

ZIONIST THOUGHT AND SONGS OF ZION: TWO JEWISH ARGENTINE POETS

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Argentine literary life of the 1920s was notable for, among other things, the emergence of three poets who were not only publicly identified as Jews but who also sought to bring Jewish thought and issues into their work. These were César Tiempo (real name Israel Zeitlin, 1906-1980); Lázaro Liacho (real name Liachovitsky; 1898-1969); and Carlos M. Grünberg (1903-1968). (Omitted from the present discussion is the troubling case of Jacobo Fijman, 1898-1970, whose subtle poetic debt to the tradition of Jewish prophetic writing did not cease with his 1926 conversion to Catholicism). As their lifespans show, all three poets lived through the era in which Zionism was transformed from a set of endlessly-debated ideological currents and projects for the future into a force that produced concrete results – the resettlement of a sizable Jewish population in Palestine and the founding of the modern state of Israel. All three of these writers followed this process with concern, making it the subject matter of some of their texts.

Of the three, Tiempo may safely be described as the least engaged with the evolution of the Zionist ideal and program, though he was effective in making his verse a means to celebrate the state, once founded. His relative detachment from the conflict-filled history of Zionism can be attributed to the fact that his favored thematic material was contemporary Diaspora culture, with special reference to the regional variant then flourishing in Buenos Aires. Because of his seldom-interrupted preoccupation with Jewish life and culture in the Diaspora, and his inattention to the specifics of Zionism, Tiempo is not considered in the following examination of poetic elaborations of Zionist thought and ideals of Zion.

Liacho and Grünberg, in contrast, were willing to explore in verse the complexities inherent in the attempt to reestablish a homeland for the long-dispersed Jews. Grünberg had an especially profound involvement. With his friend Moshe Tov, he played a role in the diplomatic strategies leading to statehood; he was a witness to the historic United Nations vote; in 1949 he assumed charge of Israeli representation in Argentina.¹ What is more, these experiences form part of the raw material for the poems in *Junto a un río de Babel* (1966), the collection examined here. Grünberg also lived out, in a particularly vivid and painful way, the unexpected complications that Israeli statehood produced in Jewish identity. After years of involvement in the Zionist struggle, he came to the realization that he could never make his home in the new state. His poetic work bears witness to his unhappy recognition that Israeli identity and Jewish identity would never fully coalesce, and that the return to Palestine, so often envisioned as a natural step for dispersed and oppressed Jewry, would be a complicated, difficult process even for those

Jews most highly motivated to undertake it. Grünberg's Zion-theme verse, which reflects the unexpectedly problematic outcomes of statehood, will be discussed in due chronological order. Historical precedence dictates prior consideration of Liacho's poetic elaborations of Zion, which came to a close immediately after triumphantly hailing the newly established Jewish state.

In contrast to the politically and diplomatically involved Grünberg, Liacho did not follow the currents and subcurrents within Zionism in detail, maintaining instead a rigorously apolitical, or at least non-ideological, Zionism, to the exclusion of any too profane a contamination of his concept of Zionism with real-world politics. This ideologically neutral outlook on the question of a Jewish homeland is the basis for the poems in Liacho's *Siónidas desde la pampa* (1969; composed 1919-1949) considered in this discussion.² Liacho is more concerned with the need for a place the Jews can call home than with the arguments for and against any particular means of satisfying this need. In his view the Jewish people require neither renewal through labor, nor contact with the soil, nor even spiritual rebirth, but rather safety from persecution and an end to other traditionally-lamented afflictions of exile. (Here Liacho explicitly identifies himself as an heir of Jeremiah and of prophetic literature in general.) Though its rationale for a Jewish homeland is principally pragmatic, the eclectic *Siónidas* does not forego the employment and support of arguments and styles of exhortation drawn from cultural, spiritual and even mystical and messianic forms of Zionism. Because its goal is the declaration of need rather than the programmatic advocacy of solutions, *Siónidas* can celebrate both the home Argentina should provide its Jewish population as well as the reclamation of the ancient land. The proposal of alternate sites to Palestine, so bitterly divisive to real-world Zionists, in *Siónidas* represents but another expression of a single urge.³ This latitude is the feature studied here. While it is possible to correlate lines in the *Siónidas* with their sources in Zionist discussion, such a literalistic exercise runs counter to the spirit of the work. *Siónidas* synthesizes varying concepts of homeland, ranging from Biblical and liturgical lamentations over exile to modern political Zionism, while overriding differences insurmountable in real life.

