



Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 19

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Side A

GC When?

IB Two days ago.

GC No.

IB The first time I have pronounced on a Zionist issue.

GC First time?

IB I gave a [?] defence. I made a strong ... It was a Zionist letter, in a newspaper. I've never done it before anywhere. I did it out of pure spontaneity I'll tell you what happened. There's a man called ... Not at all a nice man, called ... He wrote an article in *The Independent* called 'Yom Kippur', which you didn't read?¹

GC No, I don't [?].

IB It's worth reading.

GC Yes. Now I'll try to get it.

¹ 'Israel Should Look to the Past and Remember the Future: Geoffrey Wheatcroft on the Contemporary Significance of Yom Kippur', *The Independent*, Wednesday 21 September 1988; letter from IB, 'Israeli Solution' (dated [Friday] 23 September), *ibid.*, Wednesday 28 September 1988, 19c.

Israeli solution

Dear Sir,

May I congratulate you and Mr Geoffrey Wheatcroft on his article (21 September) on Israel (would that most of the commentators used by the BBC possessed half as much intelligence and understanding of Israel's situation).

Mr Lionel Bloch's response (Letters, 23 September) is a characteristically lucid and trenchant statement of the arguments employed by the intransigent Likud Party, from which Mr Wheatcroft and the (fortunately many) followers of Mr Shimon Peres, and all those who seek a tolerable solution to Israel's problems, including myself, sharply dissent.

As for Karen Wald's strange letter [alleging anti-Semitism in Mr Wheatcroft's article], I cannot discover in it a single statement which seems to me to have any discernible relation to reality; it is symptomatic of the irrational state of mind with which those who seek to rescue Israel from its dangerous predicament have to contend — an uphill task.

Yours faithfully,
ISAIAH BERLIN
Oxford
23 September

IB Well, the original article must have been on last Wednesday – Tuesday or Wednesday, last week.

GC I'll find it.

IB No, wait a minute, today is Saturday – my letter appeared on, I think, Thursday. Or yesterday, maybe. And I sent it ... ooh, yesterday was Oxford[?] Thursday. I think I sent it on Friday, so it must have been not last week but the week before, on let us say Wednesday.²

GC Yes ...

IB Now the man's name – he's a well-known journalist, he's not at all a nice man – he worked for *The Observer*. He's never written about this before, as far as I know. His name is – [?] I'd love you to read the whole dossier, but I haven't kept it, rather typically.

GC [?].

IB Wait a moment. The original thing – Pat is away: she may have kept something – wait a bit, his name is – how can I forget? – Geoffrey Wheatcroft. Wheatcroft is the name. And he is quite a well-known journalist. I owe him a debt of honour because he once was commissioned to write a profile of me in *The Observer*, and I managed to persuade him not to. But he is a horrid – not a nice man – drunken, promiscuous, ladies, quite handsome, adventurer. He wrote an article which seemed to me to be very decent – about Israel. It's called 'Yom Kippur' and so on, because at the beginning he explained what Yom Kippur was. And – yes, I can't remember exactly what it said, but it more or less took up a sort of Ma'arakh line – about the fact that there ought to be negotiations, Peres and so on. In favour. And that the Likud was against. It wasn't terribly well informed, but anyhow it took a gentle line, and it finally said that the gentiles – the Jews remember the [?] too much, the Holocaust – [?]. The Jews should seek, terrible as it was, should

² For the facts see previous note.

seek to forget – gentiles should remember it, but Jews – gentiles should remember the past, but the Jews should look to the future. Perfectly all right. Perfectly good slogan. The gentiles should not forget it, but the Jews should look to the future, which was a decent sentiment.

Next day, two letters appeared – two days later – one by Lionel Bloch, you can imagine, and one by a woman in Oxford who I'd never heard of called Karen Wald – nobody knows; indeed I didn't ask.³ Bloch, whom I knew, straight Likud – you know who he is?

GC Yes.

IB Violent left-wing – he's been taken in by the Israeli wets. I like the Israeli wets: new concept. And I said, more or less, Bloch was all wrong, and the Jews can't make peace, [?] terms [?] proposes, because they won't trust the contrast[?]. [?] anyhow, [?] the Arabs kill each other, how can they not kill the Jews? That's roughly the line. And you can go on and on and on, you can imagine, about the fact there's nobody to talk to and how can I trust anybody? It's a ridiculous [?] truth, it's obviously an anti-Likud line. Miss Wald said, this is a letter of secret anti-Semitism – the article. Liberals might be taken in, but they shouldn't be. And then talked nonsense: it was an unintelligible letter – you'll see. A confused letter which I couldn't understand. I then suddenly felt, here is a decent goy – not a great friend – he quotes Conor Cruise O'Brien – which is already all right, if you see what I mean – shows – about the siege mentality, and he says he hoped they won't have it. [?] because [?] he understood why, but [?] – and here's a – he's a horrid man, but here is a decent letter, by a goy, and two Jews immediately pounce on it, and that's a terrible thing, because it discourages everybody. He's not a great friend, but in ... So I wrote an indignant letter in which I said, 'I wish to congratulate the editor

³ 'Memory of the Holocaust', 23 September, 19a–b.

and Mr Wheatcroft on publishing this article'; that 'I wish to comment on the fact that Mr Lionel Bloch, with characteristic lucidity and trenchancy' – he's a member of the Reform Club – of the Garrick: I see him, because he talks to me [?] – 'has written this article, which is straightforward Likud, well-known representative of Likud, and therefore represents the intransigence which those who follow – for the large number of Israelis who've – large number, fortunately, of Israelis', I say – or '(fortunately) large number who follow Peres, those like myself, regard as – wish to resist in every way, [?] against.' [?] Wald, I said that though I did my best, I could not find any discernible relationship between a single word and reality, is what I said – single discernible relationship. [?] I ended – I can't remember how I ended – I said, 'Would that' – at the beginning – 'Would that the BBC', I said, 'had people more or less as fair-minded as Mr Wheatcroft' – I put that in a bracket – 'one of the few people who seems to me – would that the BBC employed people with that degree of moderation, or as disinterested, or neutral' – something like that. Of course you'll get it. That was published either yesterday or the day before. That's recent. That you'll still get. But you ought to look at the whole thing, because I've completely forgotten what it is about – what the others said.

GC Fine.

IB That could be – no doubt it'll be picked up in Israel, probably.

GC If I shall not find it, I shall ask a friend of mine from the Embassy. It will be picked up.

IB [?] I would like it [to be picked up]. I have got to go to the dinner for the retiring ambassador, who is straight Likud.

GC He is Likud.

IB I know. So I am afraid when I go to the dinner, Mr Bloch will be there. There may be some – there may be a contretemps. I go rather nervously. I was invited by – you can imagine by whom – no, Marcus Sieff, that's all right – and that not very nice man – the official representative of the Israel Appeal.

GC I'm not sure I know him.

IB You know the name. His father owns a lot of petrol stations, he's a rich man.

GC Ah, yes. I know him.

