

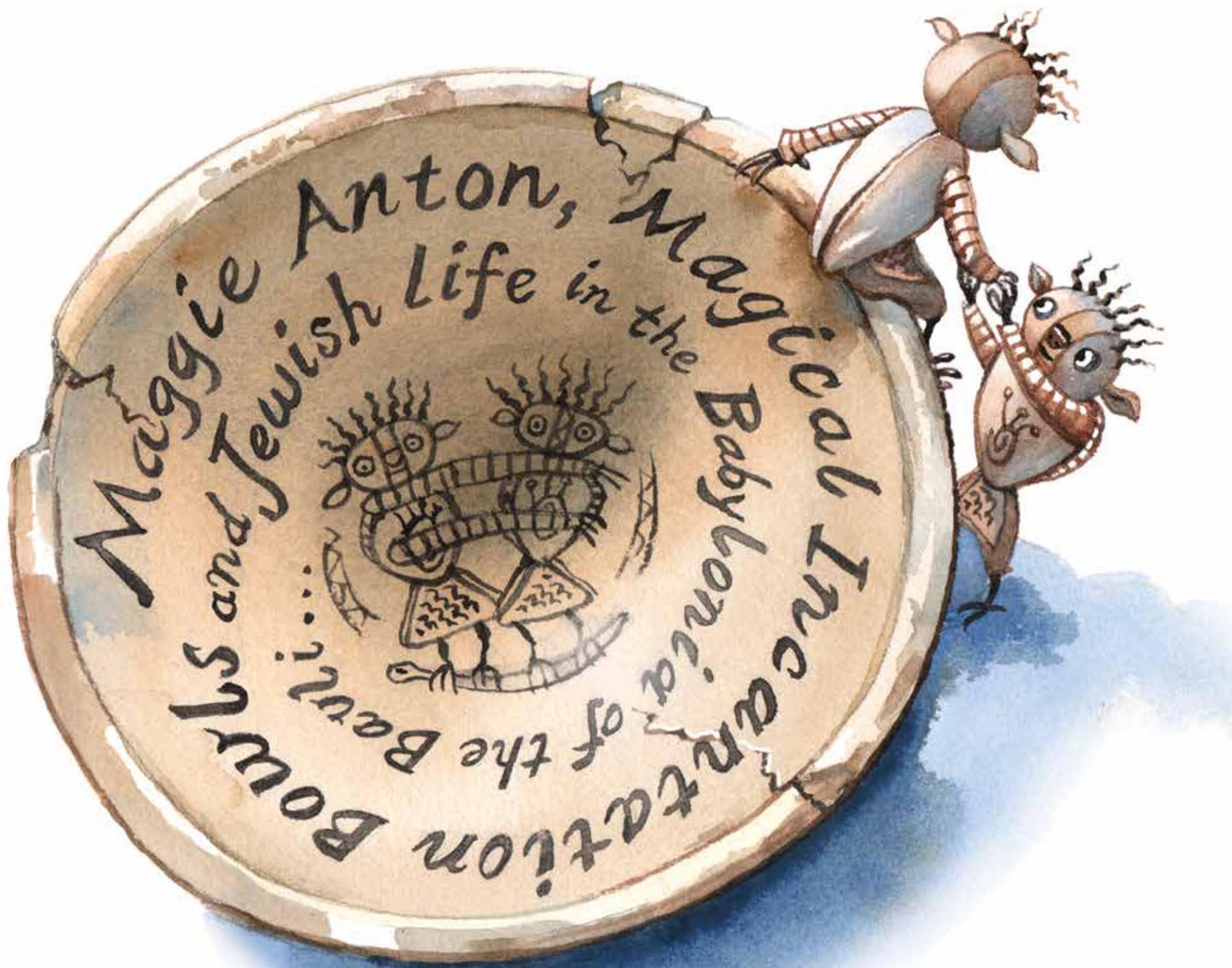
David G. Roskies **Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's Polish Triumph**

JEWISH REVIEW

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by *Shai Secunda*

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With Friends Like These

Those who advocate that Israel should make additional concessions to the Palestinians frequently warn that otherwise, world public opinion, especially in Europe, will turn against the Jewish state. Yet outgoing European Parliament (EP) member Leonidas Donskis, in your Fall 2014 edition (“Neither Friend nor Enemy: Israel in the EU”), presents a portrait of the EP which suggests that there are no Israeli concessions that will ever satisfy European opinion. What Donskis is saying is that, at heart, most members of the European Parliament do not really accept the legitimacy of Israel’s existence. If that is the case, then perhaps the time has come to stop pretending that more Israeli concessions will win Europe’s friendship. Plainly, they will not.

Moshe Phillips
Benjamin Korn

Members of the Board, Religious Zionists of America
New York, NY

Protective Edge

Professor Asa Kasher writes (“The Ethics of Protective Edge,” Fall 2014), “Human shields may be attacked together with the terrorists, but attempts should be made to minimize collateral damage among them, even though those who act willingly are, in fact, accomplices of Hamas. In all such cases, as much compassion as possible under the circumstances must be shown without aborting the mission or raising the risk to Israeli soldiers.”

I must respectfully disagree. Kasher acknowledges that the mission may go forward and that Israeli soldiers are not to be further endangered. But this gets muddled with his asserted obligation to treat willing unarmed military accomplices of Hamas with “compassion.” I believe that this confounds and distorts the moral and legal standing of those who are in effect unarmed combatants with that of “civilians.” The emblematic scene that captures this distinction was from a half-dozen years ago. In it the IDF have cornered a group of Palestinian fighters in a building. In order to aid their escape, a large group of unarmed Palestinian women loudly run in front of the exits of the building, thereby allowing the men inside to hide behind the women and escape. The IDF held its fire. There was no moral or legal requirement to do so.

These were unarmed women dressed in civilian clothes, but those are merely superficial distinctions. The core truth is that they were indeed combatants. If the IDF is correct in refraining from firing on unarmed combatants actively and voluntarily aiding the enemy in combat it is so for political reasons not moral ones.

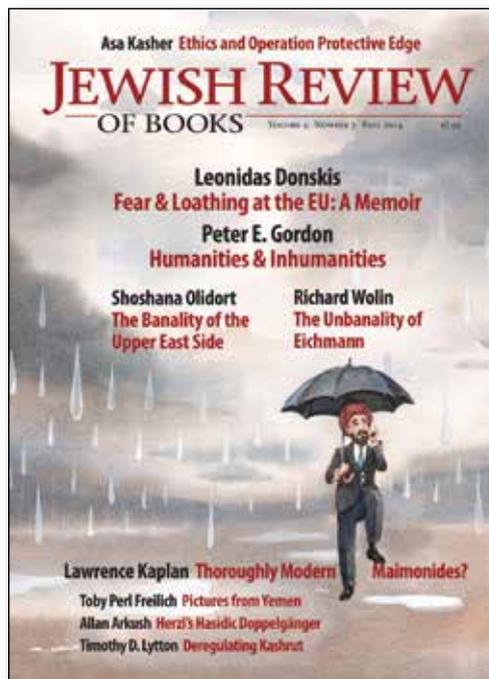
Lloyd Cohen
Professor of Law, George Mason University
School of Law
Arlington, VA

Professor Kasher makes interesting points, but it seems he misses two vital ones. First, the “roof knocking” is hardly a means of limiting civilian casualties in the course of achieving a military goal. That conclusion assumes that the combatants who may (or may not, for that matter) be in the building won’t hear the knock. The practical effect of this tactic and of the bombardment overall is retribution, which, if that was the goal, was successful in that some 44 percent

of Gaza has been rendered uninhabitable.

Secondly, I’ve read that the “safe range” for firing in the vicinity of friendly troops is some 250 meters. As *New Yorker*, I put this in local terms, which means it’s about three city blocks. In an area as densely populated as Gaza, I can’t imagine these weapons can be used in a manner that a) kills combatants and b) limits damage to non-combatants.

Stephan Cotton
via jewishreviewofbooks.com



Asa Kasher Responds:

I thank Professor Cohen for his comment on my article. Two clarifications: First, there is a morally significant difference between “accomplices of Hamas” and certain “human shields.” The former are involved in creating or enhancing danger to Israeli civilians or troops, while the latter stay in the vicinity of terrorists in order to obstruct military activity. While the former may, or even ought, to be attacked as combatants, the latter are not combatants. However, if they are injured or killed in the fighting, their casualties ought not to be described as “collateral damage.”

Second, the women who facilitated the escape of terrorists were accomplices and should have been attacked. Holding fire under such circumstances was wrong: The mission had not been accomplished and the troops were jeopardized. Mission and force protection have priority over a distinction between combatants and accomplices.

Mr. Cotton makes several false assumptions. Military activity during Operation Protective Edge (and previous ones) was not retributive. It was defensive and pre-emptive. Houses were “rendered uninhabitable” only when they served Hamas as sites of production, storage, or launching of rockets over Israel, as well as command and control sites. (The figure of 44 percent of houses having been destroyed is, by the way, a conspicuous fabrication probably gained from some propaganda outlet.)

The “safe range for firing in the vicinity of friendly troops” is irrelevant when you attack a site in which both terrorists and their non-dangerous neighbors are present. Considerations of proportionality do not preclude causing collateral damage in Just War in either theory or practice. Such considerations

were made by commanders during Operation Protective Edge and previous ones, as part of the Israeli military ethics I described in my article.

Strange Odyssey

Thank you to Allan Arkush for highlighting Jess Olson’s biography of Nathan Birnbaum and for including mention of the earlier essay by Robert Wistrich on this forgotten figure’s “strange odyssey” (“Zionism’s Forgotten Father,” Fall 2014). Birnbaum’s defection from Political Zionism and his critique of the emptiness of a movement solely rooted in European nationalism is still trenchant. Furthermore, Birnbaum’s embrace of the Agudas Yisroel toward the end of his life only heightens the irony of David Ben-Gurion’s miscalculation regarding Orthodox Judaism’s ability to endure in the Jewish State. To dismiss Nathan Birnbaum as erratic and unpredictable is to misunderstand his journey, a journey that all Jews face today in the search for Jewish authenticity.

Eli Kavon
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

Cobwebs Cleared

Paul Reitter’s piece on Stefan Zweig (“Like an Elevator,” Fall 2014) was wonderful. For too long Zweig’s actual literary output has been ignored in attempts to make him a representative or exemplar of something that upsets the particular angry critic of the moment. But all those novellas do deserve to be re-read in their beautiful new editions from Pushkin Press and NYRB Classics. With the cobwebs cleared, readers can see these books for what they are: fantastic, compact, and powerfully insightful stories of individual psychology, of ambivalent and conflicting desires empathetically dissected.

Barak Bassman
Ardmore, PA

On Mediocrity and Memory

I “discovered” the Holocaust in 1962 by reading *Exodus* when I was 12 years old. It had a tremendous effect on me as it sunk in that my family too would have been victims if my grandparents hadn’t immigrated to America. For years I sought out books about the Holocaust—*Night*, *The Painted Bird*, and Anne Frank’s diary being among the most memorable—but by 1980 I’d stopped. Maybe becoming a mother had made me too sensitive, but I could no longer bear another description of the death camps, the packed trains, the gas chambers, and the myriad stories of those who’d somehow survived. So I tend to agree with Amy Newman Smith (“Killer Backdrop,” Summer 2014). There are far too many mediocre Holocaust books. Yes, many people found love in the ashes, but Holocaust romance as a genre is obscene. But I can also see Erika Dreifus’ point (“Killer Backdrop: A Response and Rejoinder,” Fall 2014): If authors don’t keep writing Holocaust fiction, the time may come when no one will remember it.

