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DARK POWERS: CONSPIRACIES AND CONSPIRACY THEORY IN HISTORY AND LITERATURE

Issue Editor: Eva Horn

Introduction.....	1
<i>Eva Horn and Anson Rabinbach</i>	
Evidence and Narrative in Mérimée's <i>Catilinarian Conspiracy</i>	9
<i>Michèle Lowrie</i>	
Toward a Model of Conspiracy Theory for Ancient Rome.....	27
<i>Victoria E. Pagán</i>	
The Conspiracy of the Invisible Hand: Anonymous Market Mechanisms and Dark Powers.....	51
<i>Jakob Tanner</i>	
Occult Conspiracies: Spirits and Secret Societies in Schiller's <i>Ghost Seer</i>	65
<i>Stefan Andriopoulos</i>	
The <i>Protocols of the Elders of Zion</i> : Between History and Fiction	83
<i>Michael Hagemeister</i>	
Staging Antifascism: <i>The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror</i>	97
<i>Anson Rabinbach</i>	
Media of Conspiracy: Love and Surveillance in Fritz Lang and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck.....	127
<i>Eva Horn</i>	
Brainwashed! Conspiracy Theory and Ideology in the Postwar United States	145
<i>Timothy Melley</i>	
Outrageous Conspiracy Theories: Popular and Official Responses to 9/11 in Germany and the United States	165
<i>Peter Knight</i>	

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New German Critique is the leading journal of German studies. It covers contemporary political and social theory, philosophy, literature, film, media, and art and reads cultural texts in light of current theoretical debates.

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: Between History and Fiction

Michael Hagemeister

In the autumn of 1999 a sensation swept through the international press: "Author of 'Zion Protocols' identified." Finally—so tell us the French weeklies *Le Figaro Magazine* and *L'express*—Mikhail Lepekhin had discovered who was behind the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. After five years of research in formerly inaccessible and secret Russian archives, he named Matvei Golovinskii, a reactionary journalist and writer, author of the notorious "document" that pretends to describe the secret plan of a Jewish conspiracy to achieve world domination.¹

Golovinskii had, according to Lepekhin, composed the *Protocols* at the turn of the twentieth century on the orders of Piotr Rachkovskii, head of the foreign branch of the Russian secret police, the infamous Okhrana, in Paris. The revelation spread like wildfire. Articles appeared in all major newspapers and on the Internet. The Saint Petersburg historian's "discovery" could justifiably be considered a "sensation," heralded the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, since it solved, in the *Washington Times*' words, "the last remaining mystery surrounding the 'Protocols.'"²

1. Victor Loupan, "L'affaire des 'Protocoles des sages de Sion': Le faux saire du siècle démasqué," *Le Figaro Magazine*, August 7, 1999, 20–24; Eric Conan, "Les secrets d'une manipulation antisémite: L'auteur des *Protocoles des Sages de Sion* enfin identifié," *L'express*, November 18–24, 1999, 58–63.

2. Felix Philipp Ingold, "Fabrikation eines Mythos: Neues zur Entstehung der 'Protokolle der Weisen von Zion,'" *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 17, 1999; Patrick Bishop, "Author of 'Zion Protocols' Forgery Identified as Russian Propagandist," *Washington Times*, November 21, 1999.

Golovinskii and his boss Rachkovskii in Paris are seen preparing the forgery in images from the “graphic history” *The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, created by comics legend Will Eisner. This book, published posthumously in New York in 2005, was enormously successful. The critics loved it, and it has been translated into many languages. The German edition, *Das Komplott*, has the subtitle *Die wahre Geschichte der Protokolle der Weisen von Zion* (*The True Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*).³ Extensive commentaries followed in all serious German newspapers. They repeatedly stressed that this “masterpiece” was a “nonfiction work,” a “study,” carefully researched, based on the most recent scholarly literature, with ample reference notes and an extensive bibliography (fig. 1).³