IB Graham – not Graham. Yes. So I got into trouble – about T. S. Eliot you know?

GC About?

IB Me and T. S. Eliot.

GC Yes.

IB So I'm constantly getting – I am in constant trouble with Jews. The last fortnight, I really have – I've been attacked in every quarter.

GC But T. S. Eliot is not mentioned any more.

IB I think that's blown over. Apparently Goodman made a statement. I didn't see it.

GC Not recently.

IB No, then, in summer.

GC I think I saw it.

IB Midsum[mer]. Where?

GC I don't remember.

IB Some paper?

GC I think so, but I don't remember. It just rings a bell.

IB I didn't know he'd done anything. I am the only person who hasn't spoken. Nobody asked me to. Only *Davar*.

GC Yesterday – no, sorry.

IB Is this on?

GC Pardon?

IB I'm asking about this: is it on? Yes.

GC If you remember, we discussed your musical choice in this programme that you had – in *Man of Action*. And we discussed your selection. You remember that you mentioned *Don Carlos*, the aria of Philip before the Inquisitor comes in, a madrigal of Monteverdi, Berlioz – I don't remember what it was.

IB It's called 'The Royal Hunt and Storm'.

GC Conducted by Beecham.

IB Conducted by Beecham, yes, from an opera called *Les Troyens*.

GC You mentioned the Spring Sonata ...

IB Sonata by Beethoven.

GC Sonata, of course. Chaliapin singing ...

IB 'La Calunnia' in *The Barber of Seville*.

GC *Norma*.

IB That's right.

GC 'Casta Diva'.

IB Sung by Rosa Ponselle – she's Italian.

GC When was she ...?

IB She died I should think five, six years ago at the age of about eighty.

IB It was long before the war. How should you know?

GC Then, possibly *Idomeneo* – a choir ...

IB The chorus – no I didn't.

GC Which means you might have?

IB I don't think you could have. 'The Blue Danube' sung by Maria Ivogün – and something else too. There must have been a Beethoven quartet or something like that.

GC And you said that you suppose you would have chosen something by Schnabel.

IB Very likely.

GC Very likely. Had it been now, you would have selected something by Brendel.

IB Correct.

GC You would now most probably have selected something by Maria Callas.

IB Yes.

GC And the last piece you mentioned – in a very moving way, I must say – was this piece in *Rigoletto*.

IB Ah, yes. I can't remember who sang it.

GC It was really moving in the way you described it.

IB It was a baritone.

GC 'The Blue Danube' – there probably ought to be a certain sentimental reason.

IB None. She is a marvellous coloratura singer – one of the best I've ever heard in all my life. And she gives a tremendous performance of it, which I must have come across by some accident. I used to review records for the *Oxford* whatever it was – what was it called in those days? The academic paper, the dons' paper.

GC Yes, I remember.

IB Well, it still exists in theory – *Oxford University* something or other – *Magazine*.

GC *Magazine*. [?]

IB Well, new form: *Oxford Magazine*, and I think I must have come across it then – I thought a stunning record of a popular kind. The performance was stunning. I am not sure at all that I got the right records. If you really want to know what it was, we'll have to enquire from the BBC.

GC But the selection was records?

IB Entirely. Couldn't be anything else. How could it be anything else?

GC I mean the criterion for your selection was good records, or ...?

IB No. The works themselves. Things which meant something to me at the time – not the quality of the records.

GC Things that meant something.

IB Yes, quite apart from whether the record was good or bad. It meant that that's the record on which I heard it. That's when it impressed me. That's what lingered.

GC Yes, I can see. That means, if you had to select it now, you most probably would have selected ...

IB Quite different ones.

GC Quite different ones?

IB I'm sure.

GC What would you ...?

IB Oh, goodness. Today I would certainly select a Schubert sonata, done by Brendel; I would have selected probably a Beethoven sonata, also by him. I would have selected – oh – Bach, a piece of Bach for the piano by András Schiff, whom I know personally – I would have selected an early record – early Bach record, maybe by Stern – but nothing in the last twenty years, certainly. Wait a moment. I would have selected a Brandenburg Concerto – still – played by the Busch Ensemble. Yes. Now who else could I have – what voices? Nothing, nobody I am completely dedicated to.

GC Let me ask you – when did your flirt with Brendel start?

IB It started – I met him ... No, I went to a concert by him, without knowing him, because I heard him on the radio, and I thought it was remarkable. I had no idea who he was – [?] German, Austrian, obviously clear, and I thought he played marvellously, entirely spontaneous. And then I sent Aline to listen to him in the Town Hall in Oxford and I couldn't go. She came back and said he was very good. Then we went to a concert and the wife of the professor of mathematical logic in Oxford, who was a Viennese pianist⁴ who knew him, met us – she was [?] Dana Scott, University professor here – American. We said how wonderful he was. 'Come and meet him.' So we went backstage. I shook hands with him. But it meant nothing. I was one among forty people. He knew her, because she was a pupil or something. Anyway, she came from

⁴ Irene Schreier Scott.

Vienna. She knew – she greatly admired him. That was that. Then I met him at dinner with Lord Drogheda. He was the Chairman of the Board of Covent Garden. He invited Aline and me and the two Brendels and a man called Burnet Pavitt, who was a friend of his, who was also on the Board. Maybe there was somebody else, maybe not. That's where I met him and his wife. I sat next to his wife and got on very well with her. Then I talked to him and got on quite well with him, but nothing very special. Then he was invited to Christ Church by the Middle Common Room, who used to invite famous people, and they used to [invite] two people, usually. Sometimes one, sometimes two. They asked him whom else he would like them to invite, and he nominated me. I was very flattered. So we went – we didn't have general conversation. I had my little circle, he had his little circle. And then he stayed the night with me, in Headington. Aline wasn't there. Then we had a long talk, and we talked the next morning. That's when we made friends – on that occasion.

He made a very funny remark about Isaac Stern, which I ought not to repeat. In the morning, Isaac Stern – well, this won't come out in my lifetime, so what does it matter, provided it's suppressed? Isaac telephoned me that morning, and I said to Brendel, I have just been talking on the telephone – that was Isaac Stern on the telephone. 'Oh,' said Brendel, 'Isaac Stern. You know, he can play very well, sometimes he is even profound. It shows the man and the musician are not necessarily the same.' What? Very true: often happens. Anyway, then after that I didn't see him for some time. Then he played in Oxford again. In the Sheldonian. We invited him and his wife to stay the night. I think I may have met them in between going to his concerts. But still, they both stayed the night. And then I remember being driven by them back to London. I thought they were both very nice. That's how it began.

GC By the way, is Brendel benevolent towards other Germans?

IB Yes and no. Some he admires, some he doesn't. He's got very clear tastes.

GC Because I am intrigued. I am fascinated by András Schiff.

IB So is he, so is he. He's very pro him. They are friends. He thinks Schiff is excellent.

GC I was going to ask you ...