Maggie Anton
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

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POLIN: A Light Unto the Nations

BY DAVID G. ROSKIES

How is it that the largest public building to go up in Poland since that country regained its freedom, the first museum to tell the story of Poland from beginning to end, goes by the name of POLIN? *Po lin*, or “rest here,” is what the first Jews who arrived in the 10th century are said to have declared. The more official, descriptive name of the shiny new 12,800 square meter building is the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, whose official opening I attended in Warsaw, October 28–30.

The museum began as the brainchild of the director of the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, Grażyna Pawlak, who was invited to attend the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993. What was needed now, she realized, was not another memorial museum in Poland; Poland itself was a Holocaust memorial. What Poland needed, rather, was a museum dedicated to Jewish life. What followed, over the next 21 years, under the adroit leadership of Jerzy Halbersztadt, was a public-private partnership that eventually included the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the city of Warsaw, private foundations, individual philanthropists, both Jewish and Christian, the Republic of Germany, and the Kingdom of Norway. A total of \$60 million was raised for the construction of the building and another \$75 million for its contents, enormous sums anywhere and unprecedented in the new Poland.

The original designers of the museum had drawn up an “Outline of the Historical Program and Master Plan,” but the time for central planning and familiar stories, neatly broken down into historical periods and punctuated by ideological schisms, had long since passed. More pressing than any academic scruples about master narratives was the fact that such an approach couldn’t possibly succeed in speaking to the museum’s prospective visitors, who would include Poles from high-school age to senior citizens, Israelis and Jews from across the globe, casual foreign tourists, and pilgrimage groups to the death camps.

By the time Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett was appointed to head the Academic Team of the Core Exhibition of the POLIN Museum in 2006, she had already redefined the way museums represented the Jewish past. Where once upon a time, pride of place was given to Torah scrolls and breastplates, spice boxes, Kiddush cups, candelabra, Torah pointers, and other sacred paraphernalia of the Jewish faith, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett curated an exhibition for The Jewish Museum of New York called “Fabric of Jewish Life” that focused exclusively on textiles, most of them produced by women. Where Roman Vishniac, on instructions from his employer, had once selected only those photos of Polish Jews that portrayed them as “persecuted, pious and poor” (as she once told a reporter for *Ha’aretz*), in *Image Before My Eyes: A Photographic History of Jewish*

Life in Poland, 1864–1939, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett produced a counter-album with Lucjan Dobroszycki that stressed the diversity and urbanity of their subjects. And where once, at the New York World’s Fair in 1939, Jews created a Palestine Pavilion to stake a claim for national sovereignty and to generate foreign investment, now, in the 21st century, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett instructed her team to “think Expo” and create a multimedia narrative exhibition that would demonstrate the centrality of Jews to Polish history—to turn their dimly remembered story, she said,

vases, and more. At the age of 18, the museum hired her. Almost half a century later, just before she took up the position at POLIN, she and her father, Mayer Kirshenblatt, completed *They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland before the Holocaust*, for which she had written the text. There is an obvious continuity between the “Mayer July” project (which also ended up including a documentary film) and the core exhibition of POLIN. Both are attempts to depict the Polish Jewish past vividly and unsentimentally, but there seem

What was needed now was not another memorial museum in Poland; Poland itself was a Holocaust memorial.

into something you can touch, hear, rub, erase, pull out, disassemble, walk through, climb up, get lost in, and, above all, experience from more than one perspective.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s qualifications to curate POLIN went beyond the impressive but predictable CV accomplishments of a museum or academic superstar (currently, she is a university professor and professor of performance studies in the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU). She grew up in the Orthodox Jewish community of Toronto with parents who had been born in Poland. As a teenager, she used to walk to the Royal Ontario Museum on Saturdays (admission was free), exploring one floor a week: native Canadians, totem poles, geology, Greek

to me to be important differences too. Whereas the “Mayer July” project was a touching act of filial love and a frank commemoration of an almost vanished family history, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett was determined to produce something more open-ended for the museum.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who is referred to in alternating tones of affection and awe by her colleagues as “BKG,” worked her team very hard, and there were, apparently, many defections. Historians, who tend to think in footnotes, had a hard time finding striking visual correlatives for the latest advances in Polish-Jewish scholarship. Surrounded by the curators, collaborators, experts,



Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett before portraits of monarchs who ruled Poland. (Courtesy of Arkadiusz Dybel.)

and consultants of a gallery, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett reportedly would sometimes interrupt the proceedings by feigning a yawn and, speaking for the ordinary museum-goer, say, “BO-RING!”

The designers, Event Communications from the UK and Nizio Design International, experts in museum design but novices in Jewish history, were also difficult for the academics to please. (“So tell me, Professor Assaf,” they would ask, “what is Hasidism?”) Professor Samuel Kassow of Trinity College, whose main portfolio was the interwar period (the so-called Second Polish Republic), made 25 trips to Warsaw during the planning of the museum. Somewhere along the way Kirshenblatt-Gimblett became a Polish citizen, learned to speak Polish, and started an active blog about her everyday life. Her voice informs the handsome, richly illustrated 430-page catalogue to the core exhibition, just as her vision, spelled out in a brilliant introduction called “Theater of History,” animates the whole museum.

This is a theater in eight acts, or galleries, set up in such a way that one can go from the forest to the

gift shop in 90 minutes. The painted forest is the symbolic backdrop for the arrival of those first Jewish exiles who gave the country and the museum its Jewish name. It is theater, because instead of being presented with original artifacts behind glass partitions, the visitor finds interactive displays, scale

final tap of the screen will miraculously produce a translation of the epitaph into Polish or English.

Gallery Three, called (with tongue slightly in cheek) “*Paradisus Judaeorum*, 1569–1648,” opens with a huge map of the newly created Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It took two teams of

It took two teams of historians to create a map of the 1,200 Jewish communities in an empire that stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and it took Adriane Leveen, who teaches Bible at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Manhattan, less than eight seconds to locate Slonim, her ancestral home.

models, visual cues, and sound effects every step of the way. Thus a display of Jewish tombstones is actually a screen image of a dozen graves, each of which will fill the screen when touched. A Hebrew inscription will gradually appear when you rub it, and a

historians to create a map of the 1,200 Jewish communities in an empire that stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and it took Adriane Leveen, who teaches Bible at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Manhattan, less than eight seconds to locate Slonim, her ancestral home.

About a half hour later, the tour I had joined was gathered “On the Jewish Street,” on the side dedicated to Jewish politics between the two world wars. A distinguished colleague of liberal bent was helping another American negotiate the “Polish-Jewish Politics” game. The three main contenders were the Labor Zionist Poalei Zion, the ultra-Orthodox Agudas Yisroel, and the Jewish Labor Bund. At each step the player was asked a series of multiple-choice questions—whether to stay or to emigrate, to choose Palestine, Western Europe, or the Americas, to support the Polish right-wing bloc or the left, to speak and educate one’s children in Polish, Yiddish, or Hebrew—and to everyone’s amazement, by a computer-generated process of elimination, the player’s best bet was to vote for Agudas Yisroel.

Each gallery has its own set of props; everything is different from room to room, from the fonts (both Latin and Hebrew alphabets) to the seats (chairs, pews, stools, benches, armchairs, or barrels). Space quite literally defines the historical moment, whether it’s the market of a Jewish town flanked by a tavern, a *cheder* (elementary school for boys), and a Catholic church; a railway station (with very plush seating) situated in the heart of the industrialized Kingdom of Poland; or a reconstruction of pre-war cobblestoned Zamenhofa Street in Warsaw with a dizzying array of competing political movements on one side and three stellar groups of Jewish writers on the other.

Precisely because each gallery is so laden with the latest in museum technology, so variegated, so full of artifice, it came as something of a relief to enter the reconstructed synagogue of Gwoździec, Galicia, with its exquisite painted ceiling and timber-framed roof. The first I ever heard of such wooden synagogues was from a book of diagrams, scale drawings, sketches, and black-and-white field photographs published by the Institute of Polish Architecture of the Polytechnic of Warsaw in 1959. In 2003, the architectural historian Thomas Hubka published *Resplendent Synagogue: Architecture and Worship in an Eighteenth-Century Polish Community* (reviewed in the Winter 2012 issue of this magazine by David Gelernter). Hubka’s book inspired Rick and Laura Brown, the co-founders of the Handhouse Studio in Massachusetts, to spearhead

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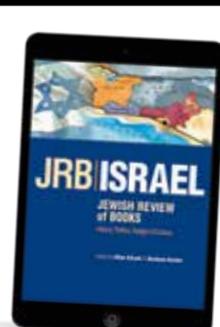
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A replica of part of the 18th-century Gwoździec Synagogue. (Photo by M. Starowieyska/D. Golik. Courtesy of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.)



"Encounters with Modernity" exhibit. (Photo by M. Starowieyska/D. Golik. Courtesy of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.)

an international team of historians, architects, artisans, students, and artists specializing in traditional woodwork and polychrome painting, who spent three years erecting a replica before transporting it to its permanent home—in Gallery Four.

"Resplendent" is an apt description for the synagogue interior, which is covered from floor to ceiling with snippets of Hebrew liturgy, zodiac signs,

messianic symbols, and a fabulous array of animals, both real and mythological, all in vibrant, living color. Reproductions of this interior, in fact, are the first thing you see when you enter the terminal at Warsaw International Airport, and they were reproduced all around Warsaw the week I was there. One might compare the Gwoździec reproduction to the Globe Theatre, lovingly restored in present-

day London as the preferred site for performances of Shakespeare, though, it must be granted, no one now prays in this synagogue.

From Gallery Four, "The Jewish Town," through "Encounters with Modernity" to "On the Jewish Street," the permanent exhibit takes the visitor to the penultimate story-space, "Holocaust." We see film footage of the German blitzkrieg, the physical space becomes angular and more constricting, and we enter the Warsaw Ghetto (which fittingly stands here for the 660 ghettos that the Nazis constructed in Poland). This gallery, curated by two young Polish historians, Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, focuses on daily life in the ghetto. It is based on the ghetto archive heroically compiled by the historian Emanuel Ringelblum and his Oyneg Shabes group, which they buried in metal boxes and milk cans that were unearthed after the war. (One of the milk cans is on display at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.) The gallery simulates the ghetto's main landmark: a wooden bridge that connected the large and small ghettos. From the bridge one sees what ghetto-dwellers saw when they looked across into the Aryan side of the city. It is also from there that one descends the ghetto staircase, street by street, all of which eventually lead to the Umschlagplatz, the collection point for the trains to Treblinka. Stepping back from the core exhibition as a whole, one can say that the 1,200 Jewish settlements large and small that were once scattered over the vast Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth have been reduced to one, and then to none.

There are, however, many sources of light that penetrate the doom, from the sunlight streaming through the massive glass windows at the museum's entrance to the tower of light that streams down upon the last installation, comprising the photographs and recorded voices of contemporary Polish Jewry. "The story neither begins nor ends with the Holocaust," Kirshenblatt-Gimblett emphatically warns us in her introduction. The Jews of Poland did not live their lives, she insists, "on the brink of destruction," and the museum's historical timeline resists such teleology. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett likens the core exhibition to a documentary without a voice-over.

For the opposite approach, the interested viewer need look no further than "Letters from Afar," a video art exhibition by the Hungarian Jewish filmmaker Péter Forgács in collaboration with the musical group The Klezmatics, commissioned, as it happens, by POLIN along with YIVO and currently showing at the Museum of the City of New York. The exhibit ominously speeds up, slows down, freezes, and juxtaposes Jewish home movies taken in Poland in the 1920s and 1930s. "We know ahead of time," Joanna Andrysiak explained in the exhibition catalogue, "that the innocent victim will fall into the hands of the killer." Invoking Hitchcock, Forgács has likened the pre-war Europe of his subjects to a crime scene.

Light also appears unexpectedly at the end of an animated short film that takes us through a day in the life of the famed Volozhin Yeshiva. This story does have a voice-over, based on the memoirs of students and visitors such as Yehuda Leib Don Yichye, who arrived at the Etz Chaim Yeshiva in Volozhin in 1888 at the age of 19. Yehuda Leib describes being immediately awestruck by the sight of the one-story white yeshiva building with its many windows.

