

Lion Feuchtwanger, *Jud Süß* and the Nazis

CHRISTIANE SCHÖNFELD

Lion Feuchtwanger's journey into exile was marked by hardship, loss and revulsion towards the barbaric Nazi state and its all too willing collaborators. However, his literary texts, articles, speeches and letters from 1933 to 1958 reveal the author's agency, loyalty, humanity and unwavering sense of humour.¹ Together with his wife Marta, Feuchtwanger spent the last twenty-five years of his life in France, New York and California, never following his original intention to return to Germany. Far from his *Heimat*, in his writing Feuchtwanger repeatedly evokes an imaginary Germany and the space he considers home. For the Jewish author, Nazism is 'der Wiedereinbruch der Barbarei in Deutschland', personified by the 'Triumvirat des Ekels' Hitler, Göring and Goebbels.² The Hitler regime is, in his view, a grotesque, bizarre aberration – 'die ungeheure, blutige Grotteske, die sich in uns und an uns allen austobt'³ – as he puts it in his 1940 novel *Exil*.³ In *Der falsche Nero*, Feuchtwanger voices his disgust at the lack of resistance of both Germans and the international community: 'Das Scheußlichste: vor diesem dreiköpfigen Höllenhund wälzt sich wirklich in Staub und

1 It is the latter qualities that link this paper to Rhys Williams, whose friendship I treasure. Thank you, dear Rhys, for all the support, inspiration and laughter! I would also like to express my gratitude to Michaela Ullmann at the Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, USC, Los Angeles, the *Feuchtwanger Gesellschaft*, the *Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek*, Berlin and Ian Wallace, who encouraged me to take a closer look at Feuchtwanger and Harlan and their respective *Jud Süß* texts. See my essay 'Lion Feuchtwanger and Veit Harlan: *Jud Süß*', in *Feuchtwanger and Film. Feuchtwanger-Studien*, 1, ed. Ian Wallace (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009).

2 Lion Feuchtwanger, *Der falsche Nero* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1980), 206.

3 Lion Feuchtwanger, *Exil* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1956), 816.

Exstase die Welt'.⁴ As if to reassure himself, Feuchtwanger repeatedly states in articles and speeches that the Third Reich is but a malfunction of an otherwise honourable and effective community, a mere and temporary glitch. Eventually, reason will triumph over idiocy, he believes; Germany will be restored and he will then conclude his *Wartesaal* trilogy properly with an epilogue entitled 'Rückkehr'. Until then, the 'hiccup' that is the Third Reich will be addressed by exposing the ruthlessness and folly of its architects and accomplices, the grave moral devastation amongst the German people, and, in an act of resistance, by evoking humanitarian values in order to defend an attainable image of Germany in keeping with the author's ideals.

In exile, the author's words turn into an apotropaic shield, his works become tools to combat the 'immutable forces of antagonism' and to evoke his unwavering belief in humanity.⁵ In 'Jews and Nazis', Feuchtwanger stresses his belief in the German people, even though part of the population has fallen prey to Nazi propaganda:

Never before has the patient German people been so lied to and deceived. And never before, not even by its worst enemies, have the German people been so misrepresented as by their own official press. It is not true that the atrocities, which have occurred, are a spontaneous outbreak of a people's wrath. They are the result of fourteen years of the most malign atrocity propaganda. The German people are not anti-Semitic. The German people are not militaristic. The German people are not barbarians. [...] It is not true that the German people are behind the present Government. [...] I am convinced that the barbarians who are at present in the saddle will not succeed in eliminating in Germany the laws of humanity, of justice, and of social understanding.⁶

I shall illustrate this moral battle between humanitarian and barbaric impulses by focusing on Feuchtwanger's literary work *Jud Süß*, based on the historical figure Josef Süß Oppenheimer, Veit Harlan's 1940 anti-Semitic

4 Feuchtwanger, *Der falsche Nero*, 207.

5 See Elisabeth Bronfen's discussion of David Fincher's film *Seven* in: *Home in Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 5.