Siónidas, dated the year of Liacho's death, was no posthumous miscellany as Liacho himself oversaw its assembly from his uncollected poems. Of the available texts, *Siónidas* includes only those that generate statements about, or project ideal descriptions of, a Jewish homeland. Despite this criterion of selection, the work is diverse in its assertions and implications. Liacho's awareness of this heterogeneity is manifest in the soul-searching "Indagación previa a la poesía," in which the poet justifies *Siónidas* and *Sonata judía de Nueva York*, the other collection of poetry included in the same volume.

Of prime interest for this study is the way *Siónidas* reconciles and harmonizes various notions of a place on earth for the Jewish people. Alberto Gerchunoff's 1910 novel *Los gauchos judíos*, then as now the most widely-read work by any Jewish

Argentine author, had won considerable official approbation (e.g., its inclusion under the aegis of the national Centennial celebration) for propagating a tendentious New World Zionism. *Los gauchos judíos* endorses Argentina as the sole focus of Zionist aspirations, advocating relinquishment of hope for a state in Palestine, lest it hinder Jewish integration into Argentinian society. *Siónidas* never discards or consigns to the past any form of Zionism, even as Israel leaves behind pre-state uncertainty.

The poems collected in *Siónidas* were written over a span of history that saw the transformation of the status of Zionist thought. Of the decisive events occurring between the earliest (1919, when the *Semana Trágica* disturbances launched Liacho on his quest for homeland) and the latest (1949) poem, the Holocaust and the founding of the modern state of Israel are only the two most obvious – both directly accounting for the decline of projects for advocating Argentina (or any site other than Palestine) as Zion. In consonance with these developments, a chronological arrangement of these Zion-theme poems would seem natural, but Liacho has proceeded otherwise.

Not all the texts collected in *Siónidas* are marked with dates, but from those that are it is readily evident that chronological sequence has been discarded in favor of some other order. The texts that envision Argentina as Zion, and those that virtually despair of the reestablishment of a homeland in the Palestine, are not concentrated in any one portion of the collection. The book at first appears about to end with a volley of salutations toward the just-emerging State, the lengthy and ceremonious free-form ode of 1948, “Canto al nuevo estado judío” (79-86). Yet the “Ex libris” (86-87) that closes the book is a short poem dated 1922 affirming the compatibility of Jewish identity with loyalty to a predominantly Christian city: “Porteño de armas llevar/ judío a buen razonar.” The speaker proclaims himself “dispuesto a ser gran peón/ en el mundo a construir” leaving the location of this world indeterminate.

What artistic considerations account for this decision to diverge from the expected sequence and what is its rhetorical effect? The ordering of the poems in *Siónidas* highlights the dissimilarities between the types of Zionism and ways of imagining Zion represented in the poems. A text that taints with uncertainty the project for a state in the ancient homeland (“Nostalgia del retorno imposible,” dated 1931, to be discussed below) is in close proximity to the relentlessly hearty “Novia de Sión” (33-34), with its robust vision of pioneer life. Zion itself alternates between being a timeless, placeless ideal (“Amor”), a zone of belonging attainable in Argentina (“Hebrea argentina”), and a geographically specific, historically validated land.

Internal evidence supports the contention that one of *Siónidas*’ rhetorical goals is to serve as a showcase for the divergent beliefs and concepts that have at one time or another found a place in Zionist thought. Even more eloquent than the variations within the collection are the shifts to be found within one unitary poem. A single poetic speaker may be a composite figure of Zionist enthusiasm who, at diverse moments within one continuous text, incarnates dissimilar outlooks on the central issues of homeland, its loss, reclamation, or re-creation. Titles of individual poems,

such as “Variaciones sobre un tema nunca envejecido” and “Variaciones judías,” hint at this effort to display diverse possibilities. As in musical patterns, these variations trace a common design by different routes – in this case, positing as the foremost Jewish issue the need to claim a territory. For example, “Variaciones judías” starts as a bitter lamentation, presenting diaspora existence as accursed and comfortless, but the final stanza affirms belonging in Buenos Aires: “En esta tierra bendita / trabajo y vivo feliz, / hundo en ella mi raíz, / y fronda cosmopolita / cubre mi tronco semita.”