The film, masterminded by the museum's creative director for media, Arkadiusz Dybel, employs the new technique of painted animation. He recruited actors from Poland and the United States, who were filmed against a neutral green screen, then integrated into computer-generated settings and sequences. It was an inspired idea. Although the building of the Etz Chaim Yeshiva still exists in Belarus, there is almost no visual documentation of what went on inside this famous yeshiva or the many others it inspired. Volozhin, founded in 1803, was a radically new type of talmudic academy, whose goal was not to train young men for the rabbinate so much as to train them in an analytic mode of thinking, a revolution in Jewish religious consciousness that is exceedingly difficult to convey on screen, especially with only seven minutes and 47 seconds to spare before the visitor must move on to the next installation.

As the hour hand moves rapidly through its 24-hour cycle, we see the life of the yeshiva through the dreamy eyes of the contemporary beholder. A roomful of young men rise in unison as the *rosh yeshiva* enters, their look of reverence as he expounds on some fine point of halakha. But it's growing dark, and the numbers inside the yeshiva are thinning, leaving one solitary student. Reminiscent of the figure in Bialik's famous poem "*Ha-matmid*," he is bent over the Talmud. When he starts to nod off, he pours water over his feet just as the Vilna Gaon, whose student Reb Hayyim founded the yeshiva, is said to have done. But it's really getting late, and the visitor must also be on his or her way. In the final frame the light emanating from the student's



Painted animation of the Volozhin Yeshiva. (Courtesy of Arkadiusz Dybel.)

candle seems to be the only source of light in all of Volozhin. This quasi-cartoon is brilliant metonymic history, history-writ-small. One quibble: The actors appear to me a bit too strapping for yeshiva *bochrim* described by 19th-century writers.

Perhaps the medium is also the message here. Whereas the modern yeshiva produced a new intel-

lectual elite and a newly individualistic model of religious leadership, Hasidism, the last major trend of Jewish mysticism, became a mass movement within a half-century of the death of its legendary founder, the Ba'al Shem Tov. Rather than a single narrative film, the museum chooses to represent Hasidism with sequential films about the rapid extension of

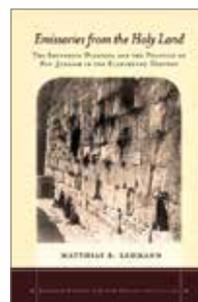
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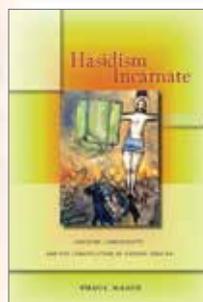
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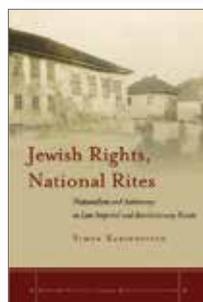
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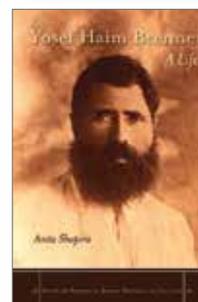
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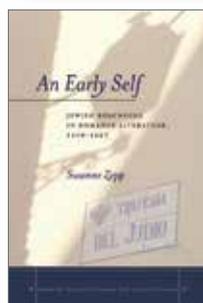
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Replica of a Jewish street. (Photo by M. Starowieyska/D. Golik. Courtesy of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.)

the movement, maps, Hasidic melodies, a comic adapted from the hagiographic classic *Shivhei ha-Besht* (In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov), an interactive game based on the petitionary notes called *kvitlekh*, and other fun stuff. The Hasidic court is represented here as noisy, dense, and detailed. The yeshiva is lyrical, spare, and monastic.

I appreciated the different rhythms, the choreography of the core exhibition, alternating between the big picture and a more intimate, individualized perspective. I also came to appreciate how the same exhibition could take on very different meanings for its different viewers. Take, for example, the so-called “Royal Cake Installation,” where, suspended in mid-air but tilted at an angle, there are three oversized oil paintings of the absolute monarchs who carved up the cake of Poland at the end of the 18th century: King Frederick II of Prussia in full military regalia, Joseph II of Austria with his scrawny white-stockinged feet sprawled over the throne, and a zaftig Russian empress Catherine II in a voluminous gown. As soon as I saw them, I burst out in appreciative laughter, reminded of all those other museums with rooms full of paintings glorifying kings, queens, and conquests. The “Royal Cake Installation” seemed to me to commemorate the hubris of temporal rulers who came and went. For the Polish visitor, it might suggest something else entirely: that the Jewish narrative of Poland is not a national history of battles lost and won, but rather the story of merchants, tavern keepers, estate managers, scholars, students, industrialists, journalists, beauty queens, revolutionaries, and, above all, the covenantal communities—Krakow, Poznań, Vilna, Warsaw, Wrocław, Zamość—where they lived and thrived.

As plays go, BKG’s *Theater of History* is not a Broadway musical. There is no feel-good finale. It’s a thousand years of Polish-Jewish history, from the first Jewish settlement to the Solidarity movement

and the collapse of communism. The last quarter of a century is left out. Then again, the sequel is all around you: in whatever’s playing in the 480-seat auditorium or in either of the two screening and multimedia rooms; in the Education Center and the Resource Center with their youthful and knowledgeable staff; in what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls a safe zone for Jewish-Polish discussion “beyond fear and shame,” where all questions and controversies are on the table.

If POLIN is Poland’s gift to the Jews, it is also the Jews’ gift to Poland. Cynics will say that it is too little, too late, which is, of course, true, but also irrelevant. In his remarks at the opening ceremony Bronisław Komorowski, the president of the Republic of Poland, declared that “it is impossible to understand the history of Poland without knowledge of the history of Polish Jews. It is equally impossible to understand the history of Jews without knowledge of Polish history.”

He also noted that “Polish Jews played a major role in the building of the State of Israel. Indeed, nearly half of all MPs in the first Knesset spoke Pol-

ish.” For President Komorowski, as for the two other elected officials seated at the dais—the minister of culture and national heritage and the mayor of Warsaw—how one welcomes the Jews, integrates their story into one’s collective memory, and relates to the state that they have created are true measures of tolerance, honor, and, above all, freedom. Just as the Solidarity movement made the reclamation of the Jewish past part of its struggle, so the opening of the POLIN Museum helps to mark Poland’s enormous achievement as a stable Western democracy. Poland has become a beacon to its neighbors in part by embracing its Jewish past.

Designed by the Finnish architect Rainer Mahlamäki, the building is rendered in a curved, flowing sandstone-like material, which was then encased in a gleaming façade of glass. The exterior is subtly clad with glass fins on which the word *Polin* is written in Hebrew and Latin letters. The building is set at a respectful distance from the Warsaw Ghetto Monument, whose shape it subtly imitates. Both the monument and the museum stand on sacred ground, at the heart of the former ghetto and the site of its death throes. “To set a glass building on a site of genocide,” Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes in her introduction, “is a strong statement; indeed, it is an expression of hope in the face of tragedy.” There were times during the opening day when the whole museum was ablaze with light.

The opening ceremony was held on the side of the museum that faces the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto, and the ceremony began, as befits a state occasion, with President Komorowski and Israeli President Reuven Rivlin lighting the memorial



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Eclipse.



Exterior view of the museum. (Photo by Wojciech Krynski. Courtesy of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.)

torch at the base of the monument. That night, when I joined a thousand or so young Poles at the public klezmer concert and choir performance in Yiddish and in Polish, I could see the reflection of the flame in the glass. Since Jewish youth routinely come to Poland for the first time on the March of the Living, a pilgrimage to the major death camps, there will now be a light at the end of their journey, a museum geared specifically to the interactive habits of their heart that tells of the Jews who lived before, during, and after.

Overwhelmed by the first day's events (and perhaps also jet lag), I got a bit lost on my walk back to the hotel and asked a 30-something woman walking her little dog for directions. She answered me in fluent English, and we got to talking about the new museum, which she hoped to visit soon. She herself had some Jewish friends—Jewish insofar as they were born Jewish, though they were otherwise indistinguishable from her other friends. Her grandparents still remembered what Poland was like when there were still many Jews around, but

nowadays, it was only the Vietnamese. A museum couldn't bring back the Jews, she said, but it could bring back the memory of a better Poland.

David G. Roskies holds a joint appointment in Yiddish literature and culture at The Jewish Theological Seminary and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His most recent book is Holocaust Literature: A History and Guide (Brandeis University Press), co-authored with Naomi Diamant.

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Common Clay

BY SHAI SECUNDA

Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls, Volume One

by Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford, and Siam Bhayro, with contributions from Matthew Morgenstern and Naama Vilozny
Brill, 396 pp., \$144

Rav Hisda's Daughter, Book I: Apprentice: A Novel of Love, the Talmud, and Sorcery

by Maggie Anton
Plume, 480 pp., \$16

Enchantress: A Novel of Rav Hisda's Daughter

by Maggie Anton
Plume, 400 pp., \$17

What do we really know about the Jews who produced the Talmud and, along the way, formed Judaism as we know it today? Seemingly, everything, but maybe not very much at all. The Babylonian Talmud is a gargantuan work of nearly two million words that offers a panoramic view of classical Jewish life, law, and lore. In its distinctively terse but somehow freewheeling style it touches on everything from the intricacies of torts and theology to the charms of Mesopotamian cuisine and Persian plumbing. Yet virtually nothing of Babylonian Jewry of the talmudic period, from the 3rd to the 6th century C.E., has survived beyond the text itself to help contextualize or confirm the many things the Talmud tells its readers. There has not been a single Babylonian synagogue dug up by archaeologists (or at least none reported), and, notwithstanding some early rumors about the now infamous cache of Jewish books confiscated by Saddam Hussein that turned up in the Second Iraq War, there are virtually no ancient Jewish relics from Babylonia to speak of. Scholars of this crucial period of Jewish history can feel trapped in a vicious hermeneutic circle of trying to write the history of the Talmud and its rabbis by closely scrutinizing the words of the rabbis in the Talmud.

Actually, for over a century historians have had at their disposal one sizable cache of Babylonian Jewish artifacts: over a thousand magic incantation bowls. They were essentially amulets for people seeking health, wealth, and other ordinary objects of human desire, whose magical spells were inscribed, oddly enough, on everyday kitchenware. The typical incantation bowl is earthenware and about the size of a cereal bowl. The magical writing is etched on the inside and spirals from the middle out, though not infrequently the center of the bowl also contains an image. Despite the apparent limitations of the genre, the magic bowls contain a rich treasure trove of Babylonian Jewish culture, including the names of the people who commissioned them, playful etchings of

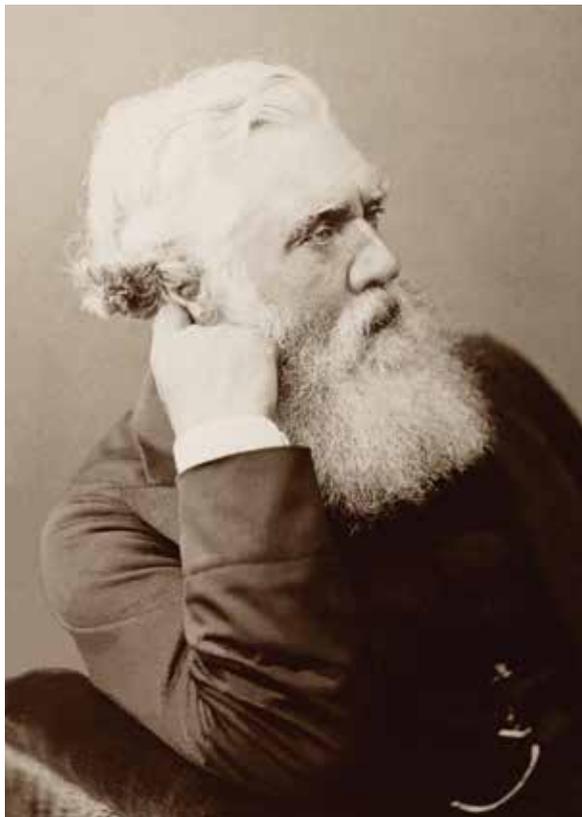
demons shown bound and begging, highly imaginative folktales of seduction and divorce, and a snapshot of the Aramaic dialects spoken by the Jews and their neighbors during late antiquity.

