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**Under the Volcano.
Warburg's Legacy**

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Under the Volcano. Warburg's Legacy

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A Fictional Letter, a Florentine Friendship

On André Jolles and Aby Warburg

André Jolles, edited by Wannes Wets

§ A Fictional Letter, a Florentine Friendship. On André Jolles and Aby Warburg

§ André Jolles, *Brief von Herr Professor X an Herrn Y, Student der psychol. Soziologie*, März 1960

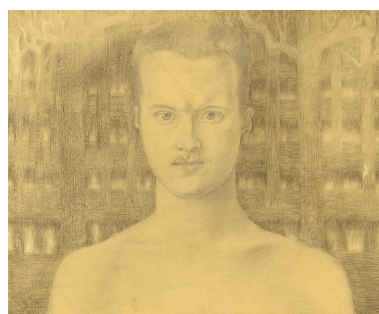
§ André Jolles, translated by Wannes Wets, *Letter from Professor X to Mr Y, Student of Psychol. Sociology*, March 1960

One of the most remarkable, and certainly one of the earliest biographies on Aby Warburg (1866-1929) was written by the Dutch-German scholar on Art, Literature and Culture André Jolles (1874-1946), in the form of a fictional letter. For nearly a decade, Jolles and Warburg were close friends and collaborators. This letter, which is included in this essay and has been translated into English for the first time, will form the starting point for an assessment of this friendship. This essay consists of three parts: the first will give a quick introduction to the figure of André Jolles; the second will deliver a chronological overview of the friendship between the two men; and the third will look into the relation between Jolles' work on morphology and its influence on Warburg, mainly in their *Ninfa Fiorentina* project.

André Jolles

In 1930, André Jolles published his *magnum opus Einfache Formen*. This work is Jolles' definitive compilation of his research on literary phenomena of form. With his book, he describes his morphologic methodology. He identified a closed system of nine primal types in literature, called "Simple Forms". These forms originated as a whole in the community and are found in the deepest layers of the collective conscience, as a result of a *Geistesbeschäftigung* (mental disposition). The nine Simple Forms are characterised by their respective *Sprachgebärden*, verbal gestures that are expressed in language (Jolles [1930] 2009; Beeckman 1983).

The ideas formulated in his book gradually appeared in the decade prior to its publication, in smaller articles and essays



Jan Toorop, *Portrait of André Jolles*, 1985, pencil and ink on paper, private collection.

written by him in various magazines. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Jolles had already shown an even earlier interest in aesthetic qualifications, amongst others with his dissertation on Vitruvius' aesthetic theory (Jolles 1906), and his series *De Primitieven and Folklore en kunstwetenschap* in the magazines "De Amsterdammer" and "De Kroniek". What is striking about these early works, is that they are situated within the discipline of Art History, and therefore not in that of literary studies. His early writings have been largely ignored in the research on Jolles. He is thus primarily known today for his literary morphology, and *de facto* almost exclusively for his *Einfache Formen*.

Jolles is considered a wandering scholar, both in geographical terms (with stays in Amsterdam, Florence, Berlin, Ghent and Leipzig) and between disciplines (as a practitioner of Art History, Classical Archaeology, Literature, Cultural History, Anthropology or Linguistics). During these endeavours, he maintained quite a few friendships with various scholars and artists, to which he remains linked to, even after his death. Amongst Jolles' contacts can be counted some foremost intellectuals and artistic or academic groups of this epoch, such as the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1872-1945), the Belgian art historian and politician August Vermeylen (1872-1945) or the German sociologist Hans Freyer (1887-1969). Jolles' interdisciplinarity and his wide-reaching social circle make him one of the key figures within the rise of many cultural morphologies that characterise the 1920s. However, when Jolles joined the NSDAP in 1930 and became a fervent supporter of the Nazi ideology, an evaporation of his previous friendships and contacts succeeded. Jolles was now considered a 'burned scholar' and he and his *Einfache Formen* slid into oblivion (Thys 2000).