The underlying common trait is the importance given the thematic nucleus: homelessness and feeling at home, rootlessness and roots, outcast status and belonging. Other poems bring divergent propositions into even closer proximity. From its title through the fifth stanza “Nostalgia del retorno imposible” (28-29; dated 1931) is formulated as a lamentation consistently denying the possibility of reclaiming the “tierra roja tras los mares.” In the last three stanzas, though, the speaker shows a resurgence of hope, inserting amid his lamentations such spirited exhortations as “Dulce tierra de Sión, patria cautiva, / por ti ha llegado el tiempo de pelear. / Renace ya nuestra expresión nativa, tú despiertas nuestra alma colectiva...” Yet these sanguine urgings alternate with further reiterations of the bewailing refrain, “tierra que no podemos alcanzar.” One rhetorical aim is the expression of hope, and support for, the Zionist project on the ancestral site. But the poem’s title, which casts the enterprise in doubt, and the iteration of the wailing refrain, signal another function: to mimic the workings of a mind alternately gripped by despair and hope.

Even in those poems that consistently promote the goal of a state in Palestine, Liacho still accommodates in contiguous verses assertions that, in ordinary speech, would more normally be voiced by opponents in a polemic. “Extranjero en todas partes” (34-37; dated 1931) unwaveringly sounds the call for reclamation of the ancient land, but alternates between rationales. The second stanza brings this divergence to the fore. Its opening six lines state that “el judío... quiere suya / a la Tierra Prometida, / su Tierra Santa y sagrada...” But the religious justification for claiming territory – a people’s consecrated land – is rejected four lines later in favor of secular Zionism: “No es el consuelo de Dios/lo que allí le tonifica;/es el odio de los hombres/que a tener patria le obliga.”

“Hebrea argentina” (37-38), which pays imitative homage to the Song of Songs, makes especially vivid Liacho’s struggle to create a poetic common ground for propositions that, in the real world, arouse tension and dissent. Here the dilemma the poem seeks to temper is the one created by the need to sacrifice distinctively Jewish traits in order to live at ease among the nations. It should be remembered that one tenet of Gerchunoff’s New World Zionism, as developed in *Los gauchos judíos*, was that to merit feeling at home in Argentina, Jews should become less clearly distinguishable from the predominant population. The ideal woman addressed in Liacho’s “Hebrea argentina” is celebrated in the midst of such a self-transformation. She is, the speaker tells her, “cada vez más nativa y más mía.” She is coming to

resemble the oldline Argentines. Liacho, as usual relying on the heightened ambiguity that poetic expression allows, leaves unspecified whether this change has occurred through intermarriage or is an outward sign, perhaps only a figurative one, of zealous acculturation: “Eres criolla de carne morena/luz hebrea que aclara el torrente.” For all the modifications the woman has undergone, the speaker finds undiminished in her the Biblically-celebrated ideal of Jewish womanhood. By keeping alive this ancient tradition of feminine splendor, she inspires an urge for “el retorno a los viejos lugares” even while offering “en tu carne morena y rosada/ nuevo mundo.” Here Liacho seems to strain even poetic logic to a point beyond the ability of literary language to forge harmony between opposites.

An inherent rule of *Siónidas* is that any established image of Zion may be elastically extended and transformed to fit new circumstances. This accounts for the appearance of the **pampas** in the title, despite mere token mention in the poetry itself. The lyrical “I” is not seen speaking **desde las pampas**; rather, in several poems he identifies himself as **porteño**. (Here it might be noted that Liacho was one of the first Jewish Argentine authors to be born in Buenos Aires, as opposed to Eastern Europe or the agricultural colonies of the **pampas**. Throughout his career as a poet and essayist, he made himself a spokesman for the culture of the capital.) The titular allusion to the **pampas** appears to be derived from the program to recruit Eastern European Jews to help settle the Argentine plains, a program that developed ideological tenets, including a form of Zionism stressing the renewing potential of farm labor in the pampas. We may attribute the inclusion of pampas in the title to Liacho’s desire to extend this already well-publicized non-Palestine image of Zion from its original designation to the city in which an increasing proportion of Argentina’s Jews now lived.