6 Lion Feuchtwanger, 'Jews and Nazis', *Everyman*, 29 April, 1933, 529.

propaganda film of the same title, and Feuchtwanger's reaction to this manipulation and abuse of his work. Harlan's *Jud Süß* is not a straightforward transposition of Feuchtwanger's phenomenally successful novel and play into the film medium.⁷ Nevertheless, Feuchtwanger's texts and the Nazis' anti-Semitic melodrama are closely linked. In his open letter to seven Berlin actors, he wrote that Harlan's film evidently perverted his novel:

Ich lese im *Völkischen Beobachter*, dass Sie die Hauptrollen gespielt haben in einem Film *Jud Süß*, der in Venedig preisgekrönt worden ist. Der Film zeigt, berichtet das Blatt, das wahre Gesicht des Judentums, seine unheimliche Methodik und vernichtende Zielsetzung; er zeigt das unter anderem dadurch, dass er vorführt, wie der Jude Süß sich eine junge Frau durch die Folterung ihres Gatten gefügig macht. Kurz, wenn ich das geschwollene, am Bombast des Führers geschulte Geschwafel ins Deutsche übersetze, dann bedeutet es: Sie haben, meine Herren, aus meinem Roman *Power* (*Jud Süß*) mit Hinzufügung von ein bisschen 'lösa einen wüst anti-semitischen Hetzfilm im Sinne Streichers und seines *Stürmers* gemacht.⁸

The synopsis of the film highlighted the instantly recognisable perversion of Feuchtwanger's text: the depiction of the young woman and the sexual abuse she endures. She is indeed a prime example of the Nazis' ruthless misrepresentation. Her character, rape and tragic death demonstrate the Nazis' abuse of the Jewish writer's work.

Hitherto, scholars have, however, regularly identified the location of the literary and film text in a specific chapter of Württemberg history as the only common factor.⁹ This view is based on research by Friedrich

7 See Lion Feuchtwanger, 'Offener Brief an sieben Berliner Schauspieler', Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, University of Southern California, Box D8a, typescript, 7 pages. Published in *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1941; German original in *Aufbau* (New York), 4 July 1941.

8 Feuchtwanger, 'Offener Brief', typescript, 1. *Power* was the title of the American translation of Feuchtwanger's novel and also the American title of Lothar Mendes' 1934 film *Jew Süß*.

9 See, for example, Dorothea Hollstein, *Jud Süß' und die Deutschen. Antisemitische Vorurteile im nationalsozialistischen Spielfilm* (Frankfurt/Main: Ullstein, 1983), 78; Stefan Mannes, *Antisemitismus im nationalsozialistischen Propagandafilm. 'Jud Süß' und 'Der ewige Jude'* (Köln: Teiresias, 1999), 27.

Knilli and Siegfried Zielinski, who stated in 1983: 'In Wirklichkeit aber hat der Harlan-Film mit dem Drama und Roman *Jud Süß* nur die historische Vorlage gemeinsam, sonst nichts'.¹⁰ Consequently, the complexity of the relationship between Feuchtwanger's text and its perverted adaptation has largely been ignored.

Among the various literary adaptations of the historical Jud Süß or Joseph Ben Issachar Süßkind Oppenheimer (1698–1738), beginning with Wilhelm Hauff's 1827 novella, Feuchtwanger's 1925 novel has been the most successful.¹¹ The novel was preceded by the play *Jud Süß*, which Feuchtwanger wrote in 1916 and which premiered in Munich in 1917.¹² He withdrew the play a couple of years later and began working on the novel, believing it to be a more suitable genre. While the play introduces Süß as the Duke's already established 'Geheimer Finanzienrat', the novel begins prior to their first meeting and offers a much more detailed and multi-faceted account of time and place as well as of the main characters, convincingly unfolding their psychology. The basic idea and structure as well as the key narrative strands, however, remain largely identical.