IB He doesn't think Richter is very good. And who else does he not like? Most of the pianists who play in London. People like Bishop-Kovachevich, or that other Yugoslav.

GC Perahia.

IB Perahia he likes. Yes. Marvellous pianist. Beautiful pianist. I like him very much. Second to Brendel, I like him the best.

GC I think that you prefer pianists to violinists.

IB No. I thought Busch was too wonderful. And Heifetz not. He was a great master – he could do anything. I thought the best violinist ever, in my life, by far, was Kreisler. He was not a nice man. He didn't behave well about ... He was a Jew. He didn't behave well under the Hitler regime. But he was certainly the best violinist I ever heard.

GC But piano music you don't prefer to violin?

IB Not as such, no. I've got no preference in that sense. I don't say I like [?]. Not at all. Most Jews prefer the violin – it's traditional. Most East European Jews –

GC And young Israelis.

IB – for obvious reasons, because the violin was portable, so Jews played it.

GC There is something strong in the piano – I don't know.

IB You prefer the piano. It is a greater instrument.

GC When I was a child I preferred the violin.

IB Of course. Yes. But I like viola too. I love the cello.

GC I love the cello. If I had to pick one instrument ...

Side B

IB One of the Bach unaccompanied cello partitas. Of course, Rostropovich also plays them, marvellously, quite different. I think I love both really.

GC But when you ...

IB Brendel does not like Rostropovich that much, again.

GC But if you listen to Bush or to Casals, I mean old records, they are less nice technically, and sometimes they are slow.

IB They are, yes.

GC And yet you love them and you still – you are not disappointed.

IB Because the style ... No, because ...

GC Because you remember how they were.

IB I am not that sensitive, I have to admit. Aline, my wife, is much more so. I remember simply – I just listen to the music, and if it moves me, it moves me. Of course, sometimes it's transformed. *Don Carlos* sung in Covent Garden before the war made no impression on me at all. After the war – it was one of the greatest works of man. *Figaro* – mostly with Mozart there was no difficulty. I first heard *Don Giovanni* in Munich in 1930 – summer 1930. And saw *The Blue Angel* with Marlene Dietrich and – what's his name? – the man, whom I admired even more.

GC The one who played the teacher?

IB Yes, yes. I liked him. He was a German, came from Latvia, tremendous Nazi. He became – what was his name? – excellent actor [?] – it was a wonderful film.

GC Very sad.

IB It was *Don Giovanni* conducted by Leo Blech, who was a very good Berlin Jewish conductor. Went to Sweden. And then, next time, it was *Figaro* in Salzburg, two days later, conducted by Bruno Walter – all very transforming. I never really went to hear these people and hear these things in Covent Garden, I don't know why. I don't know how much Mozart was on in London before the war – not all that much.

GC When you said that you are not very sensitive ...

IB Jannings⁵ is the name of the German.

⁵ Emil Jannings: apparently not from Latvia.

GC Jannings?

IB Jannings.

GC Jannings. The one who played with Marlene Dietrich?

IB Yes, and many other films. I liked all his films. Wonderful German actor.

GC When you said that you were not so sensitive [?], it amazes me – something puzzled me once. You said that you don't always mind if opera is not extremely well ...

IB Correct.

GC [?] It puzzles me because the opera, if it's not well done, it can be very ...

IB If one knows it, that supplies a difference. What I mean is, I can't hear it badly done – no good – done by English singers, usually not good enough, I have to say. But not perfect – I mean A–, A= I can bear quite easily; if I know the music, I am transported by it. To a certain extent, it is the performance that matters less than the work. Much less. I am not a judge – performance [?] is not what matters to me. A wonderful singer singing a bad piece is to me no good. A supreme singer singing Puccini [?] not much pleasure. Lotte Lehmann singing Wagner doesn't give me pleasure.

GC And if they don't play well, they don't act well?

IB Of course, it depresses me, but I can see it. Provided the work is of first-class quality, I can tolerate it. *Figaro* in Istanbul, in a

Turkish cinema, although it was comical – the second act appeared to be done in a harem – nevertheless I can't deny, even if it had been the first time I had heard this opera, I would have been transported. Turkish singers.

GC You insist that you don't have any twentieth-century ...

IB What I love, of course, is hearing rare works, I am not – often not very well done, but I am prepared to go anywhere to hear a work I want to hear, in whatever performance. If some early Verdi opera, or some unknown Bellini, or some rare Mussorgsky is done, I don't mind – of course I'd rather it was well done, but a very poor performance of – what shall we say? – for example, *The Stone Guest* by Dargomyzhsky was done in Padina[?] – I went. St Pancras sometimes does these things in London – I go.

GC You go?

IB Yes. For third-rate works too. I want to know what *Zampa* by Hérold is like. I climb all the stone stairs of King's College London, and then I fall ill next day. That I remember.

GC Before you fell ill?

IB The very next day. I climbed all those steps. The next day I couldn't walk properly, I suddenly began walking slowly. I just couldn't walk at all fast. I like walking fast. I suddenly couldn't, and I knew something was wrong.

GC When was it? Where did you come?

IB Where were those steps? 19...

GC Not when, where?

IB King's College London.

GC I see.

IB Some at the top ...

GC I remember what happened. There is no composer of the twentieth century that you would select.

IB No, that's not true. I don't – all I can say is I wouldn't miss any work written by any composer born in the twentieth century. Bartok and Stravinsky – of course.

GC I was going to ask.

IB No question. Oh, and others too. I'm not a great addict of Richard Strauss, but he's a twentieth-century composer. Mahler, I don't know. Mahler's nineteenth- [?]. But – I am trying to think – I like Poulenc, but I wouldn't miss it. I like Shostakovich, but I wouldn't miss it, I could live without it. I wouldn't miss it, I wouldn't yearn for it.

GC But it's different. Because last time I got the impression that you wouldn't miss it but you like some of them. Yes, I see. Poulenc is twentieth century.

IB Certainly. May not have been born. All right, he *was* born in the twentieth ... born in this century.⁶ So was Shostakovich – just.⁷ Britten I wouldn't miss at all.

⁶ b. 1899.

⁷ b. 1906.

GC And Russians?

IB Twentieth-century?

GC Or, generally speaking, Russian composers.

IB What about them?

GC You haven't mentioned them. There is no Russian composer in your choice of [?].

IB Oh yes. I think that *Boris Godunov* is one of the greatest masterpieces – in every way – and so is *Khovanshchina*, for historical reasons. I once wrote a programme note about it for Covent Garden.⁸ For that programme – written by me, yes. *Eugene Onegin* is an immortal masterpiece – wonderful sweet lyrical music. About that I wrote a note for Glyndebourne⁹ – so I'm a programme-note writer. *The Queen of Spades* is a good opera by Tchaikovsky. After that – nothing. Oh no, I like Rimsky-Korsakov. Oh no, that's wrong. I love – what's it called? – *The Golden Cockerel* – *Coq d'or* – by him, and I like *Sadko*, which is never done in England.

GC That I don't know.

