, if the British had done it, maybe Hitler could have been removed.' But the probability of it, considering that the Rhineland was already occupied – nothing happened. All that happened was the Archbishop of Canterbury made a speech in the House of Lords, in which he said the Germans have regained their self-respect. And everyone said the Germans have got their back garden. That was the Saar people[?] – Rhineland too. Back garden. There were people who were prepared to deal with the Germans, but nobody of – certainly nobody in Government circles. I know what Churchill would have done. He was in no position to do anything.

Then he went back to Germany, and he wrote a letter to the Warden of All Souls, which he showed me, in which he said that if there was a war, which he very much hoped that there would not be, he would feel himself obliged to march in the ranks of the German army, which people who saw the letter in England thought was very good and patriotic and moving and quite right and German. But he came back to England in the summer of 1939, I think the summer. Didn't see me this time. It was probably too dangerous. Anyway he didn't. Went to see Crossman, and he went to see Duncan Sandys, and various other people. And to Duncan Sandys, according to Duncan Sandys to me, he said, 'We will give Yugoslavia autonomy.' Which was not quite, the business about getting rid of – but what happened was that David Astor invited him to Cliveden. At Cliveden he wrote a letter to von Weizsäcker, who was also a sort of anti-Hitler member of the Foreign Office, who was tried, I think. I think he was put in jail. Who also was Ambassador in Rome.

GC [*unclear*]

IB Well he was, more or less. He would have taken part, or might have taken part, in some anti-Hitler thing. Might have. Anyhow, he was Trott's sort of man in the Foreign Office. In which he said 'Lord Astor is our man. He's a great friend of Germany. He would certainly go on our side, if we negotiate' – something like that, I don't know. 'He's thoroughly pro-German – he's just the kind of man we ought to keep in touch with', and so on. Well of course that letter appeared in the British Documents – the German documents printed by Woodward and Rohan Butler, and David Astor was hideously embarrassed. It looked like a straight pro-Nazi letter, I mean. So he got Lady Cripps to write a letter to *The Guardian*, the *Manchester Guardian*, to say 'Mr. David Astor is quite all right, a decent and honourable man, would never dream etc.' Of course David throughout believed that von Trott throughout was a British agent, neither more nor less. He was always working for us, and all these things were cover. Well, of course, they may have been, but I think he was a complicated character, highly ambitious, and I think what he wanted to be was to be a leader of post-Nazi Germany. That's why he didn't emigrate [?] people. That's suggested. Well, he took risks, and he certainly kept in touch with anti- – the upper-class aristocratic anti-Nazi plotters, as you will see in a book by a woman called 'Missie'.⁶

GC [*unclear*]

IB No, it's quite different. No, that's different. There's a book by somebody called 'Missie'. She's a Russian ...

GC Yes, appeared a year ago.

IB That's right.

⁶ *The Berlin Diaries 1940–1945 of Marie 'Missie' Vassiltchikov* (London, 1985).

GC [*unclear*]

IB She saw von Trott all the time. He keeps on coming in – in and out of that circle – circle of German aristocrats, and foreign aristocrats, who obviously don't like Hitler, but were quite comfortable in Berlin during the war. Sometimes they don't have food, but then suddenly a lot of caviar appears out of nowhere. And he was in that circle. And these were not Nazis, certainly, but they were upper-class Germans, who certainly meant[?] – Metternich and Bismarck, those kind of names. Certainly de Stauffenberg talked to people[?] who were in that circle.

GC Sure.

IB Oh, they were, yes. And then von Trott went to America, in late 1939, ostensibly to take part in the meeting of the – wait a bit – United States Pacific Institute, or New York Pacific Institute, which had a world conference of some sort, as a German delegate. He saw Lothian and Wheeler-Bennett. Technically this was illegal, because he was an enemy alien. This must have been November, December. But they did see him. Because Lothian knew him well in England, and he was a Rhodes Scholar, and Wheeler-Bennett also was very friendly. I don't know what happened between them, because Wheeler-Bennett, whom I knew very well, didn't actually tell me, except that he turned against him later, and regarded him as an unsuitable person. I'll tell you about that in a moment. And Lothian died without [?] ... He saw people in the State Department. And I think he tried to suggest to them a kind of truce; a temporary peace with Hitler, after the war had begun, which I suppose would enable his people to try and remove Hitler. That was the only possible motive for that. But he didn't say anything about – obviously he wasn't going to leave Poland.