In another image from Eisner’s book, we meet Sergei Nilus, the most prominent publisher and commentator of the *Protocols*. Eisner shows him as a gray-haired mystic who is often invited to court, a competitor to Rasputin, a professor, and a wildly gesticulating fanatical anti-Semite (fig. 2). We also learn that Nilus had three wives and also a daughter, whom he used as a medium in séances.⁴

According to Umberto Eco, however, who wrote the introduction to Eisner’s book, Nilus was not a professor but an “itinerant monk, . . . half prophet and half scoundrel.”⁵ Nilus the monk began his wanderings as early as 1988, namely, in chapter 92 of Eco’s novel *Foucault’s Pendulum*, a book that can be seen as a fictionalized encyclopedia of occult teachings and conspiracy theories. Eco was probably influenced by the Serbian author Danilo Kiš. In Kiš’s *Book of Kings and Fools* Nilus appears as a “strange hermit,” “for insiders simply father Sergius.” Likewise, Nilus appears in books whose basis in fiction or fact is hard to determine, for example, the occult conspiracy story *The Spear of Destiny*, by Trevor Ravenscroft, or the international best seller *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*. In the latter the publisher of the *Protocols* is described as “a rather contemptible individual known to posterity under the pseudonym of Sergei Nilus.”⁶ In that book, which inspired

3. See, e.g., Fritz Göttler, “Schreibritschäter: ‘Das Komplott,’ Will Eisners beklemmender Comic-Roman über die Weisen von Zion,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 12, 2005; and Dietmar Dath, “Mit der Zeichnerhand die Lüge töten: ‘Das Komplott,’ Will Eisners meisterhafter Comic über die Protokolle der Weisen von Zion,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 8, 2005.

4. Will Eisner, *The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: Norton, 2005), 134.

5. Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 137; Eco, *Serendipities: Language and Lunacy* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, 1999), 17.

6. Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, 16th ed. (London: Corgi, 1990), 198–99.