IB 'S-a-d-k-o'. It's the name of a Russian fifteenth-century merchant – fourteenth-century merchant: a legend. And other things too. Korsakov I like more than most people. He is not regarded as a [?] – I like him very much. Sometimes it's boring, but

⁸ 'Historical Note', in *Khovanshchina* (opera programme) ([London], 1963: Royal Opera House Covent Garden Ltd).

⁹ '**Tchaikovsky and Eugene Onegin**', *Glyndebourne Festival Programme Book 1971*, 58–63.

sometimes it's delightful. Never profound, never noble, but agreeable. I like Spanish composers. I love Falla.

GC You love Falla?

IB I love Falla. I like Granados and I like Albéniz. I do not like Turina or Nin or Halffter.¹⁰ These are all Spaniards.

GC When you mentioned *Evgeny Onegin*, it reminded me that I wanted to ask you: Did you say that Pushkin is not translatable?

IB I said that Pushkin's verse – lyrical poetry is not. *Onegin* is – not very good, but can be rendered. One gets something. But lyrical poems – no good at all. I think no lyrical poetry is translatable. Ballads, yes. For example, 'Heracles' written by Goethe is very well translated by the Russian poet Zhukovsky: same rhythm. No good translations of Russian poetry are known to me, by any one. In other words, none about which one can say, 'This is written by a man of genius.' If you know the original, you can admire the translation, but if you don't know the original, then to be completely bowled over by a translation, I think, must be very rare. The best translation of Russian poetry I know – some people say my late friend – what's his name? – ah, he died, diplomat, Ambassador to Jordan at one time [?], curiously enough – just a moment – Charles Johnston. He translated in Russian, a Russian wife, called Princess Bagration. But Maurice Baring translated Pushkin's poem called 'The Prophet' about as well as I've seen any Russian lyric translated.

IB I like music extravagantly, I must say. It's the one art which I can't go without. That's why I play my Walkman when I walk from

¹⁰ Probably Cristóbal Halffter Jiménez-Encina (1930–2021), but possibly one of his uncles Ernesto (1905–89) and Rodolfo (1900–87) Halffter Escriche.

Headington here, and play some pretty inferior music. But still it's a great deal better than nothing – better than silence – on those walks. I don't like walking very much. In Italy, it makes me walk up the hill without effort. Without, I'm terribly bored. I can listen to inferior opera. *Maometto secondo* by – what's his name? – Rossini is not the best of operas, and still. Yes?

GC Did Verdi – you wrote about him – did he influence your – did you prefer some operas to others because of the content, not because of the music?

IB I don't discriminate. To me each Verdi opera has some kind of moral centre. And the moral centre is moving. If it isn't, then the opera is not much good. There are mechanical operas by him. *I due Foscari* is not one of his best operas. It's rather mechanical. So is a very bad comic opera called *Un giorno de regno – regno di giorno*¹¹ – very boring, no good. [?] *Giovanna d'Arco* – not much good. But in *Rigoletto*, for example, the relationship of Rigoletto to his daughter is totally relevant – not just one tune after another. It's not a music box. *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Donizetti is a music box. I enjoy it very much but it's not a relationship [?] – I feel *very* differently about it from ten Verdi operas. Divine composer – Verdi, for me. A great, great composer.

GC I know.

IB I wish I could feel that about Wagner. Most people do. More people feel it about Wagner than feel it about Verdi, I think, by now. He transports them, or moves them. More or less [?]. Not for me.

¹¹ He was right the first time.

GC When there are musical candidates for honorary degrees in Oxford, let's say players – are you consulted?

IB No. As a rule not. I can suggest people. I have done that. For example, it's probably through my suggestion that Brendel got a degree.

GC Ah, he got a degree?

IB Yes. I don't think I suggested Rostropovich, nor Shostakovich – both of them got degrees. I may have suggested Rostropovich – I'm not sure. Shostakovich certainly not. I'm trying to think whom else I've suggested, successfully. Solti was a deserved degree – that came from me all right. But Karajan certainly didn't. That was disgraceful.

GC I remember. We discussed it.

IB Certainly. Fortunately I was in America when he came. And none of these singers – I would not have suggested Kiri Te Kanawa, I wouldn't have suggested – oh – that nice old gentleman who conducts Wagner.¹² Very sweet. I've forgotten his name. He's eighty-three or -four; eighty-four or -five. [?] He did an English *Ring* at Wiener about eight years ago. Very sensational performance, everyone adored it.

GC English?

IB English, yes. Not recognised for years. He's now well over eighty. He got a degree, very independently of me. I can't say that

¹² Possibly Reginald Goodall (1901–90), eighty-eight at the time of this conversation.

I suggested Haitink, who got it last year. I don't think anyone consults me. No.

GC But, generally speaking, musicians get honorary degrees quite often, not so?

IB They do.

GC Was it always the tradition?

IB No. Not at all. Composers, for example. I'm trying to think. Haydn got a degree. Then for a long time I don't know of anybody. Then – who could have got a degree? Certainly not Verdi or Wagner or Puccini or Strauss or – Strauss might have done, but I wouldn't be sure – might have done. Glazunov got a degree – for no particular reason. After him, I'm thinking of Russians – Ravel got a degree. Debussy did not. English composers: Britten, Tippett, Vaughan Williams, probably Elgar.

GC Messiaen?

IB Messiaen didn't come. I suspect because Karajan was getting a degree that day. He said he would come, then didn't turn up. He was accepted, it was offered to him, but he didn't come. He was in a concentration camp during the war, Messiaen. So naturally, Karajan came, couldn't be on the same platform.

GC Is there any American composer that you had – any favourites?

IB No. I respect some of them. I respect them. No. Nobody I long to hear. What composer are you offering me? There's a very good composer at Harvard who writes very modern music. I listen with respect. Not much more than that. I am not transported – I don't

feel I want to hear it again at once. There aren't many important American composers.

GC When you were a child did you try to play any instrument?

IB I was taught the piano. In England. My left hand of course doesn't work properly and I realised I would never play [?] for myself – I played too badly for myself, compared to records, or anything. So I stopped.

GC And you never sang in a choir?

IB Certainly I did. At St Paul's I was a treble: highest voices. I sang in carols, Christmas carols and other – my parents didn't mind in the least. I sang Christian songs, very eagerly, and a lot of – I sang in folk song in English in my preparatory school. I know the basic English folk songs quite well for that reason. I can remember the tunes now. *John Peel*, *Bonnie Prince Charlie*, *The Keel Row* – all kinds of things.

GC And among your friends in the Oxford days, who were the musical mates – those who liked music like you, or you could discuss music with, or you would go to concerts with?

IB In the 1930s, nobody much. Stephen Spender was very musical. But I don't know – yes, I went to Schnabel concerts with him, yes, I did. He was very musical. Still is. With whom did I go? Occasionally I was taken to the opera by young undergraduates who thought I lived too dull a life in New College. We had to go in white ties – to the stalls in Covent Garden, for which they paid. The young men were: a man called Robert Irving, who was a conductor of the ballet in America, who was in Covent Garden. He is now *the* conductor of ballet, getting on – too old by now. He was a very famous ballet conductor. He was one of the young men.