The Fictional Letter as a Biography of a Friendship

This letter, that forms the starting point of this essay, bears a fictional date of March 1960, but was in reality written in March 1902. In it, Jolles poses as "professor X", a son of Marietta Warburg (1899-1973), the eldest daughter of Aby Warburg (who had only just turned two years old at that time). The letter is addressed to a certain "Herr Y", nephew of the said professor and thus the great-grandson of Aby. The nephew, a student of Psychological Sociology, is facing a difficult, but non-disclosed situation, to which the professor sees help in a comparison with his *Urgrossvater*, Aby Warburg, who was, according to Jolles, in a similar position. In what follows, Jolles (or "professor X") gives an overview of Warburg's scientific methodology and mental disposition, at a time when the little work that Warburg had written was not yet heavily circulating. By pretending to look back on Warburg's research achievements from the future, Jolles was one of the first to describe Warburg's new scientific system, at a point where both men were at the beginning of their careers.

Jolles and Warburg have by then known each other for nearly eight years, after their first meeting in Florence in the early spring of 1894. They had much in common; both coming from a bank environment (although the wealth of the Jolles family was significantly lower than that of the Warburgs), thus being able to devote their life to the study of culture. Both men have been spending the cold winter months in Florence, or elsewhere in Italy, since their youth, as was

the custom for the modern European bourgeoisie families (Roeck 2009, 3-5). The first trace of their friendship is a letter sent by Aby Warburg to his mother, Charlotte Warburg (1842-1921) on 3 april 1894. He mentions:

Weil ich einen kleinen Ausflug nach Arezzo gemacht habe von dem ich gestern Abend zurückkam. Adolph Goldschmidt und ein jonger holländischer Theologe und Dichter Jolles, mit dem ich mich hier sehr angefreundet habe, waren mit.

[Because I made a little trip to Arezzo, from which I returned yesterday evening. Adolph Goldschmidt and a young Dutch theologian and poet Jolles, with whom I became very friendly here, were with me] (GS *Briefe*, 105; translated by the author).

Jolles was only nineteen at that time. By then, he had solely published a few short symbolist poems and religious plays, which earned him the description “Theologian and Poet” in Warburgs letter above. It is remarkable that Jolles turned his attention towards art history only after the first meeting with Warburg; in May of that year the first entry of Jolles’ series *De Primitieven* appeared, where he looked at the transition from Northern-Italian Gothic art to early renaissance, from the Duecento to the Trecento (Jolles 1894-1895).

As Silvia Contarini shows in her essay that appeared in the catalogue of the recent exhibition on Warburg at the Uffizi, Jolles’ early work shows a remarkable influence of Warburg. That might not be a surprise, given the large amount of contact the two scholars had with each other; during the next winters after their first meeting, the two met yearly in Florence, except for the years of 1896 (as Warburg was on his American journey) and 1897. The rest of the year, back in their home countries, they stayed in contact through a rather extensive collection of letters, some of them also between Warburg and Jolles’ mother, the writer and salonnière Jacoba Cornelia Jolles-Singels (1847-1901) (Contarini 2023).

These early years of their friendship already showed some beginnings of the scientific influence the two intellectuals would pose on each other. From 1894 onwards, as he grew older, Jolles wrote more, and on different subjects. His focus shifted from poetry to shorter articles, which he published in many of the major journals of his period. He published a wide variety of articles, ranging from Art History, Literature, Folklore studies and reviews of books and plays. Of particular mention is the work he has written for the weekly journal “De Kroniek”, of which Jolles was a founding member and which was the main platform for the new symbolist and naturalist art of the *fin de siècle* in the Netherlands. During the last two decades of the 19th century, Jolles’ parents played an important role as philanthropic benefactors of the Dutch arts, thus paving the way for their son’s cultural education, as he was raised amid the literary and artistic elite of his time.