Feuchtwanger tells the highly ambivalent story of the vain and ruthless businessman, the elegant, popular socialite and subservient Jew Josef Süß Oppenheimer, who enables Karl Alexander's court to flourish while profiting from his endeavours. Feuchtwanger presents a decadent, weak ruler, avaricious and insatiably materialistic men, women seduced by power and charm, and an anti-Semitic people that might kill Jews or 'nagende Würmer' (265) for the fun of it – 'aus purem Gaudium'. (408) The subtext of the charismatic Jew's quest for political influence and financial wealth is his great, albeit naïve ambition to acquire enough power to enable the

10 Friedrich Knilli and Siegfried Zielinski, 'Lion Feuchtwangers *Jud Süß* und die gleichnamigen Filme von Lothar Mendes (1934) und Veit Harlan (1940)', in *Lion Feuchtwanger*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: Text & Kritik, 1983), 99–121 (100).

11 Lion Feuchtwanger, *Jud Süß* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991). Hereafter references will be given in brackets in the text following quotations.

12 Lion Feuchtwanger, *Jud Süß. Schauspiel in drei Akten (vier Bildern)* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1918).

liberation of the Jewish race. However, in Süß Feuchtwanger also creates a father. His fictional Süß has a daughter, who is a symbol of innocence, beauty and kindness – and whom he keeps hidden away in a house near Hirsau in order to shield her from the corrupting influences of the world he made his home. The white house in Hirsau is located within a *hortus conclusus* reminiscent of a Renaissance painting, a delightful walled garden filled with flowers, ensconcing the Virgin Mary and symbolising her purity and virginity. The characterisation of Süß's daughter (called 'Tamar' [palm tree] in Feuchtwanger's drama and 'Naemi' [pleasantness] in the novel) is entwined with the beauty, unaffectedness and isolation of the garden. This blossoming, perfect home of his daughter mirrors the young woman in the eyes of her father: she is pure love and the fountain of life, the 'best part'¹³ of Josef Süß – the part of his soul that has remained untouched by all the ruthless compromises, vain ambitions and insalubrious dealings.

Feuchtwanger's Süß is an absent, but loving and kind father who is idolised by his daughter. By equipping this historical figure with fatherhood, Feuchtwanger not only reflects on his and his young wife Marta's own experiences of the deep love for and devastating loss of a baby daughter, he also creates a human being. Not a monster, as the court documents will have it, but a person who makes compromises in order to advance professionally. Süß chooses to focus on his career and accumulate material riches and, essentially, power. Only the creation of Tamar/Naemi truly highlights the problematic nature of this path. Only when his daughter dies does Süß begin to understand properly the tragic emptiness of his pursuits. Her lifeless body speaks of the violent nature of the Duke and his world. But it also demonstrates the consequences of her father's transgression and calls for resistance. Süß's subsequent revenge on the Duke leads to his own destruction, but this is no longer his concern.

Feuchtwanger's depiction of the suave, power-hungry Jew Süß is not meant to be anti-Semitic. It is an intuitive and sagacious study of the price of success in general and of the historical figure Joseph Süßkind Oppenheimer

13 Lion Feuchtwanger, *Jud Süß. Schauspiel in drei Akten*, 64.

as an example of a 'Mann, der Erfolg hat'¹⁴ in particular. With hindsight, Feuchtwanger's astonishment at the criticism and abuse of his work is surprising. In 1929 he refers to the, in his view, peculiar interpretations and severe criticism from both Jews and anti-Semites that his depiction of Jewish characters evoked.¹⁵ However, he was convinced that 'weder die Nationalsozialisten noch die Zionisten daraus Kapital schlagen können'.¹⁶ But it requires little effort to isolate critical descriptions and negative character traits of Feuchtwanger's Süß. Once the character is thus reduced and contextualised according to Nazi ideology, the depiction of the ruthless and determined Jew could all too easily be included in anti-Semitic narratives.¹⁷ Feuchtwanger's repeated descriptions of Süß's love of power – 'So spannte er ein Netz von Unternehmungen, vielfältig verästelt übers Land. Er dehnte sich und badete in der Macht' (151) – could be placed alongside examples of Nazi propaganda such as Fritz Hippler's supposed 'documentary film' *Der ewige Jude* (1940) or Erich Waschneck's *Die Rothschilds* (1940) that outline the Jews' supposed worldwide conspiracy to expand their power and eventually cause the downfall of the Aryan race.