Then there was – who else? Wait a moment – I remember somebody called Ronald Crichton, who is a musical critic to this day, in New College. And the third one – and they would say to me, ‘Come and hear and put on a white tie as our guest.’ That I enjoyed very much. Outings in London. In Oxford I went to all concerts. Who did I talk to? Martin Cooper, who was a famous music critic, who was my contemporary. I wrote a kind of address at his memorial service. He was a great friend. [?] Martin Cooper certainly. Not Desmond Shaw-Taylor, whom I knew but never went. Wasn’t really a friend of.

GC Did anybody have a collection of records, that you would go to his home?

IB No. Yes, I think one, he was called John Griffiths.¹³ He was a classical scholar at Brasenose. He and his father occasionally used to ask me to dinner and play records to me – that was what they wanted, not I. But still, I was quite pleased. Tony Andrewes, who was an ancient historian at New College. He played the cello. And I used to talk about music to him, certainly. In Oxford, I went by myself. I went with Aline, towards the end, after the war, before we were married.

GC That I know.

IB Yes, that you know. How do you know that?

GC Because you told me.

IB Quite.

¹³ Possibly John Godfrey Griffith (1913–91), classics, New College.

GC And I think that Igal told me that he met you and Aline in a concert.

IB Perfectly possible. However, we were married by then.

GC Ah, that's when you were married?

IB Yes. We married in 1955 [sc. 1956]. Wait a moment. There were quite a lot of musical dons, but I don't know that I went to concerts with them. Stuart Hampshire used to go to concerts.

GC Not only to go to concerts, but to discuss music [?].

IB I used to talk to Stuart: it might well be exactly about that. Stephen and Stuart I used to talk to. I used to try and explain why I thought that, although I adored *Fidelio* – that *Don Giovanni* was fundamentally a better work musically, although I love *Fidelio*. I still do. I'm just trying to think who I used to discuss music with. Oh goodness – even as an undergraduate – I used to talk about it to people at Corpus Christi. I was the music critic of the *Oxford Outlook*, of which I was editor, for about a year, under the title of Albert Alfred Apricott – heaven knows why. I wrote one or two pieces. It's all in Hardy's bibliography.

GC All right. That was the music [?] for today. Now, have you ever met Raymond Aron? I mean, you hardly met him ...

IB Oh, I knew him quite well.

GC At a certain moment – you did respond – his thesis was also, I think, on something – on inevitability in history, or determinism, or [?] he published it all...

IB No, I'll tell you. I met him in Paris with Nabokov, who was his friend, I should think in, I don't know, 1947 – that kind of date, quite long ago. I made friends with him. He was a very cold fish, corpse-like figure, even in appearance. I am always coupled with him as far as views are concerned. We belong to the same right-wing – we are sort of right-wing liberals. He is well to the right of me. But still. He was a highly intelligent ... I used to see him from time to time. We met – never by arrangement. For example, I met him in New York at lunch with Mac Bundy. I met him in Paris at lunch with, say, Germaine de Rothschild. I met him in Oxford when he delivered Chichele lectures in All Souls. I met him at the conference in honour of the First International in 1963 [sc. 1964] in Stanford – oh, the library, I think – and so on. But we knew each other. But he always felt, I think, that I didn't admire him quite enough. I remember when he was very angry with me. We both delivered long lectures at this First International centenary. He naturally printed his. I refused to print mine.¹⁴ He couldn't understand why. It was perfectly all right. He went to listen to it. I heard his – no perhaps I didn't hear his – I had to go away. But he was irritated that I should not regard these things as automatically printable. Somehow it was a criticism of him [because of his view?] that every lecture is to be printed. I remember that. But I saw him from time to time. I saw him at meetings in St Antony's occasionally. He came to England very often, as you know. I admired him. He was a man of very superior intellect, really; he was a wonderful political commentator. His books I never admired very much. His first two books – one of them is about German sociology,¹⁵ and is very dull. And the other is about philosophy of

¹⁴ Now in SR as 'Marxism and the International in the Nineteenth Century'.

¹⁵ *La Sociologie allemande contemporaine* (Paris, 1935); *German Sociology*, trans. Mary and Thomas Bottomore (London, 1957).

history,¹⁶ which I thought no good. I think that was his doctorate thesis. Then he wrote a book on war which wasn't of great interest.¹⁷ He wrote a lot of books on politics – ultimately these are publicistic books. I never thought they had any solidity. But he was brilliant, interesting and usually right. Not terribly anxious to be a Jew. But still, when de Gaulle made that famous attack, he responded.

GC He had a very sharp mind.

IB Very.

GC Very analytical, very ...

IB He was the best political analyst of my time. Easily.

GC Very rational. Maybe too rational.

IB Exactly.

GC But I don't know why I asked you about him, because, you see ...

IB He used to come to dinner at our house here. We knew each other well enough for that.

GC But you sense that – you think that he ...

¹⁶ *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire: Essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique* (Paris, 1938); *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: An Essay on the Limits of Historical Objectivity*, trans. George J. Irwin (London, 1948).

¹⁷ Presumably *Les Guerres en chaîne* (Paris, 1951); *The Century of Total War*, trans. E. W. Dickes and O. S. Griffiths (London, 1954).

IB Certain ... not quite enough. He was very, very vain.

GC I understand. But how did you sense it?

IB One does [?] somehow. A certain chilliness of manner. Theoretically we were great friends. But in practice no.

GC You see, I knew nothing about it. But I don't know why I asked you. I sensed something.

IB No. And he was mildly critical of my writings, I can't remember which. He never had a word of praise for anything I ever wrote. And I understood that this was in some way some kind of obscure jealousy, which he didn't need to feel. His reputation was not under threat from me. But I am just trying to think ... he disagreed with me about certain things, and said so. What, for example?

GC I don't remember.

IB I think about – I am not so sure that he wasn't some kind of determinist in history. I wouldn't be sure.

GC I'll check it again.

IB He believed in causality. I didn't even give him a chance much – I can't remember. I am trying to think what he would have disagreed with.

GC What he would?

IB Have disagreed with.

GC I didn't [?]. I'll check it. I read his memoirs, which I didn't like. They were too detailed – it was too – his memoirs are not interesting.

IB Too – no. As a man, he had no personality for me. Politically even, there was something corpse-like. All right, he was against the Algerian war, he was pro-American, he was an old conservative. But somehow he lacked some kind of central impulse. He didn't stand for anything in particular. Only for human intellect. Very good. But somehow moral feeling was lacking. And people who have no moral impulse in political matters seem to me not to be able to have much effect. Nor did he.

GC Did Aline know him?

IB No, I don't think. Before the war? She knew his brother, yes.

GC Robert, or ...?

IB Not Robert, no. Somebody else. Robert wasn't his brother.¹⁸ No. Some relation, not a brother.