For many years the incantation bowls were the

explicitly describes the bowls, though it does discuss amulets). Remarkably, the first profound appreciation of the bowls as objects useful for conjuring up the lost world of Babylonian Jewry can be found in the domestic confines of a popular novel.

They were essentially amulets for people seeking health, wealth, and other ordinary objects of human desire, whose magical spells were inscribed, oddly enough, on everyday kitchenware.

private fiefdom of a small group of specialists—including James Nathan Ford, Dan Levene, Matthew Morgenstern, Christa Müller-Kessler, Shaul Shaked, and others—who sacrificed good years and good eyesight to deciphering them. Their efforts have yielded a substantial uptick in the publication of these artifacts, with the recently released and



Sir Austen Henry Layard, ca. 1883. (Courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France.)

lusciously illustrated *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, the first of a projected nine-volume edition of the 654 bowls in the famous Schøyen Collection, the largest private collection of manuscripts and related antiquities in the world, assembled by Oslo businessman Martin Schøyen.

One might have expected the bowls to have been immediately recognized as a treasured source for writing the history of talmudic Babylonia. Yet they have apparently been deemed by talmudists to be too superstitious, too folksy, or just too untalmudic (the Babylonian Talmud itself never ex-

The story of the incantation bowls' discovery begins as a tale of mild colonialist curiosity that quickly melts into snooty scholarly dismissal. The first finds came in the mid-19th century, when an antiquarian, "ancient Babylonian fever" was sweeping across Europe. Fittingly, an early report of the bowls is tucked deep within Sir Austen Henry Layard's *Discoveries among the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, an 1853 best-seller adorned with a gorgeous frontispiece depicting Sennacherib's magnificent palace. For someone like Layard, who uncovered the famous cuneiform library of Ashurbanipal and regularly sent priceless objects back to London that would form the core of the British Museum, the incantation bowls were little more than archeological flotsam—late artifacts good for a nicely appointed cabinet of curiosities, perhaps. It took more than half a century to see the first scientific edition of incantation bowls published, and by then most orientalists could hardly be bothered. J. P. Morgan had already invested a considerable fortune in purchasing ancient cuneiform tablets for scholars to study, and, as opposed to the hopeless superstitions found in the incantation bowls, the tablets documented the impressive statecraft and science of a far more ancient—but seemingly more advanced—Mesopotamian society than the Sassanid Empire.

And yet what the spell bowls lack in relative antiquity and apparent sophistication, they more than make up for in quotidian charm. The people who commissioned them sought relief from the slings and arrows of ordinary fortune, hoping that powerful spells might keep the pain and fear at bay. Take Mahdukh, daughter of Newandukh, a woman whose name appears throughout *Aramaic Bowl Spells* and who is often depicted in the incantations at the threshold of her home alongside her husband Gundasp. The poor woman seems to have suffered from terrible migraines. She experienced searing pain "in her head, in the ear, in the temple, and the eye-sockets" due mainly to the nefarious activities of a demoness named Agag. The goblins of these bowls are not stock figures, but richly drawn characters with extended families, favorite haunts, and identifying characteristics. For her part, Agag enjoys reclining "among the graves and among the roof-tops"

(perhaps relating her name with the similar-sounding Semitic word for roof), her lineage is traced back six generations, and she has nicknames like “blinder,” “smiter,” “sightless,” “lame,” and “itchy.” Some bowls are adorned with etchings of demons that could have waddled off the drawing pad of the late Shel Silverstein. Their menace seems a put on, like Smurfs who went over to the dark side.

Their domestic modesty and cartoonish flourishes aside, the bowls are in fact carefully wrought pieces of metaphysical technology. Many of the bowls are written in a professional scribal hand, and they employ precise, technical formulas to magically bind



Left: Bowl commissioned by Mahdukh, daughter of Newandukh. Right: Bowl with typical etching of a demon to keep evil away. (Photographs by Matthew Morgenstern. Courtesy of The Schoyen Collection, MS 1927/45 and MS 2053/250.)

demonic forces and prevent them from inflicting harm. While some bowls indeed contain the senseless sequences that sorcery is infamous for, others achieve a distinctive, almost poetic style. Biblical verses and Jewish prayers are freely invoked, stories that channel the power of talmudic sages like Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa and R. Yehoshua ben Perachia are told (a number of the texts in *Aramaic Bowl Spells* concern these rabbis), and passages are included that detail halakhically conceived divorces with the threatening unseen demons. Talmudic historians may prefer to think of the bowls as merely reflecting the popular culture of the unlearned hoi polloi, but the picture of Jewish life glimpsed in *Aramaic Bowl Spells* upends assumed divisions between elite and folk, common and learned, and scholarship and magic.

Purveyors of contemporary culture, on the other hand, have found in the bowls a story too rich and fabulous to ignore. In 2010, American artist Jewlia Eisenberg and her band Charming Hostess produced “The Bowls Project”—a dome-shaped art installation at San Francisco’s

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and an accompanying experimental rock album that set some real bowl incantations to an original score. In 2013, Israeli author Dorit Kedar published *Komish Bat Mahlafta: A False Biography of a Real Woman*, a novel inspired by the magic bowls. And Maggie Anton, the best-selling author of *Rashi’s Daughters*, has now published the second volume of a projected trilogy entitled *Rav Hisda’s Daughter*, which tells the story of a woman in a rabbinic family who takes up an apprenticeship in magic bowl production and goes on to an illustrious career as a sorceress.

Rav Hisda’s Daughter opens with the intimate voice of its protagonist:

I have always been blessed with a good memory. This gift from Elohim, which has allowed me to memorize the entire Torah and Mishna, as well as a myriad of incantations and spells, has also given me knowledge of the unseen world . . . But a good memory may also be a curse. I will always carry the burden of seeing the beloved husband of my youth stolen away by the Angel of Death before we’d been married five years. And the agony of losing a cherished child at the tender age of four, a budding blossom never to bear fruit.

Like legal documents, the chapters of *Rav Hisda’s Daughter* have subtitles that announce the years of the regnant Sasanian Iranian monarch, and there are echoes in the story of the massive wars fought between Rome and Persia during that time. Anton paints a fairly accurate picture of the lightning-fast dialectical give-and-take of the rabbinic study hall, and the sights, sounds, and smells of Babylonian Jewish life in late antiquity.

In the first volume we learn a good deal about the making of Mesopotamian beer, and we see

how magic bowls were produced, from writing to home installation. Here is how Anton describes the dramatic preparation before a bowl placement ceremony:

We went inside, where Giloi showed me the lying-in chamber. The slaves, who’d accompanied Rahel on countless installations, set to digging the appropriate holes. As each pit was finished, I turned the corresponding bowl upside down, laid it at the bottom, and covered it with dirt, all while trying to keep my hands from shaking. After the final hole was filled, one slave held out the white linen robe for me to wear and the other helped me with the veil. As I’d seen Rahel do before, I stood tall and lifted my arms to the heavens. My eyes closed, I prayed for fortitude, and also that the Merciful One would hear and grant my request. I could feel my skin tingling, and when I looked down, the slaves were huddled at my feet and I knew the time had come.

While this scene is undoubtedly dramatic, most of the real action of the narrative takes place in the fluttering heart of the main character, Hisdadukh.

Hisdadukh’s name is an exotic-sounding Aramaic-Persian amalgam that simply means “Hisda’s daughter,” the Talmud’s colorless designation for the daughter of the prominent early 4th-century sage, Rav Hisda. Like A. M. Bauld’s *Mozart’s Sister* and indeed Anton’s *Rashi’s Daughters* trilogy, this a project that takes its cue from Virginia Woolf’s famous daydream: “Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say . . .” As daydreams go, this one is meticulously researched. Anton has quite remarkably pieced together an entire life from stray talmudic dicta, which, as she cleverly notes in an afterword, were never intended to directly reflect historical truth: “The Talmud is clearly not an historical text; some might go so far as to call it historical fiction.” In *Rav Hisda’s Daughter*, Anton has produced a historical synthesis that few talmudists could hope to achieve—were they even tempted to do so.

Hisdadukh is who she is, at least initially, by virtue of the men in her life. She is born into one of the Talmud’s most important rabbinic families and ends up marrying not one but two towering sages: When (in an anecdote Anton takes from tractate Bava Batra) her father asks which of his prize students she wants to marry, she replies “both.” Rava, the quicker of the two, says “I’m last” and indeed, Hisdadukh’s first husband, Rami, dies tragically young. And yet she is her own woman, insatiably curious and fiercely independent. She is an active and successful—if unofficial—participant in the home-based yeshiva her father heads. But Hisdadukh ultimately finds her calling beyond the study-hall when she begins to study magic bowl making under her sister-in-law and discovers among other magic “specialists” a vibrant, if competitive, female fellowship.

It is notable that aside from bringing the bowls out of the shadows of antiquity into pop culture’s neon glow, Eisenberg, Kedar, and Anton all share an assumption that the incantation bowls were

largely produced by women. The authors of *Aramaic Bowl Spells* are fairly certain that this is incorrect, but I'm not sure how much it matters. In part, it reflects the ancient idea that magic appears on society's margins, where women, too, are often confined. This prejudice has been taken variously. Instead of asking the patriarchy to embrace women and their sorcery, Eisenberg and Kedar celebrate women's outsider status and revel in the

Anton has quite remarkably pieced together an entire life from stray talmudic dicta.

bowl's subversive, occasionally erotic charms. They thus participate in an established Jewish feminist discourse that reclaims peripheral and "dangerous" female figures and unleashes them on (or domesticates them for) an unsuspecting Jewish

Rahel couldn't be a *kashafa*. *Kashafot* were wicked.

By imagining the female relatives of prominent talmudic sages publicly producing magic bowls and other sorceries, Anton locates the magical arts at the very center of classical Jewish life. Unlike historical romances in which sex is breathlessly subversive and sorcery shocks, Anton keeps her sex scenes light and playful and marries traditional rabbinic piety with ancient sorcery. This is what makes *Rav Hisda's Daughter* so surprising and, one might argue, so compelling. The relentlessly undramatic nature of the series is its genius.

The resurfacing of the magic bowls in contemporary popular culture is a phenomenon worthy of note, not just for book-of-the-month clubs and avant-garde artists. Scholars ought to take heed. Anton is onto something. *Rav Hisda's Daughter* raises fascinating questions about what talmudists mean when speaking of "elite" in rabbinic culture, how rabbinic homes functioned simultaneously as both *ye-*



Jewlia Eisenberg in one of the domes of her "Bowls Project," 2010. (Photo by AnMarie Rodgers. Courtesy of "The Bowls Project," installation by Jewlia Eisenberg, Michael Ramage, and Charming Hostess.)

public, the most prominent example being the re-appropriation of the medieval legends of Adam's dangerous first wife, Lilith.