In 1940, the historical figure Josef Süß Oppenheimer became the epitome of the threatening, ruthless Jew of anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda and the perfect example of a carefully designed construction of deviance. Harlan's *Jud Süß* is probably the most infamous of all Nazi propaganda films and has been discussed by many scholars in the field. The complexity of the German film industry becomes apparent when examining the

14 Lion Feuchtwanger, 'Über die Ursachen meines Erfolgs', typescript (2 pages), Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, University of Southern California, Box D8a, 1. Feuchtwanger had originally planned to write a novel inspired by another 'Mann, der Erfolg hat', Walther Rathenau. See Lion Feuchtwanger, 'Über *Jud Süß*', *Freie Deutsche Bühne*, 5 January 1929 and William Small, 'In Buddha's Footsteps. Feuchtwanger's *Jud Süß*, Walther Rathenau, and the Path to the Soul', *German Studies Review* 12 (1989), 3, 469–85.

15 Feuchtwanger, 'Über *Jud Süß*'.

16 Feuchtwanger, 'Über *Jud Süß*'.

17 For a comparison of Veit Harlan's *Jud Süß* and Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, see Daniel Knopp, *Wunschbild und Feindbild der nationalsozialistischen Filmpropaganda* (Marburg: Tectum, 1997), 50–70.

production of the film. Marta Feuchtwanger refers to Lothar Mendes' 1934 film adaptation of Feuchtwanger's novel when commenting on the Nazis' anti-Semitic version: 'The Nazis had of course noticed this big success of the movie, and they thought that they would take advantage of it and also the success of the book. They made a movie and turned everything into the contrary. It was a very anti-Semitic movie, and the greatest actor, Werner Krauss, played I think four or five parts, each one more anti-Semitic than the other'.¹⁸

Goebbels, 'der kleine, gerissene, ehrgeizzerfressene Betrüger'¹⁹ as Feuchtwanger calls him, arranged for a screening of Mendes' film during the pre-production phase of the Nazi version. The audience included the director Veit Harlan and his co-scriptwriter Ludwig Metzger.²⁰ Despite the disapproving interpretations by a few critics that both Feuchtwanger's play and novel had engendered, his work and Mendes' adaptation were diametrically opposed to Nazi anti-Semitism. Goebbels was, however, adamant that 'a new film version had to be made'.²¹ The result was, in Feuchtwanger's view, a 'Schandwerk',²² which was packed with visual quotes from Mendes' adaptation.

The Ufa film was shot with a stellar cast, including: Ferdinand Marian (Jud Süß), Heinrich George (Herzog Karl Alexander), Werner Krauss (Rabbi Loew, Süß' assistant Levy, and other Jewish characters), Kristina Söderbaum (Dorothea Sturm), Eugen Klöpfer (her father, Landschaftskonsulent Sturm), Albert Florath (Obrist Röder) and Malte Jäger (Dorothea's

18 Marta Feuchtwanger, *An Émigré Life. Munich, Berlin, Sanary, Pacific Palisades*, interviewed by Lawrence M. Weschler, completed under the auspices of the Oral History Program, University of California, University of Southern California, 1976, vol. 2, 552. Lothar Mendes' *Jew Süß* premiered in 1934. The film was released in the USA as *Power* (like the American translation of Feuchtwanger's novel).

19 Feuchtwanger, *Der falsche Nero*, 206.

20 For the production history of the film, see Susan Tegel, 'Veit Harlan and the Origins of *Jud Süß*, 1938–39', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 16 (1996), 4, 515–31, here 520.