GC There is a brother ...

IB But this man wrote nothing. The one that you're thinking of she didn't know. Maybe there is even another Robert. But the Robert you are thinking of was not a brother.

GC No, he's not. The one who wrote on the Resistance.

¹⁸ Aron's (elder) brothers were Adrien (1902–69) and Robert (1903–78). There was also a Robert Aron (1898–1975) who wrote on Vichy but wasn't a brother of Raymond.

IB On Vichy and so on, no.

GC Sartre you certainly haven't met.

IB No.

GC And you are not curious to meet.

IB No. In no way, sure. Didn't want to particularly. Took no interest, and I was turned against him when I talked to Edgar Wind, who maintained that he was a collaborator during the war, which is not true. He stayed in Paris, his plays were performed, he didn't do anything positive of which he could be accused, as far as I know.

GC And any contacts with other ...

IB The only book by him which I really enjoyed – I thought that the first book¹⁹ was remarkable – *L'être et le néant* – I never finished it. But his doctrines – of his [?] of commitment – I thought did have a streak of genius, and I was influenced by it.²⁰

GC You were?

IB Yes, but by realising that that was exactly what he thought. Not by reading him. And then I asked other people what his ideas were, and they said, 'Well, he doesn't believe in metaphysics, he thinks it's just a kind of crutch [on which] people lean to justify themselves.' Fundamentally you just plump, you just commit yourself to a certain line of action, and you are responsible. And that's that. You can't say history, or progress, or my party, my

¹⁹ By no means Sartre's first book.

²⁰ See E 467–8.

nation demands it. I thought that was right. In that sense he believed in freedom. Freedom of the will.

GC In that sense.

IB Of free choice.

GC [*unclear*]

IB In that sense. But on the Marxist part, the great big thing about the – what's it called? – 'logique dialectique' – I didn't think that was any good. In *Les Mots* ...

GC *Les Mots*.

IB Was a remarkable book.

GC I liked *The Reprieve*. I thought it was a good piece of – historical novel.

IB [?] Which? What is that in French?

GC It's the first [sc. second] of the three volumes of [*Les Chemins de la liberté*].

IB It's not *Nausée* – that's separate. That's Camus. That is Sartre, that's right.

GC No. He wrote three books – the first is called *The Reprieve* and finishes in 1939, when Daladier comes back from Munich, and I thought that it was a good piece of social novel, if you want.

IB Yes, certainly. I'm sure you are right. I never read it. I didn't read Sartre very much.

GC Was he *en vogue*, really, among your friends?

IB No.

GC Never?

IB He was, among the philosophers, not at all. Until Iris Murdoch wrote a little book about him. Freddie Ayer claimed to have knocked him out, as far as the English were concerned, for a number of years. He was never widely admired in England.

GC He couldn't read English?

IB No. I know. Incredible. German. [?]

GC He went to Berlin to study German.

IB But in America he would speak no English.

GC Nothing – he depended on his wife, who spoke well.

IB She did.

GC She spoke English well. I mean, she spent five or six years in America, I think.

IB I was impressed by the fact that after the Six-Day War he was not anti-Israel.

GC No, he was not.

IB That must have been 'Landsman' [?], to some extent.

GC Not only. All his coterie were Jews, by the way.

IB Who else?

GC Young North African Jews.

IB I see. I understand.

GC Some are considered not to be young philosophers. All of them were Jews. He visited Israel before the Six-Day War [...] I met him. He was so rational. Moral issues he didn't mind. When we discussed the problem of the refugees, for example – Arab refugees ...

IB He didn't care?

GC He discussed it strongly, but from political, not from moral ...

IB Angle [?]. Not from a human angle.

GC Yes. It was quite surprising.

IB Yes.

GC I was not impressed personally. Neither by him, nor by ...

IB Not like Marcuse, about whom I must tell you. I knew Marcuse, and I met him in Israel once, when he came.

GC I knew that.

IB He delivered a lecture in Jerusalem, and afterwards somebody said to him, 'Do you regard Israel as an imperialist Fascist state?' To which he thought and said, 'No. I do not. No. Plenty is wrong

with Israel, and I connect [it] with America, which is really unfortunate. But no, I wouldn't call it imperialist.' Then his wife, who has only received probably thirty letters from Israelis, said, 'How could you say [that]? Of course we are imperialist. What do you mean? Monstrous.' And his wife said, 'Terrible thing to have said.' Then he went to Tel Aviv and there he said it was an imperialist state. That I enjoyed very much. He was a highly cynical figure.

GC I never met him and I hardly read him. He had his short days and he has now disappeared.

IB He has evaporated. Nobody talks about him.

GC No, nobody.

IB Quite true. Book on Hegel²¹ is not bad, in a Marxist sort of way. He was amusing to meet. Bright.

GC Did you have any contact with the Frankfurt philosophers?

IB Certainly. Dr Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno spent four years in Oxford. I knew him very very well indeed. And we never talked about philosophy. Philosophically I couldn't understand a word he said. And [he] was certainly half a charlatan. And he certainly knew it. And he certainly didn't mind. He just talked away in the hope that it would take. It was a rhetorical turn which he simply enjoyed putting on. Musically he was very interesting. [?] Schoenberg, but he wrote a singspiel, he wrote a German sort of opera while he was

²¹ *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New York, 1941).

in Oxford, which nobody ever heard of again, called *Tom Sawyer*.²² I remember going to his house. He played it on the piano to me. I remember him saying ‘Komm a-her, Hooockleberry.’

GC [*laughs*]

IB That kind of thing. And he used to play *Don Giovanni* to me and sang it. He was very good fun. He was clever, amusing, and something of a rogue about him. He was not exactly – he was serious when he lectured: he would sort of blow himself up and become a Marxist philosopher. But he had a lot of humour. He used to send me postcards when he went to Germany once or twice – a photograph of Karl Marx’s house in Trier, which belonged to the Weimar Republic, of course. And he would say, ‘Here’ – in German – ‘here lived our master and teacher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’ – that was a pseudonym for Marx.

GC [*laughter*]

IB Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel – ‘hier wohnte’.²³ That I remember. I met him in New York, 1940. He said, ‘Please come to the Russian tea room. There are sometimes very beautiful women there.’ He was a frivolous character.

GC That was in the war?

IB 1940. He left England in 1938 – for Columbia and so on. The institute moved to America. Still, he was very interesting on Schoenberg, on Berg, on Webern and all those people. Friend of

²² It was based on *Tom Sawyer*, but its title was in fact *Der Schatz des Indianer-Joe* (*The Treasure of Indian Joe*). The libretto was published posthumously in 1979, but the music was never finished.

²³ ‘Here lived’.

Benjamin and all that. When I talked to Scholem about him, Scholem was very shocked that I regarded him as a kind of absurd figure. But I did. I couldn't ... Everybody in Oxford did – a bit.

GC And other people?

IB No. [?] Habermas [?]. He called on me, but I don't really know him. Habermas was shocked by me.

GC Why?