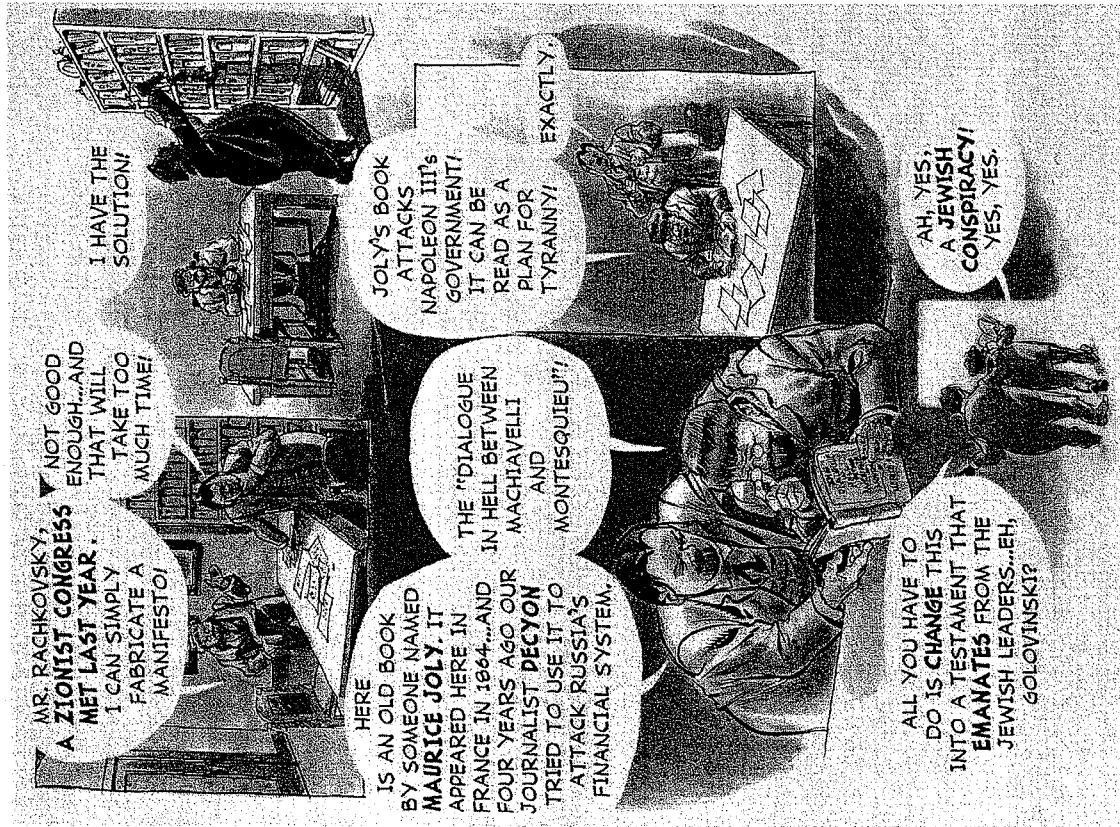


Figure 1. The “forging” of the *Protocols*. From Eisner, *Plot*, 59. Copyright 2005 by the Estate of Will Eisner. Reproduced with kind permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.

Dan Brown's blockbuster novel *The Da Vinci Code*, Nilus and the *Protocols* are part of the global conspiracy of a secret order, the Prieuré de Sion, whose prominent members (including Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo, and Claude Debussy) are attempting to bring the Merovingian dynasty—descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene—back to power.

The scholarly literature on the *Protocols* confuses the picture even further. The enigmatic Nilus turns out to be a surprisingly versatile figure. He appears not only as a professor or a monk but also as a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, an orientalist, a court nobleman, a journalist, a half-crazy pseudomystic, a zoologist, a mediocre lawyer, a religious philosopher, an agent of the secret police, an Orthodox theologian, and even a former play-boy. Some believe that Nilus was not his real name; some consider him the actual author of the *Protocols*. None of this is accurate.

In reality, Nilus was neither monk nor professor.⁷ There is not the slightest evidence that he was ever invited to court. He was also no "competitor to Rasputin." At the time that Rasputin was consorting with the imperial court, from 1906 to 1916, Nilus was far away from Saint Petersburg in the provinces. He had neither three wives nor a daughter, although he did have a son. Nilus was a deeply devout Orthodox Christian and an opponent of spiritism; he never conducted séances. The *Protocols* was first published not in 1905 but in 1903. And the *real* Nilus shortly before he published the *Protocols* looked rather different (fig. 3).

Eisner, the brilliant cartoonist, is not to blame for the gaps in his historical knowledge, for instance, that his czars reside in Moscow, not in Saint Petersburg; or that he presents Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the powerful procurator of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, as a stupid, fat chain-smoker, when in fact he was a skinny, highly intelligent ascetic (and "not a doctrinaire antisemite"); or that "the Reichstag Fire plotted by [his] followers" brought Adolf Hitler to power in Germany, when chronologically just the opposite happened.⁸ As the *Chicago Sun-Times* writes, "Authenticity is not at issue."⁹ But it is necessary to criticize Eisner's advisers, like Stephen E. Bronner,

7. For Nilus's biography see my article in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 21 (Nordhausen: Bautz, 2003), 1063–67, available at www.bautz.de/bbkl/n/nilus_s_a.shtml. For a shorter version see Michael Hagemeister, "Nilus, Sergei," in *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, ed. Richard E. Levy, vol. 2 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 508–10.

8. John Klier, "Pobedonostsev, Konstantin," in Levy, *Antisemitism*, 551; Eisner, *Plot*, 99.

9. Carlo Wolff, "Eisner's 'The Plot' Speaks to History," *Chicago Sun-Times*, May 1, 2005, www.suntimes.com/output/books/sho-sunday-eisner01.html (accessed May 25, 2005).