GC It was after September?

IB Yes. The war had begun. November, December. But Poland was obviously going to be kept. But maybe Western Europe, I don't know, anyhow that's what he – talked on these lines. He went to see Brüning, who was at Harvard, to whom he also talked on these lines. And then he – there was a man called Messersmith, who was a State Department official dealing with German affairs; he asked Frankfurter whether von Trott was kosher. Frankfurter wasn't sure, so he wrote to Maurice Bowra in Oxford. Maurice Bowra wrote saying, 'Not at all. Nobody quite knows where he stands. Be careful.' That letter was intercepted by – I thought the British censorship, but maybe the American censorship. In any case, it was copied to the Foreign Office. Certainly it was in the hands of – presumably of MI6, and presumably went on the file, which is why, when in 1942, I think, maybe 1943, he went to Sweden and tried to get in touch with British Intelligence, and Heath[?] from the Foreign Office said, 'Don't touch him.' He was a great friend, not a friend – a man who believed in him from the beginning to the end, was Allen Dulles, who thought he was quite all right. In a sense he was. And, of course, what happened as a result of the Bowra letter was that when Bowra got a knighthood, David Astor in *The Observer* anonymously wrote a violently hostile paragraph saying, 'Those who think that a bully-boy is a wit, ... who think' – you know the sort of thing – 'that a man who can take a German left-wing patriot for a Nazi spy, a man who corrupts young men' – God knows, it went – it was a ferocious attack.⁷ Anonymous. And his friends did write to him saying, 'You shouldn't have done it' – [?] people who were friends of both. Poor

⁷ In 'Table Talk' by 'Pendennis', *The Observer*, 7 January 1951, 5, we read, 'He has perhaps been at his weakest in judging the more serious problems of real life, such as those of an anti-Nazi German determined to resist Hitler; and at his strongest as a host producing his version of an eighteenth-century man of letters and bully-boy combined.'

Maurice Bowra was very upset. In his autobiography, he thinks he did wrong, and tries to take it all back, tries to improve his relations with David Astor and everybody else, but in fact he saw von Trott in Germany when he went there himself, in – I don't know when – 1932: that sort of thing. He didn't go after Hitler. I don't think he did, but – 1933, maybe. But he never really liked him, I can testify. But in the book he pretends they were great friends. He knew him.

GC I remember, I read the book.

IB You read the autobiography?

GC Yes, I read [*unclear*].

IB Exactly. And that was just a desire to improve his foreign relations. The autobiography was not very genuine. It was amusing, but ...

GC Amusing.

IB Yes. Not entirely truthful. So then what happened was that Brüning was very angry with Frankfurter for reporting on Bowra's letter. And von Trott said to Brüning, according to somebody to whom Brüning spoke afterwards, a German who I think is still alive, though I've forgotten, 'The trouble is, the Jews have ruined it all, in Washington.' Who the other Jews were, if any, I don't know. Frankfurter is the only person I would know about. Maybe there were others who gave contrary advice. I don't think anybody knew him. Anyway, he went back to Germany, to the Foreign Office: the rest you more or less know. That's to say, obviously he was involved in the plot, and was put on a meat hook by Hitler, was killed. And Frau von Bielenberg, who believed from beginning to end that he was entirely honourable and brave, worked against

the Nazis – I don't trust Frau von Bielenberg that much. She was the Irish wife of a German – he went to a camp for a short time, but, I don't know why – I just have a feeling that – I'll tell you about my feelings. People like von Trott and Bielenberg, quite naturally, and quite properly, didn't want the destruction of Germany, which was perfectly all right. I think they only began serious plotting against Hitler-maybe I'm unjust – when it looked no longer certain that the Germans would win the war. Which would be about 1943. In order to save Germany from ruin, from defeat. The thing that troubled me, and I didn't know whether von Trott, if put to it, would prefer a Nazi victory to a total German defeat, unconditional – total crush. I think maybe he would. David Astor knows that he would – certain that he didn't mind German defeat. And Frau von Bielenberg I'm sure says – and how can one prove anything? But I always had a feeling about him, that he was an ambivalent character, that he decided things on impulse, that he was romantic, Hegelian, and wanted to play a part – above all he was a German patriot, which he had every right to be. What happened to the Communist brother I don't know, he was probably killed. That is the full story of my relations.