Not only do certain of the *Siónidas* postulate forms of homeland divorced from a time-honored geography, such as an Argentine Zion, they are completely abstracted from the material world, having no real ground, either consecrated or freshly claimed. The above-cited “Hebrea argentina” seems firm in its assignment of an Argentine nationality to the idealized addressee. Yet the speaker adds to this real-world attribution a purely figurative one: “porque es patria tu honor de doncella” (38). The extreme abstraction reached by some *Siónidas* is typified by “Amor.” In this sonnet the speaker makes a “mundo de justicia en que confío” (57) the home that it is his Jewish mission to reach. “Amor” repeatedly utilizes terms whose literal referent is territorial. But, transformed into poetic figures, and designating qualities such as charity and justice, they lose the ability to signal real-world places. As well as the just-noted “mundo de justicia,” the speaker visualizes his destination as “playas de amor en que confío.” Passage to this ideal state requires a sea crossing, but over a body of water remote from recognizable geography. “El mar que embate lo judío,” as the lyrical “I” alludes to it, is less a physical barrier than a summation of all the forces that frustrate his quintessentially Jewish quest, “ansiendo detener nuestro crucero.”

This paucity of concrete referents cannot be attributed to Liacho's being a determinedly transcendent author who rejects the specification of time and place as unpoetic (although the *Siónidas* in sonnet form tend to have few real-world references and to be undated). Liacho can make it perfectly clear whether by Zion he means the homesite in Palestine, and whether his topic is the founding of a modern political state – when he cares to. Certain *Siónidas* abound in unequivocal markers used by Liacho to identify the ancient site and its modern reclamation. Among these are such overt statements as “Un nuevo mundo construye/ el judío en Palestina,” (34), and “morar en Palestina” (42) posited as the ideal. Place names include not only “Palestina” and “Jerusalem” but “Tel Aviv” – “Tel Aviv” being unmistakably part of the twentieth-century drive toward statehood and more difficult to abstract into metaphor. Liacho also has a stock of identifying attributes he consistently assigns to the traditional land, such as its *tierra roja*, desert agriculture, and the Western Wall. He dedicates lengthy poems of homage to Herzl and Jabotinsky, as well as more briefly honoring other names in the modern history of Zionism. In his more editorializing *Siónidas*, he lodges a number of detailed complaints against Britain's policies and practices during the Mandate. Indeed, the overseas voyage of return evoked so indeterminately in “Amor” is given precise referents in lines from other *Siónidas*, as “Hay una tierra roja tras los mares/a la que sueño un día regresar” (“Nostalgia del retorno imposible,” 28).

The ethereally disembodied poems, like “Amor,” diverge in obvious ways from the texts that look toward a Jewish state, but do not stand in rhetorical opposition to them. Rather than support any one plan of action, these vague texts are the lyrical expression of an inchoate, diffuse cry for relief from exile, for a safe haven, for home. They seemingly substitute a distinctively Jewish thought, outlook, or spirituality for such concrete goals as statehood; yet nothing in them rules out a here-and-now political Zionism. The point is to sound, through poetry, an all-inclusive call for a Zion – be it political, cultural, spiritual, or any admixture of the above.

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Liacho's *Siónidas desde la pampa* concludes with 1949; the most recent poem is a salutation to the State upon its founding. On the one hand, this cut-off point gives the collection both an opening and a closing date charged with significance. The *Semana Trágica* of 1919 rouses the poet to an awareness of the difficulties facing the world's scattered and vulnerable Jews, while the achievement of statehood brings to fruition a history of struggle to remedy this situation. Statements and inferences made in the book support this rationale for the closing date of 1949. However, ending the Zion-theme cycle of poems in 1949 confers a second rhetorical advantage. Liacho, whose poetic goal is so often to smoothe over conflicts and contradictions, can make the winning of statehood appear as the resolution of competing currents in Zionist thought – and, indeed, of warring tendencies in Jewish self-definition. *Siónidas*, by

making no reference to any phenomena taking place in the already-established state, can avoid the profound fissures and contradictions in Jewish identity that statehood brought to the fore with fresh clarity.

This renewal of tension and conflict is one of the principal axes of Grünberg's *Junto a un río de Babel*. Grünberg's collection, particularly the segment dedicated to the theme of Zion, stands in striking relation to Liacho's *Siónidas*, taking up the story of the Palestine homeland and the Diaspora almost exactly where *Siónidas* leaves off. (Only a few of the poems in Grünberg's 1966 collection refer to the efforts to obtain national status, and these few concentrate on the last phases of the struggle.) Moreover, it deliberately enunciates many of the conflicts annulled by Liacho in his poetry, as well as others; employing its rhetorical force to display these conflicts in the most painful way possible.