Warburg and Jolles’ early scientific collaboration underwent an important stimulus in 1899. Jolles, together with his close friend Johan Huizinga and the Sanskritist J.Ph. Vogel (1871-1985) visited the twelfth International Orientalist Congress in Rome from that year, passing through Florence on their journey. Instead of travelling further to Egypt with the two

scholars, as was their original plan, Jolles decides to return to Florence alone, permanently staying there and not returning to the Netherlands. Warburg had been living there since his marriage with Mary Hertz (1866-1934) in 1897. They will spend most part of their time in Florence until 1907, first in their apartment on the Viale Principessa Margherita 42 (also known as the 'Palazzo Potetje') and, from 1898, in their home on Lungo il Mignone 23.

Jolles' exact reasons are not sure, but perhaps love could be one of his arguments in returning and staying in the city; at the Warburgs, he met Mathilde 'Tilli' Mönckeberg (1879-1958), daughter of the mayor of Hamburg. The following months, Jolles acts as a true *cicerone*, showing Tilli the art and architecture of Florence, and little by little winning over her heart.



Mary Warburg, *Remembrance card for the Silvesterabend in 1900*, pencil, pen, photocollage, 245 x 178 mm. Tilli and Jolles can be seen on the lowest register, wearing the costumes designed for the play.



Mary Warburg in her studio working on the bust of Tilli Mönckeberg, 1900, photograph. London, The Warburg Institute.

A memorable but also very exemplary evening for this period is the *Silversterabend* (New Year's Eve) of 1900: the passing from one century to the next was celebrated by the Warburgs and their guests, amongst them Jolles and Tilli, with a luxurious dinner, enriched with various activities. Central to the evening was a performance of a play written by Jolles, based on Jacob van Maerlant's *Merlijn*. Jolles also starred in the title role of Merlin, Tilli played his romantic adversary, Fortuna, dressed in the manner of the frescoes by Ghirlandaio. Aby also took part: he played *ein alter Florentiner*, carrying a baby on his arm, symbolising the birth of a new century.

The new year did not only bring a new century, for Jolles it also meant a marriage; on the third of July he and Tilli got engaged, and their marriage took place on the sixth of September. The year 1900 brought a new home as well; up until then, Jolles had been staying at the 'Pensione Laurent', a guest house that was very popular with German expats. Looking for a permanent place, he was faced with severe financial problems, due to failed stock market speculation in 1895. Luckily, his friendship with the Warburgs provided a solution. In 1900 they rented the Villa 'Le Palazzine' in Fiesole, in the hills surrounding the city. Warburg, who wanted to escape the busy city, used the upper floor of the villa as a summer-and weekend retreat; Jolles lived permanently on the ground floor, first alone and, after their marriage, joined by Tilli.

After Jolles and Warburg occupied the Villa Le Palazzine, their collaboration became more extensive. It is during this period that the famous *Ninfa Fiorentina* project took shape. What was set up as an exchange of letters on the figure of the Nymph, the expression *par excellence* of *Pathosformel*, was never finished. The fruits of this labour can be found in a leather bound-map, said to be adorned by the Mary Hertz-Warburg and Tilli

Mönckeberg-Jolles, entitled *Debitori & Creditori*, with a picture on the cover of the Ninfa, the female figure on the fresco depicting the *Nascita di Giovanni Battista* in Santa Maria Novella, by Ghirlandaio. Only two letters can be found inside, along with some preparatory notes and schematic sketches: the *Epistula Prima* by Jolles, and an answer to that letter formulated by Warburg.

The unfinished project is characteristic of their collaboration. In the biographical letter added to this essay, it is clear that they also had other plans forthcoming, none of them being realised; in the letter, Jolles mentions two; firstly the “kleines Buches über die Nympe in der ital. Frührenaissance, das erste welches er zusammen mit seinem auch später treuen Mitarbeiter Jolles publizierte”. This “little book” would probably consist of the fruits of the *Ninfa* project. Jolles also alludes to the “Blätter aus Fiesole”, a combined magazine of him and Aby on art. No issue has been published, and it is only shortly described by Tilli Mönckeberg in two letter to her mother: Aby’s and André’s plans for a combined magazine on art are slowly taking shape and “Aby’s and André’s magazine is pure research. The project is not at all unlike Colly’s [Carl Mönckeberg, Tilli’s brother], they are working along very similar lines, are keen to find collaborators” (Thys 2000, 210).