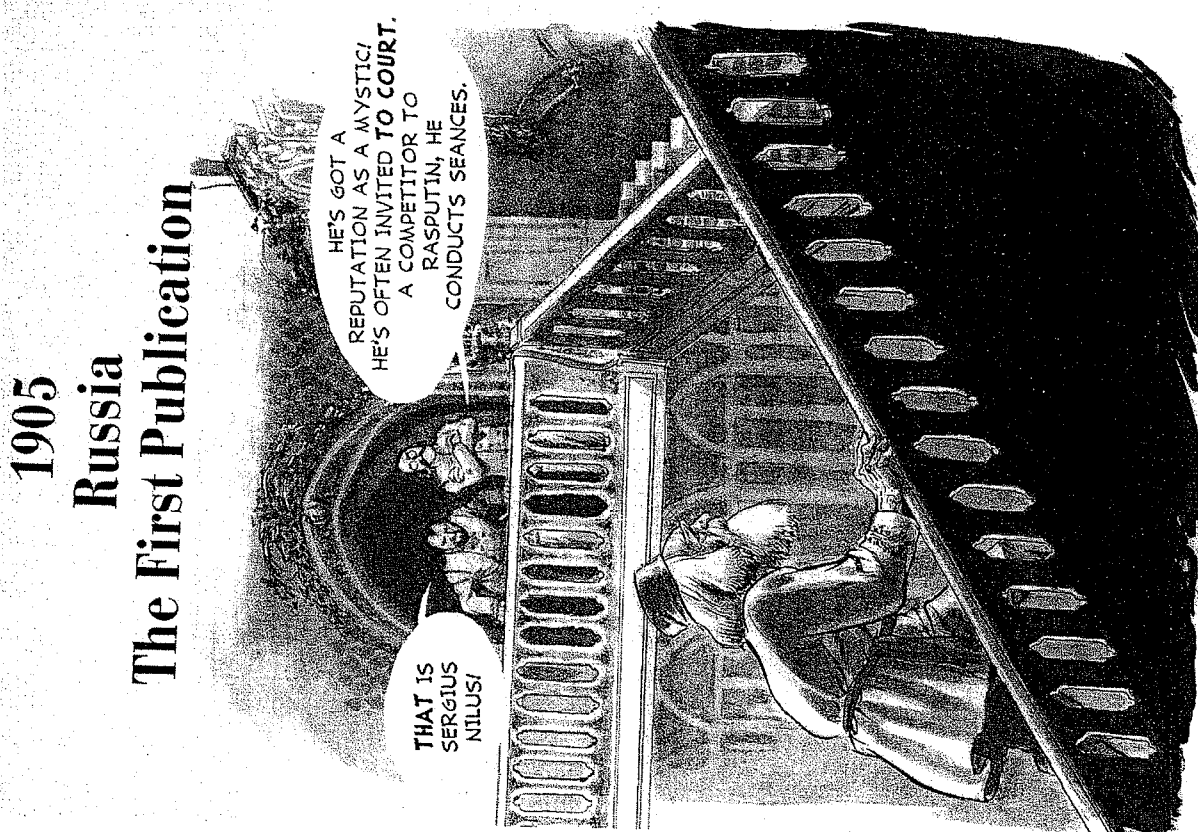


Figure 2. Sergei Nilus, caricatured. From Eisner, *Plot*, 61. Copyright 2005 by the Estate of Will Eisner. Reproduced with kind permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.



Figure 3. Sergei Nilus, pictured with his son about 1900

a professor of political science, who, in his book on the *Protocols*, erroneously introduces Nilus as “the son of Swiss émigrés who had entered Russia during the reign of Peter I.”¹⁰ If that were true, the Nilus of the early twentieth century would have been almost two hundred years old.

How can we explain that when it comes to the origins and dissemination of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the rules of careful historical

research are so completely ignored and we are regularly served up stories—and not only in graphic novels—that have little to do with history, but a lot to do with fiction?