21 Tegel, 526.

22 Feuchtwanger, 'Offener Brief an sieben Berliner Schauspieler', 5.

fiancé Faber).²³ As well as Harlan, Krauss, Klöpfer, George and Florath knew Feuchtwanger well, having appeared in his play *Jud Süß*. Feuchtwanger was shocked when he learned that they had agreed to participate in this propaganda film:

Ich stelle mir vor, wie Goebbels gelegentlich zu einem von Ihnen sagt: 'Und da wäre dann noch dieser Jud Süß. Feuchtwanger hat ihn so populär gemacht, und er hat, objektiv, wie diese Juden nun einmal sind, auch alles so bequem zur Schau gestellt, was sich gegen den Juden ausdeuten lässt. Da könnte man doch einfach hingehen und sich das klauen. Man braucht nur die andern zwei Drittel des Buches zu unterschlagen, und man könnte die besten Geschäfte machen.'²⁴

Feuchtwanger's novel and Harlan's film share a number of similarities, especially the characterisation of Josef Süß Oppenheimer as a businessman, who is vain, hardnosed and ambitious, attractive and charismatic, and the representation of the central female figure as both an ideal and a site of violence. The attempted rape and subsequent suicide are, in both Feuchtwanger and Harlan's texts, the climax and the turning point of the narrative. However, while Feuchtwanger depicts greed, vanity and ambition as human weaknesses of both Jews and Gentiles, Harlan focuses entirely on the initially charming and helpful Jew as a dangerous and recklessly underestimated threat. The opening credits of Harlan's film claim authenticity – 'Die im Film geschilderten Ereignisse beruhen auf Tatsachen' – and introduce Süß as a ghetto Jew in traditional attire, who hides unimaginable riches in his modest abode. Shortly after this identification of the main lead as Jewish and marginalised, seemingly safely contained in the ghetto, the film cuts to an attractive, elegantly dressed gentleman in a carriage: Süß effortlessly masks his true identity and is on his way to Stuttgart. His crossing of the border (Stuttgart is 'judenfrei'), is at the same time a violation of the com-

²³ The film can be viewed at the Bundesarchiv Berlin and the British Film Institute in London. My analysis is based on a viewing at the BFI.

²⁴ Around the time the Nazis took power, a large edition of the novel *Jud Süß* was published. A few volumes were burnt, the rest were sold in Austria and Switzerland for foreign currency. See Feuchtwanger, 'Offener Brief an sieben Berliner Schauspieler', 2 ff.

munity. The film focuses on Süß as an insatiable and merciless egomaniac, lacking conscience, gifted only in manipulation and the accumulation of wealth. The Jew here is clearly depicted as the deviant other.²⁵ Klaus Kreimeier rightly links the timing of anti-Semitic propaganda films and the Nazis' strategic organisation of mass murder.²⁶ The threat to the community lies in the adaptability of Süß, as representative of his entire race, and his desire to erode the community from within. His cunning flexibility and heartlessness make him dangerous, his fantastic wealth is his asset, and his sexualisation highlights the potentially fatal rupture of the community through the destructive force of his presence.

Nazi film's heartthrob Ferdinand Marian's dark Süß is placed early on in opposition to young, blond Dorothea Sturm, who is played by Harlan's wife Kristina Söderbaum. She is presented as a symbol of health and purity, beauty and youth – clearly a representative of the Nazis' ideal woman and an 'Aryan' version of Feuchtwanger's Tamar and Naemi. In a complete inversion of the narrative structure and intention of Feuchtwanger's novel and play, the ideal woman here is not the adoring and adored daughter of a Jew, but is placed in opposition to the deviant Other, whose victim she inevitably becomes. It is the Jew, not the Duke, who is the rapist. However, the description of the Duke's attempted rape of Süß's daughter and her subsequent suicide in Feuchtwanger's play and novel are almost identical and have clearly impacted on the Nazi version of the story. Feuchtwanger's description of Süß's daughter's violation and death bears striking similarities to the rape of Dorothea Sturm by Jud Süß in the Nazi film script. In all three texts, the sexual assault on the virgin victim and the pitiless

²⁵ On deviance see, for example, Linda Schulte-Sasse, 'Courtier, Vampire, or Vermin? *Jud Süß's* Contradictory Effort to Render the "Jew" Other', *Perspectives on German Cinema*, eds Terry Ginsberg and Kirsten M. Thompson (New York: Hall, 1996), 184–220.