In a way, this biographical letter marks the last height in their friendship. Jolles faced a series of personal setbacks; in September 1901, Jolles’ mother died; in July 1902, his first son, Hendrik Jolle Jolles, who was only one year old, died in Villa Le Palazzine. Shortly after, André and Tilli moved to Freiburg im Breisgau. Not only the tragic death of their son prompted them to leave the city; Jolles’ relation with Warburg had by then suffered greatly from the growing discord between the two men. Underlying annoyances prevailed and made it very difficult for the two to keep living together. A major annoyance concerned the hierarchy within the collaboration. Warburg cast himself as a teacher, since he was eight years older than Jolles and already had an academic background. Jolles, on the other hand, was anything but interested in the role of a student, and considered himself Warburg’s superior in terms of aesthetic reflections and creativity.

The Warburgs and the Jolleses will stay in touch through correspondence until 1928, but their letters will be mostly written by the two wives, Mary and Tilli. After his move to Germany, Jolles will initially devote himself to the study of Visual Arts, heavily influenced and stimulated by Warburg, which will result in a doctorate dissertation on the aesthetics of Vitruvius in 1906 and a *Habilitations-Schrift* on Mycenaean goblets in 1908. From 1918 onwards, he left Art History and Archaeology behind to devote himself fully to his morphological literary history.

Both Warburg and Jolles were already fascinated by forms before their joint period in Florence, and after their collaboration, they will each develop their own morphology. Both Warburg’s *Pathosformel* and Jolles’ *Sprachgebärde* are not (yet) concretised expressions of a certain human mental occupation. Both concepts therefore exist before a concretisation, and will be realised, in Warburg’s case in a visual artwork, and in an applied Simple Form in Jolles’ case. They are both transcultural and cross-time.

Their collaboration offered new impulses precisely because of their shared fascination with forms. For Jolles, the Florentine friendship meant an introduction to the (German-speaking) academic community and its scientific processes; for Warburg, it meant a broadening of his strictly scientific style into the more artistic genres, such as that of the fictional letter.

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Brief von Herr Professor X an Herrn Y, Student der psychol. Soziologie, März 1960*

André Jolles (1902)

Lieber Schüler und Neffe,

Du fragst mich als deinen Lehrer und Verwandten um Rat für deine jetzige Lage, und um so besser kann ich ihn dir erteilen, da mir ein Vergleich aus deiner Familie zu Gebote steht. Ich habe nämli. grade auf Ersuchen deiner Grossmutter, meiner Mutter, Frau Z. geborene Ma-

rietta Warburg die Papiere und Memoiren deines berühmten Urgrossvaters Aby Warburg, des Grundlegers des neuen wissenschaftlichen Systems, wonach unser Jahrhundert wahrscheinlich seinen Namen erhalten wird, herausgesucht u. geordnet – unter uns gesagt: Es war eine ziemlich schwierige Aufgabe, denn an die Stelle des durch zu grosse Ordnung unpraktischen Zettelsystems seiner Jugend trat in den späteren Jahren – es war um 1900 – ein mehr auf die grossen Ideen gerichtetes, ich möchte fast sagen mehr künstlerisches System, ohne welches er seine grosse Individualität nie zur Geltung gebracht haben würde, das seinen Nachkommen aber das Forschen etwas erschwert.

Aber um zur Sache zu kommen: dasjenige, was dir aus dem Beispiel deines Urgrossvaters von so grossen Nützen sein kann, ist die Ähnlichkeit zwischen seiner Lage, in der er sich Anfang dieses Jahrhunderts befand, und deiner jetzigen und zwar wissenschaftlich sowohl als moralisch. Allerdings war er etwas älter, aber er hatte sich in fast gleicher Weise festgearbeitet. Ich will dir seinen damaligen Zustand, soweit ich ihn seinen Briefen und anderen Dokumenten entnehmen kann, nach besten Kräften beschreiben.