While this set of preoccupations colors many of the poems in *Junto a un río de Babel*, there is a readily identifiable nucleus of texts almost exclusively devoted to probing the most sensitive aspects of post-statehood Jewish identity and Palestine versus Diaspora relations. Indeed, in the table of contents, Grünberg sets this portion of the book apart with the subtitle "Siónidas." The texts from this section have, as well as their obvious shared general theme of Zion, a number of other thematic and structural characteristics in common.

The formal construction of these texts gives them a functional appearance, with the element of artistry downplayed. All are short, composed in determinedly plain language, with little to attract attention to their poetic form as such. Grünberg favors the sonnet and rhymed quatrains that provide the general appearance of a romance, though without strictly adhering to the standard syllabic extension of the lines by eight syllables. Other texts forego stanzaic division in favor of what is essentially a list or series of assertions made in consonant or assonant rhyme. By employing easily recognized and assimilated verse forms and scarcely innovating with metrical conventions, Grünberg directs attention away from poetic structure and toward the main purpose of the poems, which is the setting forth of propositions with an ironic twist. Each text is designed to accentuate one or more bitterly humorous observations about the current-day conundrum of Jewishness, both in Israel and the Diaspora.

These utterances assume the basic form of a paradoxical assertion. The importance of such contrapuntal oppositions, in which one element is played off another, opposing one, is emphasized by such titles as "Carambola" (126) and "Voltereta" (123). To draw attention to both sides of the contradiction, the statement often receives a symmetrical, bipartite elaboration. In one frequently utilized construction, the first half of a stanza or an entire poem puts forward a proposition, while the second half echoes the initial formulation, modifying it so as to produce an unexpected, sharp turnabout.

Taking this strategy to an extreme, many of the poems consist of a single four-line stanza, in essence an aphorism in verse, standing alone on an entire page. This

pared-down form serves to deliver, without any secondary elaboration, the formulation of a cruel paradox. “Diásporas” (125) illustrates all the above-summarized features of poetic style, language, and construction. Its two neatly reciprocal halves contrast the situation of Jews before and after the reclamation of the homeland in Palestine:

Ayer, judíos judiegos,
contorneábamos el mundo,
y hoy, judíos extranjeros,
contorneamos el terruño.

The Zion-theme poems dispersed in Grünberg’s *Babel* cover a number of aspects of Israel and its relations with the Diaspora. There are relatively few of the celebratory and triumphal expressions that form the mainstay of Liacho’s treatment of Israel in *Siónidas desde la pampa*. Although a number of poems contain affirmations of loyalty, pride, and support, their tone is hardly one of cheer. Grünberg, with the tendency to lament and bewail that has characterized his Jewish-theme verse since the publication of the 1940 volume *Mester de judería*,⁴ vividly presents the difficulties faced by the Jewish population then resettling Palestine. Using his favored strategy of ironic contrasts, Grünberg counterposes the glorious ideal of redemption, which even in secular Zionist variants had messianic dimensions, with the unglamorous miseries faced by the modern nation. These include the poor conditions for reestablishing agriculture, the wretched state of the Holocaust survivors, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and inadequate international support. As noted, Grünberg’s observations are couched in the form of ironic contrast or counterpoint. The opposition may be between pre- and post-1948, as in “Diásporas,” or between the lyrical Zionist dream and the real-world, struggling Jewish state. For instance, the first stanza of “Repatriación” (70) offers a triumphant vision of the return to Palestine. The rapturous version is enunciated, not by the speaker himself, but by mindlessly celebratory Zionists whose victorious phrases he reiterates in order to later refute. In the second stanza, the poetic voice recapitulates the elements of this sanguine outlook, but adds a decidedly melancholy descriptive label to each. The homebound “galeotes de la grey” now become “los despojos de los galeotes de la grey.” The land, earlier referred to as “las eras de Israel,” in the poet’s embittered reformulation becomes “un harapo de los eriales de Israel.”