I saw the widow. He married a German girl, who came to see me in Oxford. I saw his nephew, who was also a Rhodes Scholar after the war. That was about three years ago. But neither of them came to see me again. I said some of this in a short note – David Astor financed a seminar in Oxford on German Resistance, in the name of von Trott.

GC Yes, I remember.

IB You see. And there was a short bit by me, more or less, not quite as full as I have told you, which was read aloud in front of one of these. He made – he delivered a speech himself, David – it was a complete encomium, of an uncritical kind, of von Trott – and talked about these Germans of 1938 who wanted to get in

touch with intellectual British circles, to do something, which is probably true. How realistic it is seems to me – but what is my judgement? That's the story of von Trott.

GC Now ...

IB This is more or less what Christopher Sykes says in his book. More or less. And David Astor was not on speaking terms with Christopher Sykes. He's not on speaking terms with Shiela Grant Duff, whose letters to and from von Trott have just been published. This year.⁸

GC Are going to be published?

IB Have been.

GC Have been published.

IB Just, yes. Just appeared.

GC In what ...?

IB In English.

GC But included ...

IB In a book.

GC In a book, just ...

⁸ *A Noble Combat : The Letters of Shiela Grant Duff and Adam von Trott zu Solz 1932–1939*, ed. Klemens von Klemperer (Oxford, 1988).

IB Separate book. I don't know who published – with a very mealy-mouthed introduction by a man called von Klemperer, who is much more pro von Trott than Shiela Grant Duff is. She quarreled with him more or less before the war when she was being violently pro Czech. Friend of Ripka and all these Czech [?] – she thought he was becoming too nationalistic. Not pro Nazi. This is not an unjust charge. I'm on her side. Not Frau Bielenberg's. But there was a great rift [between] people like her and the other side, who thought she was unjust. Still, he then proposed marriage – he was in love with her.

GC What is Shiela Grant Duff doing now?

IB She's doing nothing. She's written a few books, I think. She wrote a book on Czechoslovakia, yes, at the time of, more particularly, the Saar plebiscite, to which she went as a journalist. She was an assistant to Edgar Ansel Mowrer, who was an American correspondent of a very liberal kind, in those days, who of course became very right wing afterwards. [*unclear sentence*] And then she wrote her autobiography, more or less, into which von Trott comes in. And now these letters, which were edited by somebody else. And she's at the moment engaged I think on writing a book about her grandfather, who was a man called Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff, who was a Governor of something in India in the 1840s, and who became an Independent Member of Parliament.⁹ In England, in the 1860s.

GC Yes.

IB Do you want to end?

GC It's all right, no. No, it's all right.

⁹ He was a Liberal MP 1857–81 and Governor of Madras 1881–6.

IB He liked meeting interesting people. He met Karl Marx. Had lunch with Leonard Montefiore, who was the brother of Claude Montefiore, who was a liberal journalist. It's very amusing. He wrote an enormous book called *Pages* [sc. *Notes*] *from a Diary*. One of the most boring books ever written. But this story – so he met [?] Charles [sc. Carl] Marx at lunch at some club,¹⁰ and he said to Marx – Marx said to him – he [Grant Duff] said, 'He's very *positif*'¹¹ – spells that in French. He says, 'He's a person engaged – mainly – in studying in philology in the British Museum, particularly interested in the Turkish language.'¹² He did [?], in order to know about [?]. 'He said to me that the Revolution might break out in Germany any day.'¹³ That must have been in the 1870s. 'I said it was very uncommon for countries after winning a war to have revolutions. He said, "Ah. You are thinking of the officer class. But the men are very discontented, and might easily rise."' After which Marx talked about the progress of science, and the fact that terrible weapons of war would one day be created by scientists, before which present weapons would pale.' He was obviously very intelligent about that. Then when the Spanish Government demanded the extradition of Marx for having something to do with some Spanish revolution, allegedly, the First International, something, Grant Duff wrote a letter to the Foreign Secretary, who I think was Lord Granville, saying, 'He's a harmless old gentleman,

¹⁰ The Devonshire Club, 50 St James's Street, London SW1.

¹¹ 'It was all very *positif*?' *Notes from a Diary 1873–1881*, 2 vols (London, 1898), vol. 2, 103 (January 1879).