Erzogen in einem streng hamburgischen Handelsmilieu hatte er sich mit erster Jugendfrische u. Energie daraus losgelöst in der Überzeugung, dass seine Kräfte in einer anderen Richtung lagen und wandte sich der Wissenschaft, in der damals breitesten Auffassung des Wortes, zu. In der angestrengten Arbeit der folgenden 15 Jahre schlich sich nun vielmehr vererbte Kaufmännisches in seine Arbeits- und Lebensmethode, als wie er selbst ahnte. Anstatt die Vögel seiner grossen Ideen ruhig ins Freie fliegen zu lassen, in der festen u. gläubigen Überzeugung, dass sie abends doch immer wieder zu ihrem Meister zurück kehren würden, hielt er sie in Contobuchartigen Käfigen eingeschlossen. Mit der Genauigkeit eines Hamburgischen Kaufherrn, dessen Bilanz auf einen halben Pfennig stimmen muss und der sich unglücklich u. entehrt fühlt, sobald Debit u. Credit einander nicht vollkommen decken, versuchte auch er das "Soll" seiner wissenschaftlichen Theorien mit dem "Haben" von direkt philologischen Thatsachen auszugleichen, u. zwang sich selbst immer grade da, wo er der grössten Freiheit bedurfte. Du weisst, wie weit u. klar seine Einsicht später wurde, wie sich diese krampfhaftige Genauigkeit in ein allgemeines Interesse auch für alle Details verwandelte u. wie sich aus dem Kaufmann der freie Gelehrte bildete, so wie sich aus dem Kaufmannssohn früher der lustige Student entwickelt hatte.

Aber zwischen die Jahre 1898-1902 fiel grade seine kritische Periode. Er wohnte in Florenz, war verheiratet mit Mary Hertz, deiner liebenswürdigen Urgrossmutter, von deren klugem Liebreiz, freundlicher Intelligenz u. hochbegabter Lustigkeit auch ihre Enkelkinder noch so viel genossen haben. Marietta war noch nicht mal 2 Jahre alt und der Mann, den wir alle als Mittelpunkt der ganzen gelehrten deutschen Welt gekannt haben, lebte damals in fast menschenscheuer Zurückgezogenheit mit nur wenigen guten Freunden u. fast ganz ohne eigentlich wissenschaftlichen Verkehr. Das erste Heft der "Blätter aus Fiesole" war noch nicht erschienen, u. der fruchtbare Autor, dessen Arbeiten in dicken Bänden jetzt wieder herausgegeben werden, hatte damals kaum mehr publiziert als seine Doctor Arbeit u. eine kleine ital.

Arbeit über das Festwesen. Zwar können wir, "die wir seine späteren Arbeiten genau studiert haben", aus diesen Sachen sehen, dass schon viele seiner Ideen darin waren; aber man kann es seinen Zeitgenossen durchaus nicht übel nehmen, dass sie durch seinen schlecht versorgten Stil u. eine zu kompakt gedrungene Ausdrucksweise die eigentliche Tendenz u. den tieferen Wert derselben durchaus nicht verstanden. Er fühlte sich unbegriffen u. verkannt u. so hörte allmählich die so absolut lebendige Beziehung zwischen Schreiben u. Publikum völlig auf, u. es schien einen Augenblick, dass diese prächtige Anlage in altmodische u. minderwertige Wissenschaft ersticken sollte. Die schlimme Folge hiervon war, dass seine Thatkraft zu vertrocknen anfang, nicht nur als Schriftsteller sondern auch als Mensch. Der Kaufmann hat seine Börse, wo er sich tagtäglich für einige Stunden lebendiger Mensch fühlt; wo er als General seine Schlacht liefert oder als sein Soldat seine Pflicht thut, wo er als Dirigent sein Orchester beherrscht oder als armer Musikant wenigstens so gut er kann seine Partie spielt; wo er in grösseren oder kleineren Verhältnissen immerhin sich Mensch weiss unter Menschen, wo er sich als Teil der Menge mit Individuen mischt u. als Individuum sich an der Menge scharf u. gescheidt abschleift. Wie geschäftsmässig Warburg auch seine Wissenschaft betrieb, ihm fehlte die Börse; er fühlte sich allein u. bekam hierdurch allmählich eine falsche Anschauung von sich selbst u. von anderen.