This is not surprising when we consider the supporters of the *Protocols*: according to them, this text documents a conspiracy of delegates to the first Zionist Congress at Basel in 1897, but also of high-ranking French Masons, members of the Grand Lodge “Misraim,” the secret organization Bne Moshe in Odessa, the Bne-Brit Lodges, the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the Illuminati, the Merovingians, and the Prieuré de Sion or the “Central Chancellery of Zion.” Authorship has been handed to Theodor Herzl, Asher Ginzberg (Ahad Ha’am), Adam Weishaupt, or the twelve or thirteen or three hundred secretive “Elders of Zion.” The original text is supposed to have been in French or Hebrew. Finally, there is the version in which the *Protocols* was written as early as 929 BC in Solomon’s Jerusalem.

But what do the opponents of the *Protocols* say? That is a longer story and—as I shall show—by and large a conspiracy story.

The story begins in 1920. The *Protocols*—brought by Russian émigrés to western Europe and the United States—becomes a global sensation. In January 1920 the first German edition appears under the title *Die Geheimnisse der Weisen von Zion* (*The Secrets of the Elders of Zion*). Toward the end of the year, six editions of this work have already sold out. At the same time, the *Protocols* are translated and published in England, France, Poland, and the United States, and in the years to come countless other translations and publications follow.

The *Protocols* leaves a particularly powerful impression in England, where a part of the respectable press, including the *Times* of London and the *Spectator*, is inclined to accept the work as authentic. On May 8, 1920, the *Times* publishes a much-noted editorial under the headline “The Jewish Peril: A Disturbing Pamphlet. Call for Inquiry”: “What are these ‘Protocols’? Are they authentic? If so, what malevolent assembly concocted these plans, and gloated over their exposition? Are they a forgery? If so, whence comes the uncanny note of prophecy, prophecy in parts fulfilled, in parts far gone in the way of fulfilment [sic]?” One week later the *Spectator* calls the *Protocols* “brilliant in [their] moral perversity and intellectual depravity” and indeed “one of the most remarkable productions of their kind.”¹¹

10. Stephen E. Bronner, *A Rumor about the Jews: Reflections on Antisemitism and the “Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion”* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000), 77.

11. Quoted in Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion”* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981), 152–53.

Given the massive success of the *Protocols* and the deep worries caused by the text, even in levelheaded, enlightened circles, it was imperative to solve the mystery of its origins quickly. But this was the hour of the self-proclaimed witnesses and experts, the braggarts and impostors.

The first on the scene was a Russian princess of Polish origin, Catherine Radziwill, a personage with—to put it delicately—a highly checkered past. Instigator of much gossip about the Russian court, she was convicted several times of fraud and forgery. The French writer André Maurois called her a “mythomaniac,” in whose life “everything was only deception and lies.”¹² In several sensational articles, which appeared in the American and French presses in February and March 1921, Radziwill describes how an agent of the foreign branch of the Okhrana in Paris visited her in the winter of 1904–5 at her apartment on the Champs-Élysées—where else? one may ask—and proudly presented her with the French manuscript of the *Protocols*, which he had just prepared according to Rachkovskii's orders.¹³ The agent was Golovinskii—the same man whom Lepekhnin sensationally exposed about eighty years later. Radziwill gave an exact description of the manuscript: different handwritings, yellowish paper, and a big spot of blue ink on the first page. What Radziwill did not know, however, was that the *Protocols* had already been published in 1903 in Russia. And, of course, she never had an apartment on the Champs-Élysées.

It would be easy to simply dismiss Radziwill's story; indeed, she herself (before dying in poverty in New York in 1941) never referred to it again. This also explains why she and the name of Golovinskii were soon forgotten. But—an important but—her story served as the basis for all further accounts that named Rachkovskii's counterfeit work for the Okhrana in Paris as the origins of the *Protocols*.

The next witness is a French count, Alexandre du Chayla. He had lived in czarist Russia for twelve years and had met Nilus, the editor of the *Protocols*. Back in France, in May 1921 du Chayla published his memories of Nilus and the *Protocols* in the French and American presses.¹⁴ Du Chayla's story was conso-

12. André Maurois, *Prometheus oder das Leben Balzacs*, trans. Ernst Sander (Berlin: Aufbau, 1981), 761, 763.

13. “Protocols Forged in Paris’ Says Princess Radziwill in an Exclusive Interview with Isaac Landman,” *American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger*, February 25, 1921, 422; Catherine Radziwill, “Les Protocoles des Sages de Sion,” *La revue mondiale*, March 15, 1921, 151–55.