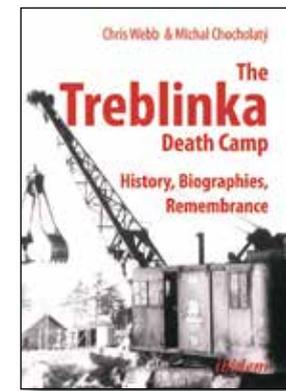
Anton's books, which are published by an imprint of Penguin and designed for Jewish-American book clubs, are a different story. She colors within the lines even if the hues are at times provocative:

As I wrote one incantation and then another, my mind whirled with the import of what I was doing . . . These vessels weren't regular soup or serving bowls, they were *kasa d'charasha*, enchanted bowls, which means Rahel was an enchantress, a *chareshata*, maybe even a *kashafa*. But how could that be? . . .

shivot and boisterous family estates, and how women and men actually interacted in these close spaces.

Set alongside the scholarship of *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, Anton's forthrightly middlebrow novel proves to be an unexpected invitation to think about these questions. Most surprisingly, it suggests a way of re-conceiving the relationship between the Talmud and the magic bowls, and the lost Babylonian world that gave birth to Judaism.

Shai Secunda is a member of The Martin Buber Society of Fellows at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the author of The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context (University of Pennsylvania Press).



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ARTUR PATEK

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Silence of the Lambs?

BY JEREMY WANDERER

But Where Is the Lamb? Imagining the Story of Abraham and Isaac

by James Goodman
Schocken, 320 pp., \$25

On Sacrifice

by Moshe Halbertal
Princeton University Press, 152 pp., \$25.95

Sacrifice is both foreign and familiar. It is, to say the least, difficult to imagine sacrificing an unblemished one-year-old lamb on an altar together with a vegetable offering and a libation of wine, sprinkling its blood about the altar, and then burning it completely. And yet we continue to speak freely of sacrifice in connection with political and moral obligations, especially here in the United States, where the theme of sacrifice is a staple of public rhetoric and TV drama. Consider just how utterly unsurprising it is that the first official sentence uttered by the just-inaugurated President Barack Obama acknowledged “the sacrifices borne by our ancestors.”

It is tempting to think that the older, biblical notion of sacrifice sheds little light on our current political and ethical use of the term. Two recent books, Moshe Halbertal’s *On Sacrifice* and James Goodman’s *But Where Is the Lamb?*, suggest otherwise. Halbertal’s short book combines two linked essays. The first is an investigation into the historical meaning of the religious practice of sacrifice, a phenomenon he dubs “sacrificing to.” The second part of the book is an inquiry into the morality of modern sacrifice, a phenomenon he dubs “sacrificing for.” A central contention of the book is that, beneath all the differences, there lies a deeper conceptual and historical continuity between ancient *sacrifice to* a God and modern *sacrifice for* a cause.

Goodman’s book is animated by similar concerns though it is very different. It chronicles many of the diverse ways in which the text of Genesis Chapter 22, the story of Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac, has been interpreted over the past two millennia. His own interest in the story began, he writes, “early in the third millennium. Dark days. Terror attacks had sparked a global war on terror . . . Wherever I turned, I heard the word ‘sacrifice.’” To make some sense of all this, Goodman turned to the history of sacrifice, then to human sacrifice, and finally to Abraham and Isaac, “the ground zero of Western child sacrifice stories.”

The Bible is full of descriptions of *sacrificing to*. This includes stories, such as the differing fate of the sacrifices of Cain and Abel and the binding of Isaac, along with detailed laws governing the sacrificial offerings in the Tabernacle. A striking

feature of both the stories and ritual injunctions is the absence of any explicit rationalization. These texts simply assume that *sacrificing to* God is a good idea without any explanation as to why. At best, we are given equivocal clues. The smell of the *olah* or “burnt offering” is often described as pleasing to God, perhaps suggesting that the purpose of the sacrifice is an attempt to curry Divine favor. But not only are there alternate interpretations available, this understanding of the *olah* is itself explicitly rejected in yet other biblical texts.

From late antiquity on, many biblical commentators, theologians, and modern theorists have attempted to step in and explain the meaning of *sac-*

reason for that relationship. By treating sacrifice as a gift, Halbertal resists the temptation to conceive of it as an attempt to buy God’s favor.

What distinguishes Halbertal’s account from those of other theorists who also understand *sacrificing to* as being a non-instrumental act of love and gratitude is his focus on the distinctive context in which this particular gift is given. Imagine trying to give a gift to someone who not only has everything, but is also capable of giving anything you could desire in return. In such a context, even when an object is offered as a gift and not a bribe, the asymmetry of power makes it hard to view the relationship in anything other than instrumental terms. Recognizing the constant possibility that what one gives will not be received or that what we hoped would be an act of love turns out to be one of mere utility is profoundly traumatic. Halbertal sees in these anxieties the close connection between *sacrificing to* and violence.

This dynamic informs Halbertal’s interpretation of the binding of Isaac. One reason that love between non-equals is fraught with anxiety is that neither party can be fully confident that the subordinate doesn’t have ulterior motives. As Halbertal puts it, God in the story emerges as the rich spouse, never sure that he is “not loved for his money.” The only insurance that a gift to God is an expression of love is when what is offered is something whose loss simply cannot be compensated for in any way—in this case Abraham’s son. After Abraham reveals himself willing to offer this gift, God changes his mind, and Abraham sacrifices a ram instead. The sacrificial animal thus becomes a symbolic substitute for the kind of gift for which there can be no compensation.

In his discussion of *sacrificing for*, the act of “giving up a vital interest for a higher cause,” Halbertal is vividly aware of the dilemmas such acts raise. On the one hand, sacrifice is viewed as a noble act, in which one rejects those courses of action mandated by mere self-interest. For many—including Halbertal—such self-transcendence is the mark of the moral: “without the self freeing himself

from his particular interested point of view, there is no moral life.” On the other hand, the preparedness to sacrifice one’s self-interest in the name of some higher cause has been a major source of gruesome acts of violence throughout history and certainly is now. One of Halbertal’s examples is the suicide bomber, whose “act of unleashing violence . . . is simultaneously initiating an act of self-sacrifice and murder.” Thus, while *sacrificing for* can be noble, it also “mobilizes crimes that in their magnitude are



Abraham preparing to sacrifice his son Isaac to God; the sacrificial ram is held by a figure in the background. From an Arab manuscript, 18th century. (© HIP/Art Resource.)

rificing to. Halbertal’s discussion in the first part of his book is best viewed as part of this discussion. Like other theorists (most famously the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss), Halbertal strives to make sense of the act of *sacrificing to* by treating it as part of an exchange of gifts rather than a market transaction (a bribe, for instance). A core difference between giving and buying is that the former is an expression of the loving relationship that exists between giver and receiver and not, as in the latter, the

far greater than those motivated by self-interest.”

According to Halbertal, this tension between sacrifice’s noble and nasty possibilities arises because we are tempted by the idea that it is the act of self-sacrifice per se that is morally virtuous, when in fact it all depends on the end for which one sacrifices. This should be obvious, but we are frequently tempted to move from the truism that valuable ends are worthy of sacrifice to the fallacy that that which is *sacrificed for* is necessarily valuable.

Another mistake is the trickery that guilt plays in the minds of aggressors, leading them to view them-

consists in the fact that we do not rule out sacrifice to them or for them as a suitable course of action. In this rather more straightforward account, the intimate link between sacrifice (of either kind) and violence is an expression of the intimate, and all too familiar, link between love and violence.

There is an interesting, and perhaps revealing, shift in tone when Halbertal moves from *sacrificing to* to *sacrificing for*. Reading the first essay of *On Sacrifice* was like being in a traditional *beit midrash* and listening to an exceptionally astute *rosh yeshiva* expound upon nuances in the meaning of

Despite their differences, the acts of *sacrificing to* and *sacrificing for* do indeed share a common structure: We sacrifice to and for the things we love.

selves as the victims when their crime includes some aspect of self-sacrifice. (Halbertal’s chilling example is Himmler’s grotesque portrayal of his SS officers as “selfless beings who made the ultimate sacrifice” in sacrificing their consciences for a greater goal.) Concluding on an explicitly political note, Halbertal observes that these features of human moral psychology have been exploited by the modern state. When it portrays itself as of ultimate value and worthy of sacrifice, it “becomes a false god, providing the loyal citizen a misdirected sense of redemption from his selfish cage.”

At the outset of his book Halbertal expresses the hope that “in following the ways in which various languages have extended the use from one realm [*sacrificing to*] to another [*sacrificing for*], we might discover some shared deep structures that encompass rich and diverse realms of human life.” By the end of the book, it turns out that this shared deep structure is “the identification of the sacrifice with the noninstrumental realm.” In both cases, Halbertal suggests, sacrifice takes us away from self-interest.

In the case of *sacrificing to*, the act of sacrifice is viewed as the free gift of a lover. Halbertal sees *sacrificing for* as an act of self-transcendence, but love, so central in his discussion of *sacrificing to*, is notably absent here. Perhaps this is because Halbertal portrays the attitude of *sacrificing for* as only appropriate in response to the perceived goodness of that for which one is sacrificing—and loving relationships are notoriously impervious to reason.

Is Halbertal correct to mark such a difference between *sacrificing to* and *sacrificing for*? I am not so sure. After all, we do often use the language of love in describing acts of *sacrificing for* as well as *sacrificing to*, and we do so in a way that implies both disinterestedness and involuntariness. Think of the sacrifices made by parents who choose lives of hardship so that their children can have better futures. The family is a primary example of an object of sacrifice to which we find ourselves bound, and our attitudes toward them do not perfectly track—even in the ideal case—our perception of its value or goodness. If this is right, an alternative reading of the materials that Halbertal assembles suggests itself. Despite their differences, the acts of *sacrificing to* and *sacrificing for* do indeed share a common structure: We sacrifice to and for the things we love.

Part of loving a person, community, or ideal

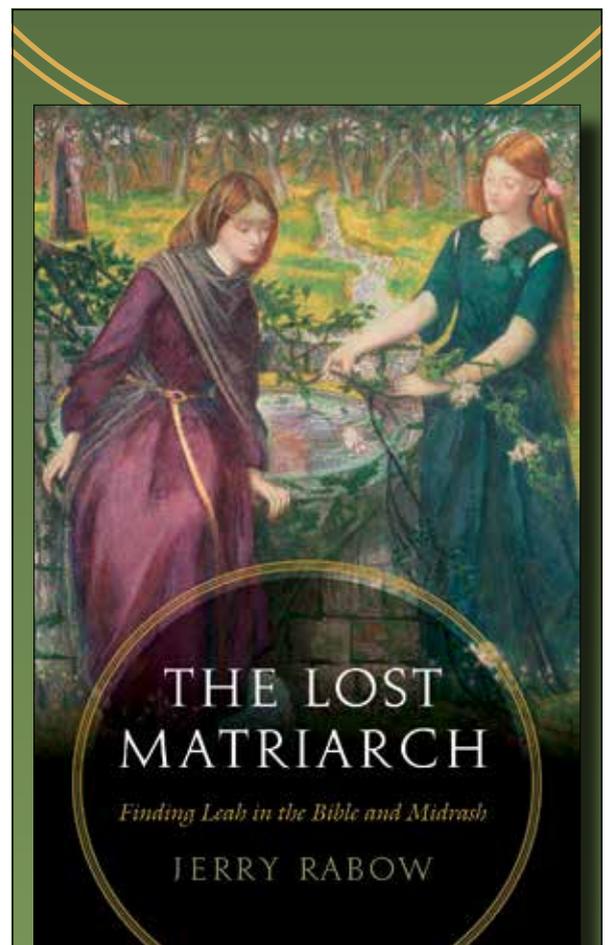
sacred texts. Reading the second part, I was back in the philosophy seminar room, in which an aspect of moral psychology was subjected to a sustained critique through argument and counter-example. There may be good reasons for these methodological choices (as well as his relatively glancing engagement with other theorists), I just wish that Halbertal had been more forthcoming in revealing what they are. It would help in evaluating the persuasiveness of his interpretations.