Er stand wie im Nebel; wenn er die Hände ausstreckte fühlte er keine Festigkeit, seine Stimme wollte nicht ausklingen, u. er fing an zu glauben, dass sich aus diesen momentanen Missverhältnissen auf eine wirkliche Abnahme seiner intellektuellen Fähigkeiten schliessen liesse. Ein zeitweiliges körperliches Unwohlsein (verursacht durch ein wenig Fieber u. Mangel an bewusster Lebensregel) verstärkte ihn in diesem Glauben, und so entstand aus u. neben seiner augenblicklichen wissenschaftlichen Impotenz eine nervöse Ueberzeugung, die seine Umgebung u. ihn selbst in erster Linie quälte u. elend machte. Die einzigen Zeiten, in denen er wirklich thatkräftig aufgetreten war (seine Dienstzeit u. die Reise nach America) waren ihm damals die liebsten, schönsten Erinnerungen, u. anstatt neue, direkte Beschäftigung in einem wissenschaftlichen Streit wie später zu suchen, sehnte er sich beinah kindisch nach diesen Zeiten zurück.

Ueber kleinere religiöse u. die Familie betreffende Sorgen lässt sich hier nicht reden; obwohl an sich gering, verschlimmerten sie den allgemeinen Zustand.

Alle diese quälenden Umstände vereinigt, bilden den negativen Teil seines damaligen Zustandes, dessen Verbesserung nur von ihm selbst abhing. Positiv war eine aus seiner Constitution, Erziehung u. dem Milieu entstandene, wirklich neuropathologische Angst, die oft noch durch körperliche Unpässlichkeit gesteigert wurde. Leute, die Aby Warburg erst nach 1910 kennen gelernt haben, können nie glauben, dass der fest entschlossene Mann, der keine Furcht kannte, wirklich eine Zeit lang derartig unter allerlei krankhaften Ängsten gelitten hat.

Erst viel, viel später, als sein kräftiger Fleiss, sein angeborener Humor u. sein unbegrenztes Verantwortungsgefühl zur vollen Reife gelangt waren, verschwanden diese pathologischen Erscheinungen. Aber lange noch nachdem die Aussenwelt in ihm nur den unverzagten Tha-

tenmensch sah, wussten seine besten Freunde, wie schwach er in seinen müden Momenten gegen sich u. andre sein konnte.

Auch das Verantwortungsgefühl, von dem eben die Rede war, wurde unter dem Regime der Angst zu etwas abnormem, denn er fühlte ein allgemeines Bedürfnis, die ganze Welt zu schützen vor dem, was ihm selbst solche Angst machte, u. anstatt die Gemeinschaft zu stützen u. zu bessern mit seiner Arbeit, grübelte er über kleine persönliche Fälle nach, an denen nichts zu ändern war. Aber ein Charakter wie der seine, seine herzliche Güte, sein feiner Geist u. in erster Stelle seine mächtige Ueberzeugungskraft waren nicht bestimmt unterzugehen durch mangelnde Fassungsfähigkeit. Bald nach dem Erscheinen des kleinen Buches über die Nymphen in der ital. Frührenaissance, das erste welches er zusammen mit seinem auch später treuen Mitarbeiter Jolles publizierte, trat die Besserung ein, u. obwohl mit vielen schlimmen Rückfällen, ging es nun bergan.