14. Alexandre du Chayla, “Serge Alexandrovitch Nilus et les ‘Protocoles des Sages de Sion (1909–1920),’” *La tribune juive*, May 14, 1921, 3–4; du Chayla, “Nilus, Fanatic Author of ‘Zion Protocols,’ Admitted in 1909 They Were Tissue of Lies,” *New York Call*, June 13, 1921, 6; du Chayla, “Nilus, Perpetrator of the Protocols, Exposed. A. M. du Chayla, in ‘La Tribune Juive,’ Explains How Protocols Came into Possession of Nilus. His Fanatic Belief in Them and Their Origin,” *American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger*, June 17, 1921, 119, 121, 128, 129, 136.

nant on some of Radziwill's account (which he knew) but omitted her most obvious mistakes. Du Chayla describes at length how he encountered Nilus in the Optina Pustyn monastery in 1909. Nilus showed him the original French manuscript of the *Protocols*—which in all its details matches the description offered by Radziwill—and admitted that he had received it from Rachkovskii. Du Chayla's depiction of the fanatical Nilus, the sinister machinations of the secret police, and the intrigues and conspiracies of the court, which all led to the fabrication of the *Protocols*, was so coherent and persuasive—and written in such a colorful and enthralling manner—that he soon became the hero of the struggle against the forgery and the principal witness in the story of its provenance.¹⁵

Indeed, du Chayla knew how to write. In 1913, during the notorious blood libel trial against Mendel Beilis in Kiev, he had worked as a journalist supporting the blood accusation and calling on the “secret leaders of the Jewish nation” (*chefs occultes de la nation juive*) to repent.¹⁶ Now, eight years later, he sold his alleged knowledge about the origins of the *Protocols* and negotiated stubbornly—as we learn from the correspondence—with the representatives of Jewish organizations to force up the price.¹⁷

Here is not the place to go into the many factual errors and inconsistencies in du Chayla's story. The important thing is that the narrative had now been shaped into its final version, which could no longer be questioned or changed. It became little short of a canonical version during the Bern trial of 1933–35. The Jewish communities in Switzerland had filed a lawsuit against the local Nazi disseminators of the *Protocols*. Their true aim, however, was to demonstrate in court the spuriousness of the *Protocols*. At the beginning of the lengthy court proceedings, which attracted worldwide attention, the plaintiffs agreed to stick closely to du Chayla's narrative. Du Chayla himself appeared as a witness, but only after he had enforced his fee (four thousand Swiss francs, a very large sum at that time).¹⁸

15. Even recently a French expert on the *Protocols*, Pierre-André Taguieff, has called du Chayla's testimony on Nilus and the origins of the *Protocols* “certainly the most important and trustworthy” (certainement le plus important et le plus digne de foi) (*Les ‘Protocoles des Sages de Sion’: Faux et usages d'un faux* [Paris: Berg International/Fayard, 2004], 41).

16. Alexandre du Chayla, “A propos du procès de Kieff,” *Revue contemporaine*, October 18, 1913, 217–18. This was a French-language periodical published in Saint Petersburg and intended as an organ of Russian propaganda in western Europe.

17. The correspondence is housed with the papers of the Jewish historian Elias Tcherikover (Il'ia Cherikover) in the YIVO Institute Archives, New York, and is being prepared for publication by Henryk Baran. I wish to thank Professor Baran for sharing this information and some of the correspondence with me.