¹² 'His talk was that of a well-informed, nay, learned man, much interested in comparative grammar, which had led him into the old Slavonic and other out-of-the-way studies.' *ibid.*

¹³ '[H]e thinks that the movement will spread to Germany, taking there the form of a revolt against the existing military system.' *ibid.* 104. IB's account of the exchange that follows (104–5) is very approximate, and the passage about Spain that follows is not in Grant Duff.

mainly interested in philology in the British Museum, reading Turkish.' So he was let off.

GC Now, you want to finish?

IB No.

GC Whenever you mention Shiela Grabnt Duff, you mention her with warmth, with empathy. You were good friends.

IB Absolutely.

GC Now, an entirely different question that arose in the last meeting, and that's – and we spoke about it only shortly. Your attitude towards India, Indians, Indian Moslems, Pakistani, Japan, that is to say, civilisations out of the Western civilisation.

IB I had no relation to them.

GC No relation.

IB None. I don't read Indian philosophers, or Indian theologians. I don't read Indian poetry. I know simply – what I've learnt about Japan I've learnt from my visit there, quite interesting. I've read one or two books about legends of the Shoguns and the various heroes of early Japanese medieval history. But fundamentally, although I was fascinated by Japan, and very much liked India, I have got no special relationship, no special intellectual or moral ...

GC Now, when you say you like – you like India, usually when you like a country you like their people.

IB That is correct. Certainly I liked the Hindus. I didn't go to Pakistan. I did I think stop on the way back in Islamabad, but I've

not been to Pakistan much. We went to India – I mean the Indian Republic.

GC You see ...

IB I had an Indian friend called, I told you, called Kabir, who was always trying to make me meet Nasser, of whom he was a friend.

GC I didn't know about that.

IB Nasser, yes. He used to go to Cairo, although he's not a Muslim. Yes, he was a Muslim. Of course, a Muslim, Kabir, certainly, obviously. [Humayun] Zahiruddin Amir[-i] Kabir. He said, 'He's a very fatherly figure. Very kindly man. You'd have a lot – you could talk to him, you know. He would talk to you. You might do a great deal of good by talking to him.' I didn't take up the offer.

GC Language for you is a problem. You say that even with the French, whose culture you know, you understand, you have difficulties, because of the language.

IB They speak badly, yes.

GC India, I mean they speak English.

IB Of course.

GC So there is something else that is alien to you.

IB Oh certainly, the culture.

GC The culture.

IB Yes.

GC And the very fact that you have command of the language, it was not enough to tempt you to try ...

IB No. I like historical cultures. India has no social history at all. Only history since the Moguls, at most. So it's all a kind of *irruvia*.¹⁴ It's a kind of general mixture, a sort of 'great big buzzing, blooming confusion'¹⁵ of epics, of poems, of this, of that. Rich and no doubt poetical, and I am sure full of works of genius. But it's a huge beehive of completely foreign experience, which I am prepared to admire from a distance. I'm sure that those who say it's wonderful are probably right. Someone like Peter Brook, who has just done a long play of the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁶ Probably he's found a great deal in it. I went to two operas by Tagore, who must have written forty operas.¹⁷ I made nothing of them at all. I asked Aldous Huxley, with whom I travelled, what he thought – he was a kind of Hindu [in] religion. He said, 'I can't really tell you very much. I think their theology is wonderful. I think their spiritual experiences are very very sympathetic to me. But as a people I find them dreadfully exhausting.'

GC Even Aldous Huxley said it?

IB What?

GC It was Aldous Huxley?

¹⁴ sc. 'irbuvia', 'jumble' (Aramaic).

¹⁵ Misremembering William James's 'great blooming, buzzing confusion' in *The Principles of Psychology* (New York, 1890), vol. 1, 488.

¹⁶ Peter Brook's 9-hour dramatisation of the Sanskrit epic premiered in 1985, and was filmed in 1989.

¹⁷ One of these would have been *Shyama*, staged in New Delhi for the 1961 centenary of Tagore's birth, which IB attended, and spoke at on 13 November 1961 (his lecture is in SR).

IB Yes.

GC Even he ...

IB Yes. He was a kind – he was really a Hindu, Aldous Huxley. If you asked what he believed in – closer to Hinduism than anything else. More than Buddhism. He really was inspired by Hinduism in some way.