IB I talked to him about the eighteenth century. I talked to him about the origins of Romanticism, in which, as you know, I take an interest. And I said to him: One of the causes of it, in my opinion, is purely personal and social – trivial as this may seem. All the great French *philosophes*, with the exception of Diderot, were well-born. D'Alembert was the natural son of a great lady, Montesquieu was a baron, Condillac was a *vicomte*, his brother Mably was a *vicomte*, Condorcet was a *marquis*. Voltaire was not, but he was a kind of upper bourgeois, like Goethe. The physiocrats were not, but by and large Diderot was the only man. He was assimilated [?]. Grimm was a baron, Holbach was a baron, Helvétius was the son of a multi-millionaire and married – his grandfather was doctor to the king's sister, and he married her. Noble lady. And so on. The German *Aufklärung* – they were all children not just of bourgeois but of poor men, one and all. Nietzsche once said they were sons of clergymen, but they weren't. Kant was the son of a saddle maker; Fichte was a poor peasant put through school by some local worthy, local rich man, baron; the Schlegel brothers, the sons of a ropemaker; Schleiermacher, son of a poor man; Schiller was the son of a miserable army doctor, persecuted very easily. Goethe was the only one who was respectable, not 'von', but still he was the son of a prosperous lawyer in Frankfurt. So – in England, I said, half-and-half. Hume

was a gentleman, Johnson was not. Richardson and Robertson were not, but Gibbon was. It was all mixed up rather. Because that's how it worked in England. Sons of peers are not called Lords or ... And I said, one of the things was Herder, who was the son of a very poor man – when he went to Paris he thought he could speak French. Nobody understood a word he said. He was very wounded. And that increased his Francophobia. And I thought the Romantic movement was in part founded on contempt and dislike for the French Enlightenment, for the lucidity, the shallowness, the superficiality, the coldness, the inhumanity, the falsity of the whole movement. People were just highly brilliant, intelligent etc. Diderot was the only one whom he ever liked, really. And so I said there is a certain social tension there between these aristocrats and these poor men with their dubious manners. He was *very* shocked. He said, 'Yes, of course, if you reduce things like that to personality ...'. I ought to have produced class divisions or economic changes in Germany, or whatever you liked. But the idea that people resented – personal resentment came into it he was not prepared to accept.

GC That was orally?

IB Oh entirely. He came to see me in Headington.

GC It was in a personal discussion?

IB Just he and I.

GC Really.

IB Yes.

GC And he *was* shocked?

IB Clearly. He said, 'How can you?'

GC I can see.

IB Quite right. If you are going to be a serious thinker how can you pay attention to vulgarisation and that kind of reduction of it? It was some kind of snobbery – God knows what. Anti-snobbery. And yet I believe it.

GC I know.

IB Those things matter.

GC But I am sure that you encounter many people who are shocked by it.

IB Of course.

GC Particularly Germans.

IB They want to explain everything in terms of impersonal causes – not attempt to drag personality into it. Fichte was the only man who said, 'The philosophy of a man depends on his temperament.'²⁴ He did say it.

GC By the way, I never asked you: Your friends, the philosophers here – when you turned in to history of ideas and your etiquette[?], do they agree with you?

IB Nobody in Oxford took any interest in history of ideas.

²⁴ 'A man's philosophy is as his nature, not his nature as his philosophy.' *Erste Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): J. G. Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte (Berlin, 1845–6), i 434.

GC I know.

GC Therefore there is no disagreement.

GC But let's say now. If you would have said what you said to Habermas.

IB Yes.

GC You would analyse it or classify it, let's say to Herbert.

IB He wouldn't object.

GC To Stuart?

IB Stuart might feel a certain wish to defend a more [radical/adequate?] position. Stuart would think it, perhaps, a little bit overdone. He doesn't want to explain history in personal terms at all. He would like to believe ...

GC That's why I asked.

IB He is not a Marxist, but he wants to have some kind of overview, like Spinoza, some kind of general explanation in scientific terms, not perhaps metaphysical, as he wouldn't like it very much. Otherwise it would cause no shock.

GC But when you say he wouldn't, you have never discussed it?

IB I never talk about anything to Stuart. He feels I am terribly unsympathetic to his philosophy and vice versa. We can't talk about philosophy – at all.

GC And yet it didn't puncture[?] your friendship?

IB In no degree.

GC Because, if I may sum up, in all our conversations we didn't speak about Stuart or Herbert. But Stuart comes up finally [?] as if he's really one of your closest friends.

IB He's an intimate friend.

GC How is it?

IB Absolutely. More than Herbert.

GC I was going to tell you that if I didn't ask a question [...]

Side C

IB All right. To Herbert I can talk about anything. I find it infinitely easy to talk to Herbert about life, about philosophy – about anything.

GC Personal as well as philosophy? Everything.

IB Absolutely. We don't agree about various things. But yes, certainly. He probably thinks that I'm rather too conservative for him. He's a lifelong member of the Labour Party, as Stuart is, as [I/they?] remain. But he's got an open mind. He's not – he doesn't suffer from neurotic defensiveness, which Stuart does to some extent. I'm trying to think why I can't [?] ... Stuart thinks – finds my philosophical positions intolerable really. Not that he disagrees with anything specifically. He feels I am politically reactionary, right-wing liberal maybe, but something like that. What he thinks about me is that – he told me the other day. He feels that I am too

amused by the world as it is to have – constantly ask myself how it could be improved.

GC That's Stuart?

IB Yes. My thoughts don't wander round possibilities of radical change. And that he finds to be a defect. If one is interested in politics one must want to stop bad things and do something energetic about good things, instead of being sceptical to the degree to which he finds me to be. He thinks I am amused about the world as it is, like Hume, whom he also dislikes – same reason.

GC And is Stuart still the same?

IB Unaltered. He married the two really left-wing wives, and that's what does it.

GC The second wife is also very left wing.

IB Oh yes. And feminist too. I don't know [?] he was in Berlin for a year with her. I found that he hadn't really met any Germans to speak to really. There are plenty of interesting people in the University of Berlin. He talked to Americans. Lots of Germans speak English. [He spoke to] one or two. But he never mentions names of anybody interesting. Never. He kept himself to ... She mingled a lot with historians of science – which was why she was there. No, Stuart thinks that I am not very interested; he thinks that my [?]ical views are somewhat reactionary, I don't take much interest in logic, or in what he calls philosophy of mind, I haven't read Freud properly. No good.

GC The fact that you hadn't read Freud doesn't [*unclear*], I told you.

IB All right.

GC But we'll come back to it.

IB Yes.

GC I asked you about it, but we'll come ... You said that even Namier told you that you ought to write about him.

IB He certainly did. Namier was influenced by Freud. Deeply.

GC I once asked him: if he had to pick up one tool for a historian – only one – he said psychology.

IB Certainly. Because I think he was psychoanalysed in Vienna.

GC Twice.

IB Twice?

GC Once in Vienna and I think the second time in London – when he was quite old.

IB Could be.