²⁶ Klaus Kreimeier, 'Antisemitismus im nationalsozialistischen Film', *Jüdische Figuren in Film und Karikatur. die Rothschilds und Joseph Süß Oppenheimer*, ed. Cilly Kugelmann (Thorbecke: Signaringen, 1995) 135–67; here 142 ff.: 'Timing des Massenmords und der "Reklame" für den Tod der Juden'.

destruction of the unequivocal symbol of purity and beauty is the climax of the narrative.

The Duke's carnal, even carnivorous, desire – labelling Naemi 'Braten' (313) and 'frisches Weiberfleisch' (315) in Feuchtwanger's novel – is comparable to Harlan's depiction of Süß's predatory sexuality in the film. In a reversal of Feuchtwanger's literary texts and, specifically, the tragic events leading to the death of Süß's sweet daughter, the central female figure of the Nazi film – the pure, good-natured 'Dorothea'²⁷ – is the daughter of Süß's political opponent, the Protestant *Landschaftskonsulent* Sturm. The rape here is presented as the final and most significant act of Süß's violent transgression. The Jew as sexual beast and vampire, sucking the life spirit from individual and community alike is, of course, a common motif in anti-Semitic propaganda.

Feuchtwanger's play depicts a disgusting, greedy, but at the same time playful and naïve Duke, who calls Süß's beautiful, young daughter 'Täubchen' and 'Tierchen',²⁸ while in Harlan's film, Süß the rapist compares his victim to a 'Vogel'. In all three texts – play, novel and film – the victim is labelled 'Kind' or 'Kindchen', addressed by the informal 'du' and told not to be fearful. In all three texts, a sexually aroused, brutal tyrant attacks a terrified, fragile child who seeks strength and protection in prayer.²⁹ In Harlan's film, Süß shows Dorothea an enormous diamond ring, a 'proper' ring in his bedroom. The significance of the ring, as a symbol of Josef Süß Oppenheimer's success and power, also links this scene to Feuchtwanger's novel, in which Süß's 'Solitär' is a prized possession. As a symbol of his achievements Süß even wears the ring for his execution and takes it with him to his grave.

The consequences of the rape or attempted violation are fatal, both in Harlan's film and Feuchtwanger's texts: Tamar and Naemi fall or throw themselves from the roof of their idyllic home near Hirsau, Dorothea in

27 The name derives from the Greek *doron* (gift) and *theos* (God), emphasising again her ideal womanhood.

28 Feuchtwanger, *Jud Süß. Schauspiel in drei Akten*, 95 and 96.

29 Feuchtwanger, *Jud Süß. Schauspiel in drei Akten*, 97, 'Tamar (sich windend, entsetzt): Nicht! Nicht! (Sinnlos Gebete lallend)'.

the film drowns herself, a recurring fate of Kristina Söderbaum's screen personae, earning her the nickname 'Reichswasserleiche'. Dorothea's death unites the people of Stuttgart for the purpose of self-preservation and national renewal, as her rape and death unambiguously signify the imminent disintegration of their community. During this sequence of the film, Dorothea's young husband gently lays her body down on the steps of the castle. The camera closes in on her beautiful, perfect face, virtually caressing her ideal form. For twelve long seconds³⁰ the audience sees nothing but her lifeless, faultless features, while Wolfgang Zeller's tragic score underlines the injustice of her untimely death. These twelve long seconds highlight the Nazis' simple logic: it is time to act. In order to safeguard our identity and our homes, the Jew has to die. Thus the masses shriek their approval when one of the officers declares: 'Der Jude muß weg!'.