With his tendency to see pitfalls and disadvantages, Grünberg distances himself from the euphoric tributes that were common in contemporary rhetoric and inserts a current of critical analysis into his poems on the recently emerged modern Israel. Here the poetic voice is equally that of a political commentator, and of a prophet issuing warnings against moral decline. He astutely foretells the dilemma Israel will face in shifting from the immaterial bonds of peoplehood to the here-and-now business of a modern state, inevitably contaminated by realpolitik. For instance, the speaker in “Indecencia” (104), after invoking Machiavelli, assumes a prophetic voice to address

the newly founded state as “Tú que ahora constituyes/ una indecente nación,” urging it to maintain at least a trace of the spirituality that historically sustained the Jews in exile. At times, the poetic “I” adopts the vague, cryptic mode of expression favored in much traditional prophetic discourse. The far-seeing speaker delivers warnings against unnamed ills that may be visited upon the people should they depart from ethical criteria of conduct. Such an admonition is the message of “Dualidad” (85), in which both the nature of the potential moral failure and the ensuing catastrophe are left unspecified, though the prophetic speaker implies that he clearly foresees both. Addressing the entire Jewish people as a single tú, he seeks to alert this audience:

Sión es tu única esperanza
de una vida menos ajena.
Pero también es una trampa;
también es una ratonera.

Despite Grünberg’s intense and well-informed concern for Israeli matters, the “Siónidas” section of *Babel* focuses attention away from the events and phenomena in Palestine. The thematic core is not Israel as such, but rather the disturbing impact of Israeli statehood and repopulation on those who remain, by choice or for lack of means, Diaspora Jews. Here Grünberg’s debt to the traditional Jewish discourse of lamentations comes to the fore, but with a typically paradoxical twist. The book’s title, *Junto a un río de Babel*, gives an accurate clue to Grünberg’s source traditions by harking back to the long history of bewailing the loss of the Palestine homeland. The irony, as quickly becomes evident, is that Grünberg includes in the *Babel* “Siónidas” anguished lamentations occasioned by the recovery of that homeland.

These Zion-theme poems are thematically centered on a paradoxical interpretation of recent Jewish history. In Grünberg’s poetic account, the Diaspora, for all its dispersive effects, also served to unite Jews around a common deprivation and grief. The pain of exile, the hardships of existence among the nations, and the disruption of traditional life were, at least, shared, unifying factors in Jewish thought and identity. The resettlement of Jews in Palestine entailed, according to this outlook, not only recuperation but loss, that is, loss of the shared deprivation that served as a historical force maintaining unity in dispersion. With a portion, but only a portion, of world Jewry reestablishing itself in Zion, the common condition is gone.

Grünberg’s texts reflect the turmoil he experienced upon realizing that, despite his long history of Zionist involvement, he was personally unsuited to undertake aliyah. (The resultant changes in the poet’s attitudes and production have been examined by Senkman.⁵) The speaker in these poems views the above-discussed breach from the vantage point of an ineluctably diaspora individual, now deprived of – continuing Grünberg’s paradoxical mode, one might say exiled from – the historical basis for his situation and the bitter comfort of a collectively lamented, shared plight. “Desclasado,” with its characteristically bipartite, before-and-after construction, is

one of the poems designed to highlight this sense of lost oneness and personal impoverishment:

Yo era otrora un argentino
de segunda
y un judío de la entonces
clase única.
Vino la dicotomía
de esta última,
y heme ahora hasta judío
de segunda.

The poet extends the idea of a new, even more painful, exile from those who for whatever reason do not manage successful aliyah to, simply, the entire contemporary Jewish population. Grünberg, sensitive to life's real and potential disappointments, was shrewdly quick to see that a modern Israeli identity would not be an unproblematic, totally Jewish identity. In his melancholy view, Israeli Jews, as all others, will continue to live out the drama set in motion by the original dispersion. The relatively swift resettlement of the homeland will not erase nearly nineteen centuries – Grünberg favors the round figure “dos mil años” – of the experience of uprootedness and of adaptation to life among the nations. Indeed, in “Espera” (135), it is suggested that “dos mil años más” may be needed for some individuals to overcome a persistently Diaspora mindset and to personally come to terms with migration to Palestine. “Homogeneidad” (144) economically conveys the warning, developed at greater length in “Nomadismo” (145-46), that exile and discontinuity will remain qualities of Jewish life even in a restored homeland:

La Tierra no se compone
de Sión y la expatriación.
Toda la tierra es destierro;
destierro es la misma Sión.