GC Did he try to explain to you ...

IB No. We didn't discuss it.

GC He didn't try?

IB He didn't try. We didn't talk about it.

GC There was a period that India was very much in fashion, and people were taken by India.

IB When do you think?

GC Uh?

IB Whenabouts?

GC In the 1950s. After the Independence, the kind[?] of mysticism ...

IB It didn't touch me in any way.

GC Did anybody try to ...

IB No.

GC That's obvious. [*laughter*]

IB Couldn't have done much good.

GC Did you ever have any friends, personal friends, not English and American?

IB Lots.

GC Lots.

IB Certainly. In America?

GC No. Neither England or America.

IB Not English, nor Russian?

GC And nor Russian. Yes.

IB And not Jewish? Not Israeli. Not Jewish. [*pause*] Von Trott is the nearest to it. No Italian, as far as I know. Yes, well, I was on very good terms with an Italian philosopher, who gave me a very nice triangular watch, which I still wear, called Rossi – Ferruccio Rossi-Landi.

GC Rossi-Landi [*laughter*].

IB Yes, exactly. Rossi-Landi. He was a friend. Not an intimate friend, but certainly a friend. No, he was a friend. I could talk to him about anything. He was at Oxford, you see. That's where I met him. Knew English, which I could talk to him. Nobody in France, no. Before the war, none of the professors are French. I'm trying

to think. The nearest to it are Aline's relations. But according to de Gaulle, they're not French.

GC Now to the article you wrote about – the one on – it was 'Jewish Emancipation' – 'Jewish Slavery and Emancipation'. You remember, the one you wrote in the *Jewish Chronicle* and the *Garland*.

Side B

GC [?] Now, you said that you didn't do it because of some expressions that really hurt some friends, like ...

IB No. Nothing to do with friends.

GC Not friends, but you told me that Keith Joseph approached you and others and ...

IB No. All Keith Joseph said to me was you can't call – you can speak of hunchbacks in conversation – how can you do that – you mustn't do it in – how can you do it in writing?¹⁸ That was just *en passant*, and I think the point is that those who read the *Jewish Chronicle* read it. I thought it would create too much controversy in the Jewish community if I did that. It was a very severe attack on Zionists really and so I thought why should I get into a row with all the Jews who [?] had written about that book, answer it and enter into polemics; that's why not.

GC But you know that I thought that to this day it's one of the best exposés on Zionism after the creation of the state of Israel.

IB You couldn't – it's very kind of you to say so.

¹⁸ '[T]he analogy used is more for talk than print.' Keith Joseph to IB, 21 October 1952.

GC For me, I mean: still I use it in my lectures.

IB By all means, but I thought in England that it would be too ill-received – I just didn't want a row. It's been translated into French. Published in French.¹⁹

GC In this collection of ...

IB [*unclear: sounds like 'vierera'*]

GC I mean, it's a pity.

IB Well?

GC Because I'm almost sure that the article *was* a reply to Koestler.

IB Hmm ...

GC Koestler came then with his thesis that you could be a Zionist and stay in exile so long as the state didn't exist. Now that it's only a matter of tickets ...

IB Of course.

GC And you could go ...

IB Oh, I remember the article. I replied to Koestler separately.²⁰

¹⁹ 'Les juifs: de la servitude à l'émancipation', trans. Louis Évrard, in *Trois essais sur la condition juive* (Paris, 1973: Calmann-Lévy).

²⁰ The last section of the article (VI, POI2 215–26) is indeed a reply to what Koestler says in *Promise and Fulfilment: Palestine 1917–1949* (London, 1949). Cf. 'Judah at the Crossroads' (1954) in his *The Trail of the Dinosaur and other essays* (London, 1955), where he comments on IB's essay.

GC It's not the same? I thought it was.

IB No. You don't think it's – when did he write this?

GC I don't know.

IB This was written in 1951.

GC 1951. And republished in the *Garland* in 1952.

IB Dictated. I wrote it in 1951. Dictated it. I dictated it to a *Jewish Chronicle* typist, shorthand-writer. Straight off. Without absolutely – took two days. Absolutely straight off, without thought.

GC You quoted there Namier's well-known parable about the glacier.

IB Ah yes. That made a great impression on me. I read that as I think a schoolboy. Namier wrote that in the *New Statesman*.²¹ 1920s.