Despite these reservations, there is no doubt that Halbertal is a master guide through both foreign and familiar terrains. He has the rare ability to revivify arcane topics and texts without sacrificing their complexity on the altar of relevance. The result is a rich and genuinely exciting discussion, one that leaves the philosophically inclined reader with a deep sense that the seemingly narrow and dated topic of sacrifice may be central to contemporary attempts to understand what it is to live a meaningful life.

In *But Where Is the Lamb?* James Goodman’s focus is not on sacrifice per se, but on the biblical story of a sacrifice that never was: Abraham’s aborted attempt to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Although the story features prominently in the theology, liturgy, and ritual of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it is typically treated as a troubling text. Not only does the story itself leave open a number of crucial questions—Why did God issue the command? Why didn’t Abraham protest? Did Isaac know what was happening? Why did the plan seem to change midway? What happened to Isaac at the end?—it also has given rise to conflicting theological lessons, many of which have challenged the moral sensibilities of readers over the centuries. Goodman’s book aims “to shine some light on the long and protean life of nineteen lines of ancient literature.”

The book moves chronologically through a dizzying array of sources, including the Book of Jubilees, Philo and Pseudo-Philo, Josephus, the sages of the Talmud, Syriac hymns, early Christian and Islamic exegetes, the Chronicles of the First Crusades, and medieval English mystery plays. Somewhat closer to home, we encounter Kant and Kierkegaard, Caravaggio and Rembrandt, biblical critics and historians, Shoah literature, feminist commentators, and Israeli poets and novelists. The list goes on, and its sheer length may not seem to provide the raw ingredients required for an engaging or satisfying



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read. Goodman, however, is a skilled writer who manages to provide just enough contextual and interpretive detail for the reader to see what is at stake in each and every interpretation.

For an outsider to the interpretive tradition such variety will come as a surprise, since it seems obvious that the story promotes a conception of faith as some kind of blind obedience and submission. In reading *But Where Is the Lamb?*, one quickly sees that things are not so cut and dry. Some read the story as a protest *against* faith of just that kind, or as a general polemic *against* the practice of child sacrifice. Others view Abraham as having failed the test precisely because God expected Abraham to protest. Some interpretations proceed by creatively reading between the lines, presenting a hesitant and stalling Abraham, an intervening Sarah, or an all-too-aware Isaac. There are even interpretations in which Abraham succeeds and those in which Isaac runs away.

I have called these “alternatives” in that they run counter to the dominant interpretation, but they are not just dissident positions limited to religious critics and modern readers. Indeed, some of the most extreme re-readings stem from early and traditional interpreters. One of Goodman’s striking examples is

the 7th-century *piyyut* of Johanan Hakohen, which castigates Abraham who:

[D]id not beg for mercy for his only son.
He wished to spill his blood like a cruel man . . .
He should, however, have begged to spare his only son
And save him from the burning coals.

It is worth noting that versions of this *piyyut* are included in the traditional Ashkenazi prayer ritual and recited to this day in some synagogues as part of the morning service on the festival of *Shavuot*. (Here, and elsewhere, Goodman is indebted to Shalom Spiegel’s classic study *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice*.)

It is precisely in the protean life of this ancient story that Goodman finds lessons for present times:

In fact, I couldn’t imagine a better foil for the fiction at the heart of fundamentalism, in all its varieties, than the fluidity, multiplicity, and variety of revelation over time, the thinking and rethinking, the talk and the argument, the writing and rewriting, the vast array and mélange of meanings, the engagement with troubling texts, and the marriage (at times happy, at times troubled, at times both) of tradition and innovation.

Even if one could discern the intended or original meaning of the story, Goodman challenges the desirability of elevating it above others. To do so would be to miss out on century upon century of ingenuity as people attempted to re-imagine the story once again.

Perhaps the most striking and certainly the strangest feature of *But Where Is the Lamb?* lies in a fantasy told in its opening chapters, where we are introduced to “G”—a ghostwriter Goodman imagines was hired by the biblical editors to help finish up their story of Abraham and who presents them with a working draft of the story of the *akedah* as a possible grand finale. The editors love the idea and run with the piece, ignoring G’s protests that this draft somehow gets the character of Abraham wrong. G fumes, but his wife reassures him that eventually someone will reinterpret it, and he is partly placated. After all, “it was in the anthology—a great book if ever there was one—to stay, but if at any time people took note of it and were bothered by it, they would revise it . . . Sooner or later, someone would revise it.” Why begin a work of scholarship, even popular scholarship, so fantastically?

Goodman teaches both history and creative writing, and he has clearly thought about different ways of writing non-fiction. His previous book, *Blackout*, recounts the story of the power outage that took place in New York City in July 1977 by constantly jumping from scene to scene, from encounter to incident to conversation, so as to echo the disorder that characterizes an event taking place in a bustling city of some seven and a half million people. Since no two subjects in the city were looking in exactly the same direction throughout the event and its aftermath, the ambitious narrative form he adopts is one that eschews a single point of view.

At least the characters that feature in *But Where Is the Lamb?* are all looking in the same direction: toward the 19 verses of Biblical text that are presented (in translation and without comment) at the beginning of the book. The challenge of telling this story is to find a suitable perspective from which to narrate a history of interpretations whose cast traverses such a vast span of time and space without that narrative seeming repetitive or disjointed. At one level, the fantasy of G is Goodman’s writerly response to this challenge. The readers are invited to view the various interpreters of the text from the perspective of an original author eager to see how others improve on the story he was unable to complete. Read this way the fantasy functions as a surprisingly effective rhetorical device. I found myself zipping through the wealth of interpretive detail in each chapter, eager to see just how creatively the challenge had been met in different contexts and religious traditions.

The decision to begin with the fantasy of G is, however, more loaded than I have implied. For Goodman has not simply introduced a point of view from which to narrate, nor has he just planted the idea of an author viewing his interpreters. He has also planted the idea of a flawed story in need of work and a concomitant invitation to the reader to become a co-writer. While reading some of the interpretations on display in *But Where Is the Lamb?*, I found myself struck by an alternate fantasy, involving not G but G- (pronounced GDash), who is fuming precisely because the perfect morality tale, in which a father’s willingness to sacrifice his son is offered as the paradigm form of religious devotion, is “creatively” misread by subsequent generations unwilling or unable to hear its core message. Like the story of G, the story of G- also introduces the perspective of an author viewing her readers, but the relationship of those readers to G- is not the collaborative partnership between G and his readers but an antagonistic struggle, stemming from the readers’ desire to make best sense of G-’s story in light of their own vision of what constitutes the good life.

As much as Goodman’s subject is the history of interpretation of this particularly troublesome biblical text, it is also a celebration of the distinctive character of the interpretive tradition itself. The creative collaboration between initial author and subsequent interpreters implied by the narrative of G is the way Goodman understands this tradition. But beyond the minimal commitment to take the text seriously was there a basic orientation shared by all of these interpreters across the millennia? Further, even if some interpreters did share a common understanding of their task, Goodman’s own characterization of it as a process of “writing and rewriting” sounds far too contemporary.

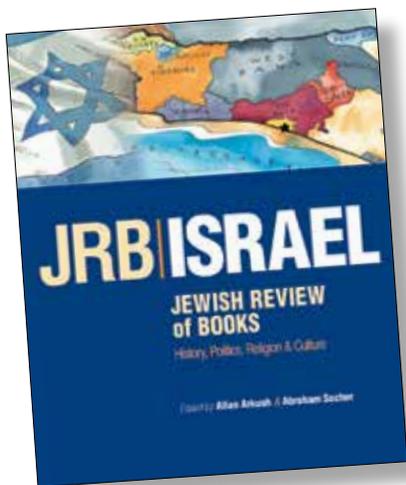
These reservations do not undermine Goodman’s achievement. The breadth of resources he draws on, and his own distinctive personal voice, ensure that *But Where Is the Lamb?* has much to offer the expert reader, while the clarity and playfulness of the prose makes it accessible and engaging to the novice as well. Perhaps the greatest mark of its depth is that, like Halbertal’s *On Sacrifice*, it leaves the reader convinced that, two millennia later, we are not even close to coming to this story’s end.

Jeremy Wanderer is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Massachusetts–Boston.

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Earlier this year, an email announcement of a publication made its rounds among scholars of Jewish studies. Written in the flowery Hebrew of the Eastern European Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah), the advertisement proclaimed that the work would “reveal all secrets.” The parody of genuine announcements of this type from the 19th century was dead-on, but the joke went beyond the mannered maskilic prose style: The work that would “reveal all secrets” was a three-volume magnum opus containing a scholarly edition of a book itself entitled *Revealer of Secrets* (*Megaleh Temirin*), plus copious notes, background sources, and a whole volume of commentaries. And since *Megaleh Temirin* is a parody of Hasidic literature, the email was thus a parody of a parody.

The author of the email was Jonatan Meir, a scholar of 19th-century Hebrew literature from Ben-Gurion University who has devoted much of his scholarly career to “revealing the secrets” of Joseph Perl (1773–1839), a *maskil* (enlightener) from Tarnopol in Eastern Galicia (Ternopil in modern-day Ukraine). Perl was best known during his lifetime for establishing a modern synagogue and a modern school that educated both boys and girls in secular as well as religious subjects, a model for the implementation of Haskalah ideology. He was a moderate *maskil* who favored incremental reforms and, like other *maskilim* of his day, remained a traditional Jew in terms of his personal practice. But Perl was also a crusader—one might even call him an obsessed crusader—against Hasidism, which he regarded nothing short of demonic. The remnants of his personal archive, not examined critically until the 1930s, are a treasure trove of information on early 19th-century Hasidism, since Perl compulsively collected every scrap of information on the movement whose existence he regarded as a threat to the modernization of the Jews.

Why Perl was so obsessed with Hasidism remains an unanswered question. His family was not Hasidic, but some later Haskalah writers claimed that he was a Hasid himself in his youth, who only came to embrace the Enlightenment in his late twenties under the influence of Mendel Lefin (1749–1826), one of the earliest Galician *maskilim*. It is unclear whether there is any truth to this story, and many of the legends about Perl seem more motivated by ideology than history. If true, though, it would suggest that Perl wanted to atone for the sins of his youth. What we can say with certainty is that Perl only took up his pen against Hasidism following the publication

of *Shivhei ha-Besht* (the hagiographical collection of stories about Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, the putative founder of Hasidism, who died in 1760) and *Sippurei Ma'asiyot* (The Tales of Rabbi Nachman), the remarkable allegorical stories told by Nachman of Bratslav, the Ba'al Shem Tov's great-grandson.

By the time these two classics of Hasidic literature were published in 1814–1815, Hasidism had been on the scene for more than a half a century. Although Hasidic tradition—accepted and unwittingly promoted by Perl—claimed that the Ba'al Shem Tov (or Besht) had founded the movement, historians including Moshe Rosman and Immanuel Etkes have argued convincingly that the Besht never set out to create Hasidism. He was a *ba'al shem*, a kind of shaman employed by his community of Medzhibodz to write kabbalistic amulets. A loose community of associates and admirers, notably Yaakov Yosef of Polonne and Dov Ber of Mezeritch, collected and reinterpreted his sayings. Dov Ber was the first to

lived), central Poland, and White Russia.

When Perl took up his cudgel against Hasidism around 1816, the two or three generations of “founders” had passed from the scene, and Hasidism had developed a fairly well-defined identity as a movement of rebbes or *tzaddikim* (charismatic leaders) and Hasidim (the term means “pious” but now came to mean the follower of a *tzaddik*). As the founders of Hasidic branches such as Chabad, Chernobyl, and others died, succession passed to their sons (or, in some cases, favorite students). The dynastic principle came to characterize Hasidism in the 19th century and beyond.