So befand sich der grosse Gelehrte, der wunderglückliche Ehemann, der wahrhaft kräftige Mensch, den du kaum mehr gekannt hast, aber dessen Ruhm nicht leicht verschwinden wird, einmal in derselben Lage wie du. Auch er glaubte keinen Ausweg finden zu können u. er fand ihn. So hoffe ich, wirst auch du aus diesem Beispiel die Kraft finden zu neuer u. fruchtbarer Arbeit, denn der Wert eines schönen Lebens, liegt nicht nur in den hinterlassenen Büchern sondern auch in dem mächtig anregenden Exempel, das man seinen Nachkommen Jahrhunderte hindurch mitgiebt.

Dein Onkel.

Letter from Professor X to Mr Y, Student of Psychol. Sociology, March 1960*

André Jolles (1902), translated by Wannes Wates

Dear student and nephew,

As your teacher and relative, you ask me for advice on your present situation, and I can give it to you all the better because I have a comparison from your family at my disposal. At the request of your grandmother, my mother, Mrs Z. née Marietta Warburg, I have just searched out and arranged the papers and memoirs of your famous great-grandfather Aby Warburg, the founder of the new scientific system after which our century will probably take its name. Bet-

ween you and me, it was quite a difficult task, because in his later years – it was around 1900 – the excessively organised and impractical note system of his youth was replaced by a system, I would almost say more artistic, that was more focused on great ideas without which he would never have been able to show off his great individuality, but which made research somewhat more difficult for his descendants.

But to come to the point: what can be of so much use to you from the example of your great-grandfather is the similarity between the situation he was in at the beginning of this century and your present one, both scientifically and morally. Admittedly, he was somewhat older, but he had worked his way up in almost the same way. I will describe his condition at that time to the best of my ability, as far as I can gather from his letters and other documents.

Brought up in a strictly Hamburg commercial environment, he had broken away from it with the first freshness and energy of young age, convinced that his strengths lay in a different direction, and he turned to science, in the then broadest sense of the word. In the intensive work of the following 15 years an inherited mercantile approach crept into his method of life and work, more than he himself had realised. Instead of letting the birds of his great ideas fly quietly out into the open, in the firm and faithful conviction that they would always return to their master in the evening, he kept them locked up in contobook-like cages. With the precision of a Hamburg merchant, whose balance sheet must be correct to half a penny and who feels unhappy and dishonoured as soon as debit and credit do not cover each other perfectly, he also tried to balance the “debit” of his scientific theories with the “credit” of directly philological facts, and always forced himself precisely where he needed the greatest freedom. You know how broad and clear his insight later became, how this cramp-like precision was transformed into a general interest in all details and how the merchant developed into the free scholar, just as the merchant’s son had earlier developed into the amusing student.

But his critical period occurred between the years 1898-1902. He lived in Florence, was married to Mary Hertz, your amiable great-grandmother, from whose clever charm, friendly intelligence and highly gifted humour her grandchildren still enjoyed so much. Marietta was not even 2 years old and the man whom we all knew as the centre of the entire learned German world lived at that time in almost inhuman isolation with only a few good friends and almost completely without any actual scientific contact. The first issue of the “Blätter aus Fiesole” had not yet appeared, and the prolific author, whose works are now being republished in thick volumes, had at that time published little more than his doctoral thesis and a small Italian work on festivities. Now we, who have studied his later works closely, can see from these things that they already contained many of his ideas, although we cannot blame his contemporaries for not understanding the actual development and the deeper value of them due to his poor style and overly compact form of expression. He felt misunderstood and misjudged, and so the absolutely lively relationship between writing and the public gradually ceased completely, and it seemed for a moment that this splendid creation would suffocate into old-fashioned and inferior science. The bad consequence of this was that his vigour began to dry up, not only as

a writer but also as a man. The merchant has his stock exchange, where he feels himself a living man for a few hours every day; where he fights his battles as a general or does his duty as a soldier, where he masters his orchestra as a conductor or plays his part as well as he can as a poor musician; where, in greater or lesser circumstances, he still knows himself a man among men, where he mixes, as part of the crowd, with individuals and, as an individual, sets himself against the crowd with sharpness and distinction. No matter how business-like Warburg pursued his science, he lacked the stock exchange; he felt alone and because of this, he gradually gained a false perception of himself and others.