Clearly, *Junto a un río de Babel*, particularly in the section “Siónidas,” embodies a critical inquiry into several aspects of the outlook for the Jewish people after modern statehood. The analysis, though relentlessly gloomy, is often quite acute and far-sighted. Still, if its thematic material went no further than detached, well-reasoned observation and commentary, *Babel* would not exercise the claim it does on the reader's attention. The riveting aspect of *Babel* is an emotionally expressive one: the work's ability to communicate extreme feelings of homelessness, discomfort, and outsider status. The poetic persona who speaks in these poems repeatedly draws attention to his own individual unhappiness, attributing to himself the miserable displacement that he sees as the condition of the contemporary Diaspora or, in some instances, all Jews.

Looking through the “*Siónidas*” section of Grünberg’s *Babel*, one is struck by the numerous titles consisting solely of descriptive tags all similarly fraught with negative meaning. These may be adjectives, such as “Desplazado,” “Extranjero,” “Desclasado,” and “Irredentos;” an elliptical adjectival phrase such as “Segunda” (for *de segunda clase*); a prefix such as “Sub” (which in the text of the poem is used in the formulations *subargentino* and *subjudío*); or a noun employed so as to make a sour comment, such as “Turistas” (designating Jews unable or unwilling to settle in Israel). These unhappy terms all turn out, in the course of the text, to have been applied by the poetic speaker either to himself or to a group of which he is a member (i.e., Diaspora Jews or the Jewish people in its entirety).

Seconding the effect of such titles, the texts display a repeated self-attribution of outsider or low-status identity to the poetic persona. The poetic “I” states “soy un ciudadano exótico” (136), “soy un extranjero” (137), and “Ya no soy un hombre” (135, in reference to his inability to immigrate to Israel). He calls himself, among other things, “un judío cacopátrida” (123), “un deudo foráneo” (136), “un alma advenediza” (136), “judío centrifugo” (126), “judío de segunda clase” (138 and 139), and one of the “judíos extranjeros” (125). Some of these self-descriptions are the speaker’s bitter reflection on the way in which others view him, as, for example, “subargentino,” the perception of “argentinos gentiles” (140). In other cases, though, there is no source other than the “I” himself, and such formulations as “judío cacopátrida” stand out as the autobiographical speaker’s personal image of his confused, divided, and irremediably outsider self.

The speaker’s attribution of traits to himself, in a manner so harshly self-scrutinizing as to create the effect of an unguarded personal expression of unhappiness, is the central point of human interest in *Babel*. The volume’s meditations on Israeli statehood and its known and predicted aftereffects are given force by the highly emotive way in which the poetic “I” alludes to his own particular case, with its paradoxical combination of intimate involvement in the drive for the founding of a modern nation and inability to benefit from its success. The features emphasized in the discussion of current Jewish affairs – conflict, division, exclusion, the creation of outsider groups – are the traits found in the person of the “I” who speaks in the texts.

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Despite the differing timespans to which their texts refer, Liacho’s *Siónidas* and Grünberg’s *Babel* have in common raw thematic material that is inherently fraught with conflict. Both collections are poetic responses to the transformations that Zionist thought, and indeed the entire term and concept Zion, necessarily underwent as the establishment of a modern Jewish state in Palestine rapidly moved from a dreamed-of ideal or debated hypothesis to a here-and-now political reality. In both cases, the poems show a determined, vigorous employment of the resources of the literary text for treating contradictions and antagonisms.

Liacho's *Siónidas* demonstrates full use of poetry's potential to hold opposing elements in what appears, in the space of the text, to be a harmonious totality. His rhetorical goal is a difficult one: to celebrate equally and jointly currents of Zionism that, when removed from the realm of his poetry and applied to real-world conditions, are irreconcilable. Grünberg, in his *Babel*, uses the resources of poetry to heighten the tensions to be found in contemporary Zionist thought and in the meanings of Zion. To do so, he makes extensive use of a type of textual construction designed to accentuate contradictions and oppositions: paradox or, more broadly, ironic contrast. The effect of these irreconcilable divergences is augmented by the presence of a poetic "I", torn and bitter, who himself exemplifies the pain which, in his interpretation, has for many Jews been an unintended result of the success of the Zionist idea.