GC As early as that?

IB That's what I think.

GC I remember.

IB Maybe the 1930s, but I don't know. I think 1920s.

GC You read it only in a collection of his essays?

²¹ Namier's essay is 'Zionism', *New Statesman*, 5 November 1927, 103–4, reprinted in his *Skyscrapers and Other Essays* (London, 1931).

IB It was [?]. It was reprinted, was it? Quite a short piece for the *New Statesman*.

GC A very short piece. Yes. I think he republished it in *Conflicts*.²²

IB Could well be. No, it could be published now. But ...

GC It's an important article.

IB Well, you'd have to have a footnote about T. S. Eliot.

GC It's much better than the article in 1958 about 'Ten Years to the State of Israel'.

IB Ah, that was just an encomium. That was just, that was just a complimentary article, just like that. Just an ordinary piece of, ordinary Zionist propaganda. That was just an ordinary article. Nothing special. No. But then you would have – if I republished it I'd have to add a footnote, a long footnote, on T. S. Eliot's letter to me about it.

GC About?

IB About this.

GC Yes.

IB About the particular section of the *Jewish Chronicle* [article] which mentions him.

GC I really – I think it's obvious[?]. If we shall publish in Hebrew ...

²² Not so. The book is *Conflicts: Studies in Contemporary History* (London, 1942).

IB By all means.

GC ... collections of your essays.

IB That I don't mind.

GC I must tell you, whenever I brought it, and I used this parable, nobody minds.

IB Nobody minds. All I can tell you is they would in England. Still.

GC Even now?

IB Yes. I don't mind whether they do or not. The only thing I don't want ...

GC I see. And then you had correspondence with Koestler?

IB No correspondence.²³ I just replied to the article. And he referred to it.

GC I'm sure ...

IB He referred to it afterwards.

GC He referred to it.

IB Yes. He wrote an article mentioning my article about him.²⁴

²³ IB and Koestler corresponded about the article in November 1954: IB's two letters are in E+: bit.ly/E-suppl.

²⁴ 'Judah at the Crossroads', 1954 (see note on p. 25).

GC But I think you referred to him in – I'll check it.

IB I referred to him of course, because that piece – I referred to him just once.²⁵ All I say, I told you: that nobody I knew, I'd read, was totally in favour of a completely homogeneous society – *integralisme*. I wasn't thinking about French semi-Fascists, but in English, at least, no one. Plato, Eliot and Koestler. That's where Koestler comes in.

GC Ah, that I didn't know.

IB That's why Eliot wrote. He didn't mind being associated with Plato, but I don't think he wanted to be hyphenated with Koestler.

GC [*laughter*] Now, you told me that when you met T. S. Eliot in one of those dinners, I think it was in Balliol, you discussed Busch.

IB I met whom?

GC Eliot, T. S. Eliot.

IB Yes?

GC I think in Balliol.

IB No.

GC Not in Balliol. But anyway, you discussed at length children ...

IB That's not right. No, I'll tell you what happened. He delivered a lecture, Eliot, in, of all places, Rhodes House, in which he was

²⁵ Koestler's name occurs ten times in the section of the article devoted to him..

very gloomy and said poets shouldn't make money out of poetry, they should all have other professions, and the literary profession was very terrible, etc. And recited his own verse in a dull, dead voice, as if he was terribly bored with it. Then a little party was given for him afterwards, by some undergraduates in No. 7 Beaumont Street, which was inhabited by Benedict Nicolson, who was afterwards an art critic, son of Harold, the present Lord Hutchinson, Stuart Hampshire, a man called David Wallace, who was killed in the war, and other undergraduates. I was one of the few dons present, the only one, I think. And Eliot began talking about this and that. We began talking about what literature was untranslatable. We agreed that Racine and Pushkin – he took it on trust from me that Pushkin could not really be – the poetry could not be translated with any success, and without sounding like rather second-rate Byron. And then he said, 'And there's Wilhelm Busch.' Wilhelm Busch of course wrote children's verse, for children. Comic verse. Nobody in that room I think knew who Wilhelm Busch was. Only I. So we had a conversation for about half an hour on Busch. Everyone else was frightfully bored, silent, sulky.

GC When did you come across Busch?

