

## **A reaction against Antisemitism in Hungary: Edmund Eisler and the flowering of the new Jewish utopian genre**

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“The idea of this writing came from a terrible night. A frightful night in which a blind people also attacked my house.” The utopian novel, *Ein Zukunftsbild* (1885), written in German by Edmund Eisler, starts from this autobiographical episode of antisemitism. Eisler wrote this information in his preface, dated October 1882. The date is indicative, as noted by Shlomo Avineri, since it is contemporary with the outbreak of the first mass wave of Russian pogrom in 1881-1882. This wave of renovated antisemitism generated new political movements and aspiration among Eastern Jewish intellectuals. It seems that, as the appeal *Autoemancipation* by Leon Pinsker, or the last story of Peretz Smolenskin, *Neqam Berit* [The revenge of the covenant], even Eisler's utopia was a literary reaction against this new antisemitism and a response to disillusionment with the unkept European promises of emancipation. The frightful episode, that led the author to escape in the fantastic dimension, seems to be related to the blood-libel affair in the Hungarian town of Tiszaeszlár in 1882. In fact, the Tiszaeszlár ritual murder accusation generated popular riots throughout the country, that gave to Hungarian antisemitism a great boost. Before the conclusion of the trial, anti-Jewish demonstrations had broken out across parts of Hungary, most notably in Pressburg. Thus, it is probable that in reaction to this wave of antisemitism in Hungary, Eisler decided to write his utopia to escape from this violent reality.

The story begins with a pogrom in a Jewish community which drives the young hero Abner to rebel against antisemitism and to start a campaign to lead the Jews out of Europe to the Promised Land, like a new exodus. As emerges from the analysis of the novel, *Ein Zukunftsbild* is constituted on the interaction among three different socio-cultural contexts. One is the Hungarian antisemitism, which gave the initial input for writing the utopia. Second point is the influence of the German-Jewish models, which oriented some literary and stylistic choices of Eisler, such as the use of German language, instead of Hungarian or Hebrew. And, finally, third aspect is constituted by the presence of ideals and typical aspirations of Eastern Jews. Thus, Eisler's novel not only allows us to understand the impact of Hungarian antisemitism on the Jewish communities, but it also reveals the different evolution of the Haskalah and the secularization of Jewish thought in these regions of the Hapsburg Empire, influenced both by German-Jewish context and by Eastern-Jewish one. In this way, thanks to this specific geographical-cultural

context, German-Jewish ideals and images, metaphors, concepts arising from eastern Europe are kept together in Eisler's novel.

In the first part of the paper I will describe the social and historical context, while in the second one I will examine some aspects of the novel relating to this secularization of religious concepts and biblical images, belonging to Jewish tradition. According to Eisler utopia, a new future Zion would have guaranteed a new social contest in which Jews could have emancipated themselves, without erasing their past tradition.