The narrative structure of the propaganda film is linear and one-dimensional, suggesting a sense of identity predominantly by constructing difference. Jews are depicted as despicable, dangerous human beings who threaten the fabric of a healthy, solid community. Despite the fact that none of the collaborators in this Nazi propaganda film openly discussed the illegal, Jewish writer Feuchtwanger's bestseller *Jud Süß* as the backdrop of their *Hetzfilm*, there is reason to believe that all involved in the production of the film were familiar with Feuchtwanger's text. Moreover, it seems, not only was the film script in part influenced by Feuchtwanger's interpretation of the historical figure Süß Oppenheimer, but it was, in fact, Feuchtwanger's *Jud Süß* that was dissected, twisted and adapted to fit the demands of an aggressive anti-Semitic agenda. In line with the anti-Semitic misrepresentation of Feuchtwanger's texts, the injustice of Süß's death penalty, clearly emphasised by Feuchtwanger and Mendes, is presented by Harlan and his Nazi collaborators as the exact opposite: a just and necessary punishment. The insufferable pain at the loss of his beloved daughter in Feuchtwanger's texts is turned into the wrath and complete lack of empathy in Harlan's version. The victim is, in both literary texts and Nazi adaptation,

30 The scene is significantly shorter in the DVD version at International Historic Films, Inc. than in the BFI copy used in this paper.

an almost sacred, untouched, perfect young woman, filled with goodness and tenderness. The ideal of beauty, purity and wholeness is transferred from the 'hebräische Venus' Naemi/Tamar to Dorothea Sturm, a symbol of an idyllic community and of ideal Nazi womanhood. Josef Süß Oppenheimer's humanity is mirrored in Feuchtwanger's Naemi – his monstrosity is reflected in Harlan's Dorothea Sturm.

Feuchtwanger's *Jud Süß* is an exploration of our self-image as civilised, modern human beings, whereas the film is a call for genocide. A reading of Veit Harlan's *Jud Süß* as an adaptation illustrates the mechanisms of 'the fearsome, word-and-thought defying banality of evil', as Hannah Arendt put it in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.³¹ The production of *Jud Süß* as cinematic entertainment and anti-Semitic propaganda demonstrates how the everyday banality of individual (in)action, the cowardly silences, and seemingly minor compromises eventually lead to crimes before which 'our human understanding recoils in bewilderment'.³² While the magnitude of death and suffering during the genocidal Nazi regime might be beyond our ability to comprehend or adequately describe, film projects such as *Jud Süß* hold, as Hamlet put it, 'the mirror up to nature' exemplifying, as Feuchtwanger would have it, human weakness and 'the destructive urge with which Nature has endowed us (...) modern barbarians'.³³

After burning his books, stripping him of his citizenship and doctorate, taking possession of his home and his library, the Nazis' appropriation of Feuchtwanger's bestselling work, their adaptation of *Jud Süß*, was itself nothing less than a brutal violation. Feuchtwanger wished to 'ameliorate the condition of mankind through literature'.³⁴ Veit Harlan and his all

too willing colleagues helped to prepare the ground for mass murder. Yet, Feuchtwanger exhibited no desire to take revenge on those who turned his *Jud Süß* into an anti-Semitic propaganda piece. Their punishment, in Feuchtwanger's opinion, would be transformation, a slow disintegration of self and, most importantly, a loss of talent, as he states in his open letter to his former colleagues in 1941: 'Es ist dies: man kann, fürchte ich, nicht sieben Jahre hindurch gesinnungsloses, schlechtes Theater machen, ohne dass man an Talent einbüsst. Sonderbarerweise verlumpt mit der Seele auch die Kunst'.³⁵ He signed his open letter as 'Ihr alter Lion Feuchtwanger' – still unchanged, stubbornly believing in the goodness of mankind and his imaginary Germany, his home.

31 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 252.

32 J. M. Coetzee, 'Portrait of the Monster as a Young Artist', *NYRB* 54 (2007), 2, 11.

33 Feuchtwanger, 'Are we modern Barbarians' (1932), typescript (4 pages), Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, University of Southern California, Box D8a, folder 6, 4.

34 Lion Feuchtwanger, 'Speech upon arrival in England' [?] [no date, unclear orig.], typed, 1 page, probably 1927. Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, Special Collections, University of Southern California, Box D8a, folder 3.

35 Feuchtwanger, 'Offener Brief an sieben Berliner Schauspieler', 7.



Kristina Söderbaum and Ferdinand Marian in Veit Harlan's *Jud Süß* (1940).