George Tabori

Act I

Dawn. Thursday. It is snowing. Lobkowitz prays. A cock crows. The day bums stir out of their beds to scurry into the city. Herzl arrives balancing a pile of unsold books on his unnaturally strong right arm.

Lobkowitz: So there you are.
Herzl: Am I?
Lobkowitz [Hit him]: Trying to sneak past me?
Herzl: Oh no, my Lord.
Lobkowitz: I called out in the dark, from behind the burning bush, where art thou, Shlomo Herzl, to receive the glad tidings that I reduced the Ten Commandments to three, but adultery is still in; plus the good old evergreens: (A) One God Is Enough and That’s Me. (B) If You Cannot Honor Your Parents, Call Them at Least Once a Week. (C) Before You Covet Your Neighbor’s Wife, Make Sure He’s Smaller Than You. How is business?
Herzl: Terrible, my Lord.
Lobkowitz: Trouble makes a man wise.
Herzl: So how come I’ve stayed stupid?
Lobkowitz: You’re stupid because you worry too much. [Hit him] He who worries has little or no faith, and faith withers without works, so remember what is in the sky above and you shall not fall into sin.
Herzl: Faith cannot be commanded, my Lord.
Lobkowitz [Hit him]: Learned fools are the worst fools.
Herzl: In an argument, it is always the loser who wins.
Lobkowitz: Who says?
Herzl: You say.
Lobkowitz: Can’t remember saying that.
Herzl: By the Red Sea, when the waters retreated.
Lobkowitz: Not a bad trick, eh? Thirty thousand Egyptians drowned.
Herzl: Twenty thousand.
Lobkowitz: Twenty five?
Herzl: Twenty.
Lobkowitz [Hit him]: You doubt my omniscience, you worm.
Herzl: If I do not doubt, what am I?
Lobkowitz: If you only doubt, what are you?
Herzl: Not a theologian.
Lobkowitz: Nor am I.

42

Mein Kampf

Herzl: Be as it may, my Lord, a broken heart such as mine, a bleeding heart, you would not despise.
Lobkowitz: Did I say I despised you?
Herzl: You called me a worm, my Lord.
Lobkowitz: What d’y’have against worms?
Herzl: If you are against me, who is for me? Mine enemies press close upon me. Only last night, a waiter in the Café Central told me, no dogs and no Jews.
Lobkowitz: No dogs? Outrageous! If you learn to fear me, you need not fear anyone in the cafés.

[HITLER appears]

Lobkowitz: Once I saw a skull bobbing on the waters of Vienna, and I spoke to it: “Since you drowned someone, they drowned you. But even those that drowned you, shall be drowned, for I am just.” By the way, how many Bibles did you sell tonight?
Herzl: Five, my Lord.
Lobkowitz [Hit him]: You’re lying.
Herzl: Three.
Lobkowitz: Which version?
Herzl: Luther’s.
Lobkowitz: You call that a Bible?
Herzl: I don’t, my Lord. He did.
Lobkowitz: Fornicating renegade! Forgetting my finest command—that I chose you not because you are special, far from it; I chose you, worm, as my helpmate to establish a kingdom in this snow, in this dread hour before daybreak, an hour that may decide your eternity, so repent and return to my patient bosom before it is too late. Between you and me, Shlomo, what are you waiting for? [Hit him]
Herzl [Hit him back]: Lobkowitz, I’m writing a book.

[Thunder and lightning]

Lobkowitz: “Lobkowitz”? Did I hear you say “Lobkowitz” instead of “my Lord”?
Herzl: Yes, Lobkowitz, I said “Lobkowitz” instead of “my Lord.”

[Lobkowitz collapses]
GEORGE TABORI

HERZL [To audience]: I don't quite know what gave me the chutzpah to call him "Lobkowitz" instead of "my Lord," but my nose was freezing and my back hurt. I was sick and tired of our game. For three years now, we have been playing the same game.

LOBKOWITZ: Four years!

HERZL: What made me submit in the first place? Perhaps I felt sorry for this God who, being omnipresent, was invariably present in Vienna, for He loves His Jews so much that He won't let them out of sight. But in that dawn, in that snow, I'd had it, and unmasked this God as a cook. This God was of course not God. You know who I mean. There is, after all, only one, His name be praised, but Lobkowitz the Loon, a kookie kasher cook, defrocked some years ago by his boss Moskowitz for mixing cream cheese with boiled beef, an insult to Mosaic Law. Why? "I'll tell you why," said Lobkowitz to Moskowitz. "Because I'm mad at Moses for wandering for forty years in the wilderness."

LOBKOWITZ: Thirty-nine!

HERZL: —instead of settling down in Vienna. Be that as it may, Moskowitz retorted, "You are fired." "May all your teeth fall out except for one, and may that hurt till the end of your days," said Lobkowitz, and he tore off his cook's apron and threw it into the borscht!

LOBKOWITZ: Mulligatawn!

HERZL: Then he fell into a coma, came out of it ten days later, a classic case of mistaken identity, which he explained to Dr. S. Freud as follows:

LOBKOWITZ [Upstaging HERZL]: "I think I am God. You think you are S. Freud. Both of us may be wrong."

HERZL: Sorry, Lobkowitz, to have called you "Lobkowitz" instead of "the Holy One," His name be praised, but I'm writing a book.

LOBKOWITZ: For me?

HERZL: No!

LOBKOWITZ: About me?

HERZL: Not quite.

LOBKOWITZ: Back to Babylon, and weep!

HERZL: Lobkowitz, wouldn't you like to know what my book is about?

LOBKOWITZ: Not at all!

HERZL: I don't know myself. I haven't written it yet. Perhaps that's what it's about. In these past three years, I have tried to get past the beginning. Can't to get the beginning I can't get past?

LOBKOWITZ: By no means.

HERZL: A scorpion bites me to start again each morning. My disgust chokes me each morning. I wish this book were a daily prayer. What holds me back is a pagan giggle, cascading inside my head as I scribble His name, unmentionable in Vienna, fading into blasphemy; it may only be mentioned in vain as a sigh or a curse or a conjuration, "Goddamn it" or "fuck God" or . . .

HITLER: Good God!

[HERZL AND LOBKOWITZ TAKE NO NOTICE OF HITLER, WHO STANDS RATHER IMPATIENTLY IN THE DOORWAY]

HERZL: Besides, what's the point of writing yet another book. There is only one book, and it has already been written, and this one book, that has already been written, says everything about everything, including your tears, yet I must write my own, so as to put the wickedness out of my heart, this shadow falling across my threshold, so I ask you, Lobkowitz, tell me as Lobkowitz, what to do.

LOBKOWITZ [Happily]: You? Ask? Me? As Lobkowitz? I, as Lobkowitz, am to tell you what to do? Well, I tell you as Lobkowitz, if you cannot get past the beginning, you should begin before the beginning. What is the title, what do you call your book?

HERZL: "My Life," I call it.

LOBKOWITZ [Shaking his head]: "My Life"? You call that a title? You call that a possible title for an important commentary? Shlomo, I am disappointed.

HERZL: How about "My Memoirs"?

LOBKOWITZ [He and Hitler shake their heads]: That's terrible! "My Memoirs"! Ask yourself, Shlomo, would your mother want to buy a book called "My Memoirs"?

HERZL: No!

LOBKOWITZ: Try again!


LOBKOWITZ: That's it!

HITLER: You've got it!

[HERZL AND LOBKOWITZ FINALLY TAKE NOTICE OF HITLER]

HERZL: Who asked you?

HITLER: What does it mean?