GC But in the early days in Vienna. No, but he believed in, as a historian ...

IB He also believed in graphology. He was always trying to get me specimens of Beeley's writing. He wrote an article, I remember,

which I stopped him from calling ‘Reelly, Mr Beeley!’²⁵ Beeley was a kind of *bête noire*.

GC ‘Well done, Mr Beeley!’²⁶

IB And then – I am trying to think, why did I never read Freud? I never took the slightest interest in psychology. I didn’t read William James either.

GC But you knew that he was very influential.

IB Certainly.

GC And you said that even Stuart would be quite annoyed that you didn’t ...

IB I think there’s something shallow and non-introspective about me. I don’t think I think about myself, or about my own mind. I’m terribly uninterested in myself. This is the truth. That’s why I can’t write an autobiography and for that reason anyone who probes the human psyche is probably of no particular interest to me. I don’t feel I have problems which this would answer. I am probably very inhibited and full of complexes but *ex hypothesi* I don’t feel them. I

²⁵ But an article by Namier entitled ‘Really, Mr Beeley!’ did appear in the British periodical *Zionist Review: A Weekly Survey of Jewish Affairs* 7 no. 110 (New Series), 19 June 1942, 6 and 10.

²⁶ A satirical remark by Namier in a critique by him of Beeley’s ‘The Administration of the British Mandate for Palestine, 1938–9’, which appears in Arnold J. Toynbee [ed.], assisted by V. M. Boulter, *Survey of International Affairs, 1938*, vol. 1 (London etc., 1941), 414–573. Namier’s critique is in a review of Toynbee’s volume in 781 131 (January–June 1942) no. 781 (March 1942), 137–44 (remark at 143), reprinted in L. B. Namier, *Conflicts: Studies in Contemporary History* (London, 1942), 102–20 (remark at 117).

should have read him [Freud], because after all I paid very little attention to sex. So it is. But still.

GC It's interesting, because – I can see ...

IB I would never have read Marx if I didn't write about him.

GC But if somebody would approach you – like you were approached about Marx – and suggest you write a biography of Freud, it could have happened.

IB It could.

GC It could.

IB It could

GC You had no inhibitions?

IB Well, I knew something about Marx. No. None at all. My approach – neutral. And I went to meet him, as you know.

GC Freud?

IB Yes.

GC I'm not sure.

IB I interviewed him. Oh yes. I went to see him.

GC When?

IB In 1938. I knew a man called Oscar Philipp – a metal merchant who lived two doors away from my parents in Hampstead.²⁷ I was visiting my parents in 1938 – summer. He met me and chatted to me, and he said, ‘By the way, I wondered, you’re a philosopher. Freud’s wife is my first cousin.’ She was called Bernhays – a well-known German family, produced some very eminent scholars. Great classical scholar whom Momigliano wrote about. ‘Would you like to meet Dr Freud?’ I said, ‘Yes, delighted.’ I’d never read a line. I was purely a tourist [?]. So I went to No. 23A [sc. 20] Maresfield Gardens at 6 o’clock in the afternoon, on a Friday – no, not 6, at 4 o’clock – and I rang the bell and he answered. We must have talked in German. And he said, ‘How do you do’, and so on. ‘[?] glad to meet you. I was told about you by my wife’s cousin. What do you do?’ I said, ‘I teach philosophy at Oxford.’ ‘In that case you must think that I’m a complete charlatan.’ Let me tell you, I told this story to the Freud Archives in New York – they were very displeased. Then I said, ‘No, no, no. How can you say things like that?’ He then pointed to a little figurine on the mantelpiece and said, ‘Do you know where this comes from?’ I said, ‘No.’ ‘Are you sure?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Quite sure?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘It comes from Megara. I see you are not pretentious.’ ‘Have you ever met *princesse* Marie Bonaparte?’ She got him out of Vienna. I said, ‘No.’ ‘Did you know her father, Prince Nicholas of Greece?’ ‘No.’ ‘I see you are not a snob.’ I kept getting these negative marks. He then said down. He had this rather distorted chin because he was suffering from cancer of the mouth, which made him look rather curious. He looked like a nasty old German Jewish doctor. That’s what he looked like – severe. Böser Professor.²⁸ Then he told me how he was arrested by the Nazis; how he was under house arrest; how he was rather

²⁷ A slight exaggeration of his proximity. There were two doors after the Berlins’ house in their street, and then the Philipps were three doors along the next road.

²⁸ ‘Evil Professor’.

frightened in that process. Marie Bonaparte got him out – not sure she didn't come herself, accompanied him. He said, 'I paid no attention – Nazis – perhaps that was a mistake.' Then he said, 'Do you think if I came to Oxford I might be able to do business?' In my mind's eye I saw two miles of undergraduates. 'Dr Freud receives from 2:00 to 4:00.' So I said, 'Yes, there is a considerable possibility.' We laughed a bit about that. 'Well, I might come.' Then what else did we talk about? Nothing. Then his wife came in and he said, 'Today is Friday. Like all Jewish women they will wish on Friday to light candles.'

GC That he said to his wife?

IB To me. His wife said to me, 'Like all good Jewish women I have an inclination on Fridays to light candles. But this monster – *dieser Unmensch* – says all religion is nothing but superstition. He shook his head very solemnly and said, 'Ja, alle religion ist ein Aberglaube.' Means 'superstition'. He said it very seriously. She said, 'You see? Monster. He won't let me do it.' This must have happened before – the joke must have been there fifty years. Then she chatted about her cousin a bit. [?] Then his grandson came in. I didn't know whether it was Lucian or Clement. To this day I don't know. And he said: 'Where have you been?' 'I have been to a play.' 'What was it called?' '*Romeo and Juliet*.' 'I thought you were your own Romeo.' And everybody – Frau Freud laughed, I had to laugh, and the boy had to laugh, and a man called Hollitscher – an odd fellow. He was I think some kind of son-in-law. He was not married to Anna, but [?] relation. Maybe he was married to one of the brothers' wives' sisters.²⁹ He was the man who predicted fashions in Vienna. He didn't design them – he predicted.

²⁹ Not so. Robert Hollitscher (1876–1959) was the husband of Anna Freud's eldest sister Mathilde, and thus straightforwardly Sigmund Freud's son-in-law.

GC The name was?

IB Something like – I am not sure – Hollitscher, H o l l i t s c h e r – that kind of name. Then we all sat on the terrace, we all drank coffee – it was like a play by Schnitzler – Vienna 1912. And then nothing, just small talk – about the weather, about what he would do if he would write, whether he was too tired to write, whom I knew in Oxford, didn't know anybody, was there a professor of psychology? No. He said psychology in Oxford meant rats, which at that time it did.

GC Even now, I think that the experimental psychology is still the stronger part of psychology.

IB Oh, I am sure it is here.

GC All right. That's the end of the interview on September 13th, or 29th.³⁰ It was quite a long interview.

³⁰ There is some confusion about the date, and about the number of days in September. I have adopted 1 October.