IB Oh my goodness [*laughter*]. I think I read him in German. It was never very good, my German. I think it was read to me, probably before the age of three. But I wouldn't remember that. When I had a German nurse. But that, no, I wouldn't remember. What I did do is, I remembered enough; when we came to Riga for 4 or 5 months between Petrograd and England, I took lessons in Latin from a German professor called Kupfer, K-U-P-F-E-R, whom Leonard Shapiro also went to, for Classics. Private tuition. He thought Leonard Shapiro was extremely good, whereas I was totally superficial, no good at all. However, Kupfer had a volume of

Wilhelm Busch on his shelves, and I remembered the name. I said, 'What is this?' He said, 'Ah, well, it's not really for boys of your age. But take it, it'll improve your German.' He wasn't particularly nice to me; and that's when I began reading it. I read enough; it's very simple.

Wilhelm Busch

There is a famous line about Jews: there was an alphabetical poem by him.²⁶ Something under A, something B, something C. Under Z, the German goes, ‘Die Zebra’ – the Zebra – ‘Die Zebra find sich stellenweise.’ ‘Zebras only occur from time to time.’ Place to place. Occasionally. ‘Und Zwiebel ist die Juden Speise’: ‘Onion is a dish for the Jews.’ Suddenly, instead of the animals, onion came in. I quoted that to T. S. Eliot, who laughed amiably. I didn’t then think he was an anti-Semite. It rather fit. ‘Zwiebel ist die Juden Speise.’



²⁶ ‘Naturgeschichtliches Alphabet’ [‘Natural History Alphabet’] (*Münchener Bilderbogen* Nos 405/406, 1863): ‘Onion is a dish for the Jews, / Zebras can be found here and there.’

GC Have you got any special attitude towards children's literature?

IB No. The best children's literature I read, that was verse, was by Chukovsky, who was a Russian critic. Wonderful. First-rate. Wilhelm Busch was very good. *Max und Moritz*, well, in English I don't think that either Lear or Lewis Carroll can be regarded as really for children. Nonsense verse, nonsense stories. Children's verse, no, I never took any interest in that.

GC So it's just by chance that T. S. Eliot brought the name and ...

IB Because he mentioned it.

GC As it happened, in the same meeting you mentioned Busch and Chukovsky, so I thought that you took some interest in children's writers.

IB No, none.

GC I see.

IB Fundamentally none.

GC [*unclear*]

IB After that we'll stop.

GC Mm?

IB After that we better stop. Yes.

GC [*unclear*] a short question ...

IB Yes, hm.

GC There are some complicated ones.

IB Yes.

GC One of the few articles you wrote, not as a review, but just an article about a musician, is Tippett.

IB Yes.

GC I mean, you wrote about ...

IB Correct. I admired his music, and I knew him personally. I met him. And he was a – I think he's still alive he's a gifted, idealistic, rather sweet character. And I didn't like Britten, which was unusual. And I had a feeling that Britten and Tippett – you know there is a famous saying in French, 'Si jeunesse pouvait, si sagesse – si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait.'²⁷ You understand what that means.

GC Of course.

IB I felt Britten could do anything he liked. He was immensely gifted, but didn't for me have very much to say. 'Si Britten savait, si Tippett pouvait.' His ideals – I understood what he was trying to do. I wanted him to be a little better than he is. But still, even so, I was sympathetic to the whole purpose of serious music, serious problems.

GC I fully sympathise with you about Tippett, but still it's quite fun[?] that you are so involved in music, and you wrote only about him.

²⁷ 'If youth only knew, if age only could.'

IB Well, of course there was a Festschrift to him.²⁸ I don't know who thought of asking me.

GC The editor was Kemp.

IB Was who?

GC A certain Kemp. K-E-M-P. I don't know ...

IB [?] No, I have no idea how I came into it. I have no idea who even suggested it. Someone who must have known us both and knew that I admired him. I think so. I cannot tell you. But I was very flattered to be asked, and I thought, well, I don't know so very much about music, but still.

GC But, I mean, you say you were flattered to be asked. But weren't you asked to write about other contemporary musicians?

IB No.²⁹

GC So somebody knew that you ... All right, so let's stop here.

²⁸ Ian Kemp (ed.), *Michael Tippett: A Symposium on his 60th Birthday* (London, 1965).

²⁹ He did write on Menuhin.