18. Du Chayla to Sergei Svaticov, June 7, 1934, Tcherikover Papers, YIVO Institute Archives, New York.

In reality, and we see this from the unpublished correspondence between the plaintiffs and their experts, there was a good deal of doubt about the integrity of the key witness and the credibility of his version of the origin of the *Protocols*.¹⁹ The historian Boris Nikolaevskii, a coordinator of the Bern trial and an expert on the czarist secret police, admitted in a confidential letter that his own research had convinced him that Rachkovskii "under no circumstances could have had anything to do with the preparation of the *Protocols*."²⁰ Nevertheless, Nikolaevskii did not present his findings at the trial, since, as he wrote later, this "would have been a stab in the back of the Russian experts and would have objectively disorganized the campaign against Hitler."²¹ He called du Chayla a "swindler" (*prokhodimets*), who had no idea about the origins of the *Protocols*.²²

The detailed and coherent narrative about the origin and early dissemination of the *Protocols* had now been authorized by a legal court. All that was left was to publicize this narrative and further spread the word. This is where Henri Rollin came in. In 1939 his book *L'apocalypse de notre temps* appeared in Paris.²³ In it, the French writer and secret service officer presents his view of the conspiracy between German and Russian anti-Semites, who, from their bases in Berlin and Munich in the 1920s and 1930s, spread the myth of the Jewish-Bolshevist global conspiracy and—more or less consciously—made use of a forgery to do so. Basically, Rollin produces a countermyth, in that the German-Russian anti-Semitic conspiracy he uncovers is almost identical to the Jewish conspiracy. A legend still circulating today is that Rollin's book is very rare because it was confiscated by the Nazis during the occupation of France and destroyed. The book actually went through at least five editions in 1939, was widely available, and is today easy to find in second-hand bookshops.

Another contribution to the conspiracy narrative surrounding the *Protocols* came from Konrad Heiden. His famous book *The Fuehrer: Hitler's Rise to Power* describes the scene in which Alfred Rosenberg, later the leading ideologue of the Nazi movement, is passed the *Protocols*.

19. Most of this correspondence is housed in the Archive for Contemporary History (Archiv für Zeitgeschichte), Zürich. I am preparing it for publication.

20. Nikolaevskii to Boris Lifschitz (Lifshits), August 10, 1937, SIG Papers, Box 57, Archive for Contemporary History, Zürich.

21. Nikolaevskii to Vera Cohn, August 30, 1964, Boris I. Nikolaevskiy [sic] Collection, Series 11, Box 20, Folder 24, Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

22. Nikolaevskii to Cohn, August 15, 1964.

23. Henri Rollin, *L'apocalypse de notre temps: Les dessous de la propagande allemande d'après des documents inédits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939), new editions (Paris: Allia) 1991, 2005.

One day in the summer of 1917 a student was reading in his room in Moscow. A stranger entered, laid a book on the table, and silently vanished. The cover of the book bore in Russian the words from the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew: "He is near, he is hard by the door."—The student sensed the masterful irony of higher powers in this strange happening. They had sent him a silent message. He opened the book, and the voice of a demon spoke to him.²⁴

This story turns Rosenberg into a tool of the anti-Semitic conspiracy and is of course impossible to verify. In fact, it paraphrases a story in which the London *Times* correspondent Philip Perceval Graves tells of the mysterious "Mr X," who in Constantinople in August 1921 gave him a copy of Maurice Joly's anti-Napoleonic pamphlet, which allowed him to expose the *Protocols* as plagiarism.²⁵

In 1967 the book was published that for a long time became the standard reference for the *Protocols*, Norman Cohn's *Warrant for Genocide*. Basically, Cohn did no independent research, preferring to compile the findings of others. Most of these stemmed from Nikolaevskii. Although that is not clear from Cohn's book itself (which was published after Nikolaevskii's death), it is apparent in the correspondence between Nikolaevskii and Cohn's Russian wife, Vera, from 1964 to 1966. If we recall: Nikolaevskii was convinced that the origins of the *Protocols* had nothing to do with Rachkovskii and the Okhrana and that the key witness for that narrative, du Chayla, was a "swindler." Nevertheless, Cohn held on to du Chayla and his tale. The reason deserves to be quoted: "Of course," wrote Vera Cohn to Nikolaevskii, du Chayla was indeed a "swindler," but his description was so "picturesque" (*zhivopisno*) that "it would be a shame to omit it."²⁶ The tale then figures in key passages of Cohn's book and delivers the "facts," which even today strongly determine the narrative of the origins of the *Protocols*. Enthralling and effective as it is, there is little doubt that this narrative contributed to the myth surrounding the *Protocols* and thus to its success.