NOTES

- * I would like to extend my enthusiastic thanks to Leonardo Senkman for his valuable suggestions.
1. Concerning Carlos M. Grünberg's involvement in the drive to establish the Jewish state in Palestine, see Leonardo Senkman, "Del civismo judeoargentino a la extranjería," in his *La identidad judía en la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Pardes, 1983), p. 325. Another source of testimony about the poet's Zionist activism is, of course, his own poetry, which contains extremely specific references to historical events surrounding the campaign for statehood. See Carlos M. Grünberg, *Junto a un río de Babel* (Buenos Aires: Acervo Cultural, 1966). All citations from Grünberg in this study correspond to this edition.
 2. There is a marked divergence between the allusions to Lázaro Liacho in general discussions of Argentine literature and those focusing on Jewish issues. If the discussion does not specialize in Jewish themes, Liacho's contribution to literary criticism and journalism and his editorial labors are considered the most noteworthy aspects of his career. For characteristic examples of this tendency, see the references to Liacho in Roberto F. Giusti, "La crítica y el ensayo," in Rafael Alberto Arrieta, ed., *Historia de la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Peuser, 1959) vol. 4, p. 474, and, in Juan Pinto, *Breviario de la literatura argentina (con una ojeada retrospectiva)* (Buenos Aires: La Mandrágora, 1958), which mentions Liacho as a literary commentator, p. 242, and as an all around participant in literary life, p. 176. This situation contrasts with the more thematically focused discussion when Jewish topics are brought to the fore. In these cases, the work of Liacho most likely to be discussed is *Siónidas desde la pampa y Sonata judía de Nueva York* (Buenos Aires: Candelabro, 1969; please note that all citations from Liacho in this study refer to this edition). This publication is, for instance (and quite reasonably so), the only one of Liacho's books to be discussed in the text and listed in the bibliography of Senkman's above-cited work; the same is true of Kessel Schwartz's highly compressed overview, "The Jew in Twentieth-Century Argentine Literature," *The American Hispanist* 3.19 (1977): pp. 9-12. Francisco Herrera's article "Lázaro Liacho," in Pedro Orgambide and Roberto Yahni, eds., *Enciclopedia de la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1970), p. 380, gives its subject's poetry slight prominence over his work as an essayist and all around man of letters. In discussing Liacho's poetry, Herrera accords equal importance to its Jewish thematic tendencies and another much favored subject matter of this author, Buenos Aires and its distinctive urban culture.
 3. The bibliography on Zionism is immense. For a sampling, see: Alexander Altman, ed., *Studies in Jewish Intellectual History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964); Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea* (New York, 1959); Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York, 1972); and Michael A. Meyer, ed., *Ideas of Jewish History* (New York, 1974).
 4. Contemporaries were struck by the contrast between the usually effervescent verse of César Tiempo, with its persistent efforts to see Jewish issues and Jewish-Christian relations in the most favorable light, and the bitter, lamenting tone of Carlos M. Grünberg's Jewish-theme poetry. See, for example, Julio Noé, "La poesía," in Arrieta's above-cited *Historia de la literatura argentina*, vol. 4, pp. 122-24, where Noé discusses Grünberg's 1940 collection *Mester de judería*, which on the whole displays a less thoroughly disaffected

- and unhappy outlook than the 1966 *Junto a un río de Babel*. It is notable that Grünberg's mildly innovative poetry of the 1920s, when he was considered to be loosely associated with the avant-garde and before he began to win notice as a poet of Jewish life, did not strike the same note of negative pronouncements on society and its ways. Noe, p. 123, contrasts Grünberg's poetry on Jewish themes to the "lirismo desinteresado de sus primeras obras, *Las cámaras del rey* (1922) and *El libro del tiempo* (1924)." Guillermo Ara appears to have in mind Grünberg's more detached and nonjudgmental poetry, not his impassioned, aggrieved, and personally involved treatment of Jewish issues, when he gives this summary of the author's work: "En una tónica de influjos vanguardistas pero de tendencia moderada se inscribe la obra de... Carlos M. Grünberg;" see his *Suma de poesía argentina 1538-1968. Crítica y antología* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Guadalupe, 1970), vol. 1, p. 82.
5. Senkman, pp. 325-26. Senkman observes that the personal upheaval Grünberg experienced at the actual founding of the state of Israel was exacerbated by events in Argentina: "También los desbordes antisemitas en los años de crisis del liberalismo argentino quebraron su fe en la ilusión integracionista judeo-criolla" (325). This thematic material also surfaces in the poems of *Junto a un río de Babel*, though not nearly as prominently as the central problem of the Jewish state in relation to the Diaspora.