He stood as if in mist; when he stretched out his hands he felt no firmness, his voice would not fade away, and he began to believe that these momentary disproportions indicated a real decline in his intellectual abilities. A simultaneous physical indisposition (caused by a little fever and a lack of conscious rules of life) reinforced this belief, and so a nervous conviction arose from and alongside his momentary scientific impotence, which tormented his surroundings and primarily, also himself.

The only times when he was really vigorous (his service and the journey to America) were his favourite, most beautiful memories, and instead of seeking new and direct occupation with a new scientific debate, as he did later on, he longed almost childishly for those earlier times.

Minor religious and family-related worries cannot be discussed here; although minor in themselves, they aggravated his general condition.

The combination of these agonising circumstances form the negative part of his then-current state, the improvement of which depended only on himself. Positive was a truly neuropathological fear, arising from his constitution, upbringing and environment, which was often aggravated by physical discomfort. People who only got to know Aby Warburg after 1910 can never believe that this determined man, who knew no fear, really suffered for a time from all kinds of pathological anxiety.

Only much, much later, when his strong diligence, his innate sense of humour and his unlimited sense of responsibility had reached full maturity, did these pathological phenomena disappear. But long after the outside world acknowledged him as the undaunted man of action, his best friends knew how weak he could be towards himself and others in his weary moments.

The sense of responsibility just mentioned also became something abnormal under the regime of fear, as he felt a general need to protect the whole world from what he himself was so afraid of, and instead of supporting and improving the community with his work, he brooded over small personal cases that could not be helped. But a character like his, his heartfelt kindness, his fine spirit and, above all, his powerful persuasiveness were not destined to perish through lack of comprehension. Soon after the publication of the little book on the nymph in the early Italian Renaissance, the first book he published together with his even later still faith-

ful co-worker Jolles, he began to improve, and although there were many bad relapses, things now went uphill.

So the great scholar, the wonderfully happy husband, the truly strong person, whom you hardly knew anymore, but whose fame will not easily disappear, once found himself in the same situation as you. He too thought he could not find a way out and he found it. So I hope that you too will find the strength for new and fruitful work from this example, because the value of a beautiful life lies not only in the books you leave behind but also in the powerfully inspiring example that you pass on to your descendants for centuries to come.

Your uncle.

* The very first English translation we present here is based on the transcription by Walter Thys in his seminal work, *Gebildeter Vagant*, published in 2000. In the editing phase of this article, Ada Naval has brought my attention to a copy of the letter in the Warburg Institute Archive (WIA III.1.7.2.1.2) but dated from the summer of 1900 and with a fictional date of 12 March 1963. I express my thanks to Naval for this discovery. Thys references to the letter in WIA (but he does not specify any folder) and he writes that the manuscript is by Tilly Jolles. As the source we have followed is the one provided by Thys, we have decided to keep the dates in the translation as they appear in the source. The next phase of work will involve comparing the contents of the copy preserved in the WIA and also investigate whether the copy of the above-mentioned subfolder is also handwritten by Tilly Jolles. However it was important to note the existence of this letter, which places the writing of this fictional biography of Warburg by Jolles in the central year of the relationship between the two friends. Warburg and Jolles remained very close friends until 1902, when they began to drift apart. With the new dating, 1900, this question is further strengthened: Did Warburg know about this letter? We also endorse the first question of Thys in his edition of the letter: “Men zou haast hopen dat een stuk als dit, nooit onder de ogen van Warburg is gekomen. Maar als dat zo was, hoe verzeilde het dan in het archief van het Warburg Institute?” (“One would almost hope that a piece like this never came under Warburg’s eyes. But if that was the case, how did it end up in the Warburg Institute archives?”, Thys 2000, 238).

Abstract

The essay delves into the friendship between André Jolles and Aby Warburg by using a fictional letter by Jolles as a biographical lens. It explores their shared interests in morphology and art history, tracing their collaboration in Florence between 1894-1900 and its impact.

keywords | André Jolles; Aby Warburg; Simple Forms; *Einfache Formen*.



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