More than thirty years after Cohn's book, Hadassa Ben-Itto's *Lie That Wouldn't Die* was published.²⁷ The author, a prominent judge and diplomat

24. Konrad Heiden, *The Fuehrer: Hitler's Rise to Power*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1944), 1.

25. [Philip Perceval Graves], *The Truth about "The Protocols": A Literary Forgery: From "The Times" of August 16, 17, and 18, 1921* (London: Times, [1921]). The identity of "Mr X"—Mikhail Raslovlev (1892–1987), a Russian nobleman and monarchist—was already known to the plaintiffs in the Bern trial in the mid-1930s, but it was kept secret until 1977.

26. Cohn to Nikolaevskii, August 23, 1964.

27. Hadassa Ben-Itto, *The Lie That Wouldn't Die: The "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005)*. A German edition has appeared under the title "Die Protokolle der Weisen von Zion" — *Anatomie einer Fälschung*, trans. Helmut Eitingger and Juliane Lochner (Berlin: Aufbau, 1998).

from Israel, wrote her book “for people who want to know what really happened.”²⁸ The result is a peculiar mix of fact and fiction, a kind of historical novel with invented episodes, dialogues, and inner monologues. The book was enormously successful among critics; it was adopted by academic libraries and translated into many languages. What sort of book is this? A quote from the advertising blurb for the German edition:

The “Jewish global conspiracy” is still used today to explain wars and revolutions, economic crises and stock market crashes, terrorism and AIDS. Again and again the threads come together in a book: the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Hadassa Ben-Itto gets to the bottom of the story of these *Protocols* over seven years of research. The result is a factual report that could not be more absorbing and enthralling if it were invented, although the subject matter would make an ideal thriller: conspiracy and murder, princesses and the Russian imperial family, secret services and leading industrialists—and a virtuous young lawyer, who takes on all of this.²⁹

There is really nothing to add to this description. We are by now far from historical research, moving in the realms of fiction: exciting, lively stories that can be relayed well in a comic book. As Lepekhn’s sensational discovery of the *Protocols* author showed, in this realm of “faction” no one asks for evidence—there is none. It can also make careers; the previously unknown Lepekhn became a “leading Russian historian” overnight.

Investigating the *Protocols*, one often meets the border between fiction and fact and can observe how this border is crossed: the *Protocols* was compiled from a series of fictional texts and then presented as the authentic document of an actual conspiracy. But the literature about the *Protocols* also far too frequently ignores this border, when, for example, comprehensive and (admittedly) gripping stories take precedence over well-researched histories.³⁰

We still do not know by whom, when, and for what purpose the *Protocols* was fabricated. What we hear is a narrative—to be precise, a conspiracy narrative. The actors this time are not Jews, however, but cunning secret agents, fanatical anti-Semites, and sinister reactionaries. The myth of the Jewish con-

28. Ben-Itto, “*Protokolle*,” 10.

29. Advertising brochure of Aufbau-Verlag Berlin, 1998, 24.

30. It seems significant that Cesare G. De Michelis’s meticulously researched study (first published in Italian in 1998), which questions Radziwill’s and du Chayla’s version of the origins of the *Protocols*, was largely ignored by the critics (*The Non-existent Manuscript: A Study of the “Protocols of the Sages of Zion,”* trans. Richard Newhouse [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004]).

spiracy has been responded to with a countermyth, which is no less mysterious than the one it aims to counter.

This shows that the critics of the conspiracy myth also too easily succumb to the seductive power of what they are trying to overcome. As the history of the *Protocols* indicates, the concept of conspiracy offers clear answers where in reality the relations are complex and opaque. Perhaps we will never discover the origins of the *Protocols*. But that should be frustrating only for a handful of historians. Everyone else already knows all too well what they want to believe.