The rebbe's court was an increasingly central institution, with *tzaddikim* often attracting followers from far and wide. Pilgrimage to the court was the high point in a Hasid's religious life. Some of these courts—most notably that of Israel of Ruzhin—styled themselves as royal, borrowing the ostentatious trappings of the nobility: sumptuous houses, fine furnishings, and armies of retainers. These courts were the objects of much fascination, attracting not only Hasidim but also non-Hasidic Jews and Gentiles. “Tzaddikism,” with all that it entailed as a social institution, became one of the predominant characteristics of Hasidism and one that attracted Perl's special ire.

As to its teachings, early Hasidism cannot be reduced to one doctrine. It appears that the Ba'al Shem Tov taught a religion of joy, as opposed to the asceticism of other pietists (often called “pre-Besht Hasidim”) of his time. The early Hasidic teachers emphasized the importance of *devekut*, ecstatic communion with God. But there were diverse ideas of what this communion meant theologically. Did one lose one's identity in God? Did one transcend the material world or rather render it holy? Different rebbes gave different answers.

Perl was not interested in Hasidic theology, since he believed that the movement was a deviant sect whose leaders were corrupt, money-grubbing charlatans who defrauded their benighted followers, justified all manner of immorality, and taught hatred of the Gentile authorities. The first work that he wrote anonymously, in German (he was fluent in German, as well as Yiddish and Hebrew), was entitled *Über das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim aus ihren eigenen Schriften gezogen* (On the Essence of the Hasidic Sect, Drawn from Their Own Writings). The “essence” of Hasidism here has nothing to do with its theological doctrines but rather their assault on the Hasidic version of Judaism that Perl wanted to advance. Perl seems to have composed this work around 1816 and sent it to the Austrian censors (Tarnopol was now part of the Habsburg Empire) who apparently did not permit its publication. It was published for the first time in 1937, with Perl's authorship established a few years later on the basis of a document found in his archive.

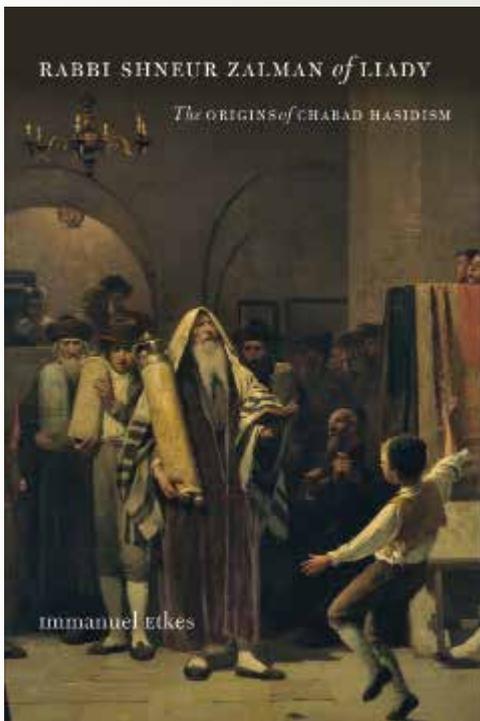
Über das Wesen may be seen as the first in a



Engraving of Joseph Perl wearing medals awarded for his educational activities by Tsar Alexander I, 1816. (Courtesy of YIVO.)

create a kind of court, which lasted until he died in 1772. Although, as Ada Rapoport-Albert has proven, Dov Ber also did not consciously organize his disciples into a movement, after his death, figures such as Elimelech of Lizhensk and Schneur Zalman of Liadi joined other associates of the Besht to spread the new doctrine—and their own interpretations of it—to new regions. As a result of their efforts, a religious and social phenomenon that had been limited to Podolia and Volhynia, provinces of southeastern Poland, now found adherents in Galicia (where Perl

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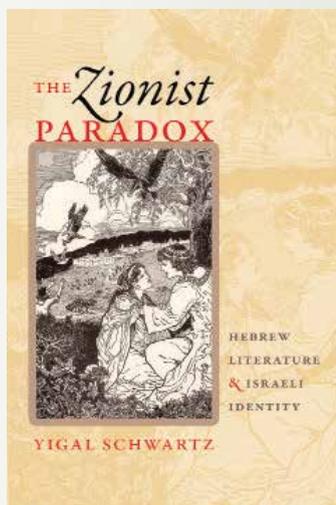
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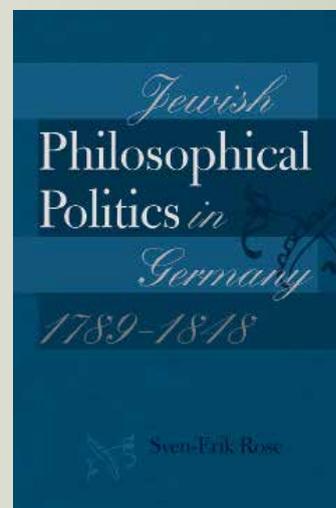
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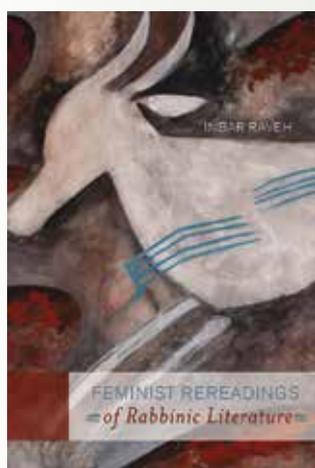
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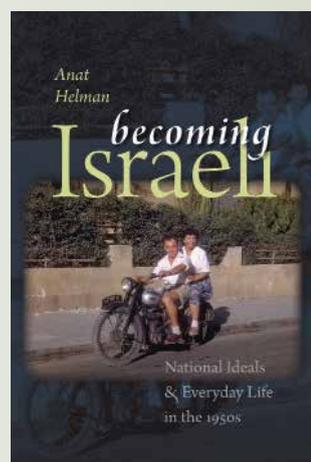
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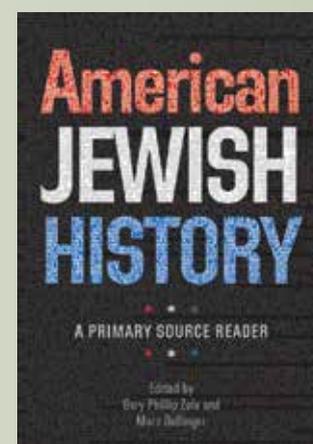
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series of at least four other extensive petitions that Perl composed in the following years to the Austrian and Russian authorities to investigate Hasidism as a “sect” and therefore, according to the law, undeserving of the protections that the regime afforded Judaism. The last of these missives, from 1838, accused Israel Friedman, the Rebbe of Ruzhin, of ordering the murder of two Jewish informers, a charge that resulted in his arrest, although

not in reality. This kind of self-referential writing recurs in Perl’s third book on Hasidism, *Bochen Tzaddik* (1838), where the Hasidim are threatened by another book, clearly in this case *Megaleh Temirin*.

Thus, Perl’s battles with Hasidism seem to have been carried on mainly in his own mind and in the pages of his writings. In one of the many insightful interpretive essays that make up volume three of his trilogy, Meir shrewdly labels Perl’s object an

19th-century historians Peter Beer and Isaac Marcus Jost, when they wrote about Hasidism). Perl also uses complicated numerology (*gematria*) to create fake names for not only his fictional *tzaddikim* but also for himself as author. In the second of his three volumes, Meir includes a *midrash shemot*, a deciphering of these coded names to identify them with actual figures. Thus, Perl’s book, far from “revealing secrets,” actually requires decoding itself.

Here is an example from the third letter of how the satire works (in Dov Taylor’s translation):

From its title page to its rabbinic approbation to its painstakingly accurate citation of actual Hasidic texts, the book looks on the face of it as if it might actually be Hasidic.

formal charges were never filed. Labeling Hasidism a sect was a strategy of *maskilim* and other opponents of Hasidism, one that has even persisted to this day. But the Austrians, like their counterparts in Congress Poland and Russia, consistently rejected the claim that Hasidism was a sect and instead affirmed, on the basis of their own investigations, that it was simply a kind of “fraternity” within the Jewish community. Hasidic prayer quorums (*minyanim*) and their prayer houses (*shtieblach*) were no more sectarian than those of various other groups in local communities.

Perl’s attempt to enlist the authorities in his campaign was thus an abject failure, but one that won him notoriety as an “informer,” the worst of pejoratives in the traditional Jewish vocabulary. At the same time that his political efforts failed to ban Hasidism (in this regard, the Haskalah was utterly ineffectual), he turned to a different field of combat. If the authorities wouldn’t listen, he would turn to his fellow Jews. And so it was that three years after composing his German treatise, in 1819, he published—again anonymously—his great Hebrew epistolary novel, *Megaleh Temirin*.

The book purports to relate the escapades of Hasidim who attempt to get a hold of and destroy a *bukh* with magical properties that has been written to defame them in the eyes of the Gentile authorities. In light of Perl’s German text, it was not hard for scholars to establish that the *bukh* (the German/Yiddish designation is deliberate on Perl’s part to distinguish it from a *sefer*, that is a holy book) was none other than Perl’s own *Über das Wesen* (he refers to it by name in Letter #109 of *Megaleh Temirin*). In other words, it is Perl himself, in the guise of his German book, that sends the Hasidim of *Megaleh Temirin* into a panic. In the recent translation of Dov Taylor:

But when I began to read your letter . . . I saw in it the news you bring me of a *treyf* travesty that was recently published against our Faithful and against the real *tsadikim*, and that this *bukh* was sent from Galicia to the prince of your community to read! . . . it’s full of wickedness, deceit and mockery aimed at the *tsadikim* and real *rebes*! . . . we got to see about doing something with regard to the *bukh* . . . you should do whatever you can to get hold of this *bukh* so that we can know what’s written there and so we’ll know the name of the *bukh*, so as to direct our Faithful to buy the *bukh* and burn it up and wipe it out, and also to find out who the author is so as to take revenge against him.

Perl thus fabricates his persecutors, in writing if

“imagined Hasidism” and writes of him inhabiting a “utopia of books.” He means that Perl—in this sense no different from generations of Jewish writers—inhabited a world where books argued with books and the real world became confused with the discursive



First edition of *Megaleh Temirin* by Joseph Perl. Published in Vienna, 1819.

world. Perl seems to have imagined that the way to defeat Hasidism was to write a devastating critique of it. However, the form of his critique was anything but straightforward.

Megaleh Temirin is a brilliant satire, a parody of what he presents as the Hasidic epistolary genre (although some Hasidic texts are in the form of “holy letters,” the letters in Perl’s book are of a type he largely invented). From its title page to its rabbinic approbation to its painstakingly accurate citation of actual Hasidic texts, the book looks on the face of it as if it might actually be Hasidic. Indeed, Meir, as meticulous about his sources as Perl, has provided detailed notes showing which Hasidic texts Perl quotes. (Perl seems to have assembled a library containing every Hasidic work, published and unpublished, up to that time.)

Perl’s text is so shot through with quotations from and references to Hasidic books that one might say that it was as much Hasidic as anti-Hasidic (in fact, the work served as an important source for the early

From Reb Zelig Letitchiver To Reb Zaynvl Verkhievker

I am amazed you *still* didn’t get a hold of the *bukh*! I already wrote you the matter is very urgent and still you didn’t do nothing. Maybe, G-d forbid!, you’re being lazy about this matter, so I’m telling you this is no trifle. I heard the *bukh* is making an impression on all the noblemen who read it and they want to translate it into Polish. All the lords reading it are roaring with laughter at our people and at the *tsadikim*.

Today I bumped into Councilman Glakhav’s agent and he told me yesterday there were several officials by his gentile for tea. Among them were many who had read the *bukh* and they were discussing this *bukh* the whole time. Some of them made a mockery and laughingstock of the agent and said that *he’s* a *khosed* too.

One asked him if he knew the reason why the Jews sway during the *Tfile* prayer, and the agent said, “I don’t know.” The nobleman said to him, “I’ll tell you the reason—because the *Tfile* is like intercourse. That’s what’s written in the book *Likutey Yekorim*.” And another asked him if it’s true that the justice of gentiles is husks and that your *rebe* goes to gentile justice so as to extract holy justice from among the husks. And the third asked him if he too speaks with them only so as to extract the holy sparks from them so that they should be left empty, and so on.

In a kind of wish fulfillment, Perl imagines that Polish noblemen have discovered his *bukh* and want to translate it into Polish! Here, he puts Hasidic doctrine in the mouths of Gentile noblemen and government officials who have learned from the *bukh* that the *Likutey Yekorim*, like several other Hasidic sources, compares the swaying in prayer to an act of sexual intercourse with the *Shekhina*. Once apprised of such lascivious Hasidic ideas, these Gentiles regard Hasidism—represented here by Jewish *arendars* (leaseholding agents)—as the butt of their humor. Hasidism, in Perl’s estimation, threatens the respectability of Judaism in the eyes of the nobility whom he wishes to cultivate so as to integrate the Jews into Austrian society. Since, of course, it is his own German *bukh*—not the Hasidic texts, which would have been inaccessible to Gentiles—that reveals the secrets of Hasidism, he more or less admits that, had his book cleared the censors, he would have been complicit in making the Jews look ridiculous.

Perl was also clearly anxious that Gentiles would

find out that the Kabbalah embraced by Hasidism regarded non-Jews as “husks” (empty shells of materiality), who might harbor stray sparks of divinity but could never possess holy souls. When Hasidim avail themselves of Gentile courts, they do so only to exorcise these sparks from what is otherwise a demonic realm. By performing such magical procedures, they intend to annihilate the Gentile husks. Here, too, Perl draws from actual Hasidic texts for the purpose of showing how dangerous Hasidism is to the relations between Jews and Gentiles. In this letter, the (presumably Jewish) reader of Perl’s Hebrew text is meant to identify with the Gentiles and to laugh both at the antics and crude ideas of the Hasidim.

Perl composed these fake letters in a kind of caricature of Hasidic Hebrew, an often ungrammatical hodgepodge mixed with Yiddish syntax that poses an almost insurmountable problem of translation. (Hasidic sermons were typically delivered in Yiddish and translated later into Hebrew or, to be precise, *loshen kodesh*, a mixture of rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic.) The only English version of *Megaleh Temirin*, which we have quoted here, demonstrates this challenge. Taylor decided to render Perl’s letters into fractured English, which hardly sounds like even a caricature of Hasidic writing, but rather like the hilarious “Yinglish” of Leo Rosten’s famous *Education of Hyman Kaplan*, which was apparently Taylor’s model. The result was not entirely successful.

In the years following the publication of *Megaleh Temirin*, stories circulated that Hasidim read the book and believed it to be genuine, so cleverly had Perl succeeded in camouflaging his text. How-

ever, these stories appear to have been fabrications by *maskilim*, which were no more historical than the claims that the Hasidim burned the book when they discovered its true intent. Both of these legends served the propaganda of the Haskalah. In reality, the Hasidim probably had little knowledge of Perl’s epistolary assault. The true audience for the book consisted of recruits to the nascent Haskalah who seem to have immediately identified both the author and his purpose. In other words, the success of Perl’s parody lay in readers quickly discerning that the letters were exaggerations of real Hasidic texts.

In fact, one might even say that Perl acted unwittingly as a shill for Hasidism, even as he sought to debunk it. Although *Shivhei ha-Besht* went through a number of editions after it was published in 1815, it seems unlikely that it was widely known when Perl published his book in 1819 and *Sippurei Maasiyot* (The Tales of Rabbi Nachman) was probably even less well known, since Bratslav Hasidism was a marginalized and persecuted group. By making these texts so central to his parody, Perl may have publicized them beyond the Hasidic circles for which they were intended. Indeed, Perl’s *Megaleh Temirin* is a mirror image of *Shivhei ha-Besht*, which, he claims, has the same talismanic qualities.

The plot of *Megaleh Temirin* is convoluted and full of subplots and multiple characters (Meir helpfully provides a list in one of his appendices, since it’s almost impossible to keep them straight in the text, given their invented names). In the guise of defending themselves, the Hasidim of most of the 151 letters reveal their violent, lascivious, con-

niving, materialistic, and bizarre behavior. They are unable to earn an honest living and subsist on charity. They are frequently drunk on vodka. They turn smoking pipes and sitting on the toilet into religious rituals (as with other details, this has its factual basis in *Shivhei ha-Besht*). Less plausibly, one fornicates with and impregnates a non-Jewish woman who flees abroad with her father.

The characters of the book cover the gamut of Eastern European types: Beyond *tzaddikim* and Hasidim, we find *mitnagdim* (the opponents of Hasidism); a Polish nobleman; a married Jewess, Freyda, who has questionable relations with the nobleman (Freyda is worthy of mention as a surprisingly independent Jewish woman); and, of course, a *maskil* who is handsome, learned in German, and thus a stand-in for Perl. Interestingly, the *maskil* is a relatively marginal figure, since most of the action takes place around preventing the *bukh* (the real protagonist of the novel) from infecting the authorities with hatred of Hasidism.

What was the impact of Perl’s scandalous book? Since it does not appear to have become a target for the Hasidim—much to Perl’s dismay, no doubt—its primary influence was on modern Hebrew literature. The use of satire as a modern literary tool owes its origins to Perl. One can draw a line from Perl to Mendele Mokher Seforim and Sholem Aleichem. And the hugely popular Yiddish spoof on Hasidism *Dos poylishe Yingl* (The Polish Lad) by Isaac Joel Linetsky from 1867 (first printed as a book in 1873) is a hilarious extension of *Megaleh Temirin*. (It was said of Linetsky’s book that many Hasidim read it and even enjoyed the book as a joke at their expense.)

Perl’s book has been taken seriously by both literary scholars and historians for more than a century. Some, led by Baruch Kurzweil, even consider it the “first Hebrew novel,” although others reserve that compliment for Avraham Mapu’s *Ahavat Zion* (1853). Meir’s edition includes the most recent literary analysis by the distinguished literary critic Dan Miron, which appears as a 43-page epilogue to the novel’s text. Miron argues that Perl’s book is a “literary masterpiece,” meant to be read whole rather than perused in fragments, as most readers read it. He sees the book as setting up a contrast between the literary practice and ethos of Haskalah and Hasidism. For the *maskilim*, the intellectual-aesthetic pleasure of reading goes together with a philosophical view that champions a world structured by reason and law. In opposition, Perl posits the hedonism of the Hasidim. The Haskalah, in this interpretation, becomes the sober defender of the law against Hasidic antinomianism.

Beyond questions of literary merit and influence, however, Perl’s *Megaleh Temirin* played a complex—and perhaps not yet fully understood—historical role. Although certain Hasidic leaders became aware of the early Haskalah as a potential threat (Nachman of Bratslav evidently met and debated *maskilim*, and Schneur Zalman of Liadi sided with Russia against Napoleon because of his fear of emancipation), the battle between the two was not yet fully joined when Perl published his book. In fact, the book, which was identified with the hated informer Perl, contributed not incidentally to provoking the battle. Just as Perl imagined his Hasidim, so he imagined the war between Hasidism and

Haskalah—and by imagining it, he helped bring it about. Of course, as part of the world of traditional Judaism, Hasidism was destined to come into conflict with the forces of modernity. But that it became increasingly the most “ultra-Orthodox” of the Orthodox, the most rigid defender of tradition, owes something to the particular animus between *maskilim* and Hasidim. Perl was not the first modernizer to mount an attack on Hasidism, but he was the first to do so unrelentingly and with well-honed weapons of satire.

In historical perspective, the all-out warfare between the Hasidim and *maskilim* that began with Perl was a fight over who would lead the Jews into the terra incognita of the 19th century. Hasidism had developed in 18th-century Poland at a time when rabbinic and communal leadership was under siege; the crisis of leadership became much more acute in the 19th century after the partitions of Poland and the rule of the absolutist governments in Russia and Austria. Hasidism, with its supra-communal networks and courts of rebbes, provided new forms of community and authority for many Jews in these empires. (Hasidism probably never won over a majority of the Jews of Eastern Europe, but it did command the allegiance of a large minority.) The *maskilim*, for their part, envisioned a different kind of community based on new occupations, secular education, and political integration. Hasidism, perhaps even more than other traditionalist movements, saw the Haskalah alternative as a real threat to its own innovative vision.

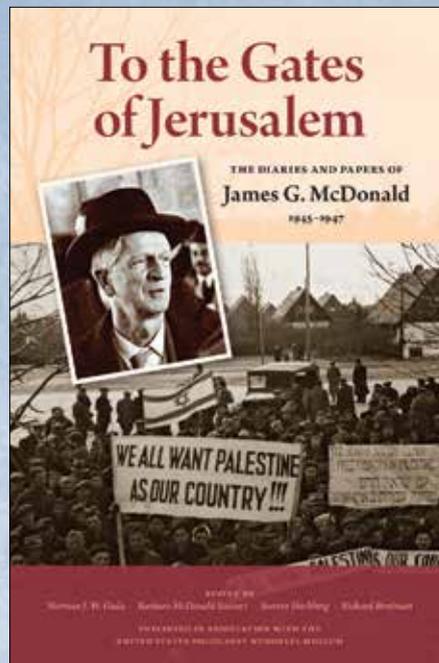
When the Jews of Eastern Europe experienced pogroms, political persecution, emigration, and impoverishment in the last decades of the 19th century, the Haskalah became discredited. But the new movements of Zionism and social revolution that took its place also aspired to provide the Jews with alternative leaders, so Hasidism now turned its rhetorical guns against them. Indeed, some of the most vociferous opposition to Zionism to this day comes from Hasidic sources. Beyond the theological arguments of this anti-Zionism, there is still a battle over political power: Who will lead the Jews in the modern world?

The weapon of satire that Perl mobilized for the beginning of this two-century-long war seems today inadequate to its intended task. To be sure, there is much in Hasidism that lends itself to satire: Thus, when extremist Hasidim protested use of the internet, they held a rally from which women were banned, but then streamed the proceedings to women . . . over the internet!

But Hasidism deserves a much more serious hearing from those who would not themselves join its ranks. As both a religious and social phenomenon, it is here to stay, a phoenix that rose miraculously from the ashes of the Shoah. And once one takes it seriously, the challenge is to imagine a world in which Hasidim and *maskilim*—or their descendants—can live together, if not in harmony, then at least in peace.

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To the Gates of Jerusalem

The Diaries and Papers of James G. McDonald, 1945-1947

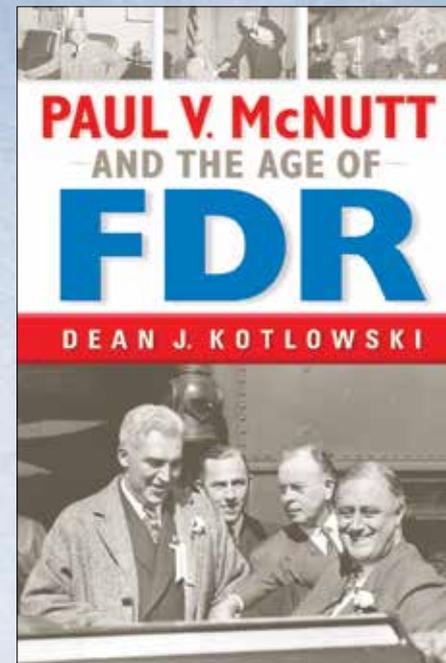
JAMES G. McDONALD

EDITED BY NORMAN J. W. GODA, BARBARA McDONALD STEWART, SEVERIN HOCHBERG, AND RICHARD BREITMAN

Praise for the Diaries:

“Inspiring—McDonald’s prescience and energy are simply amazing. But because we know what is soon to happen to Europe’s Jews, we share his frustration that no one seems to be listening.”

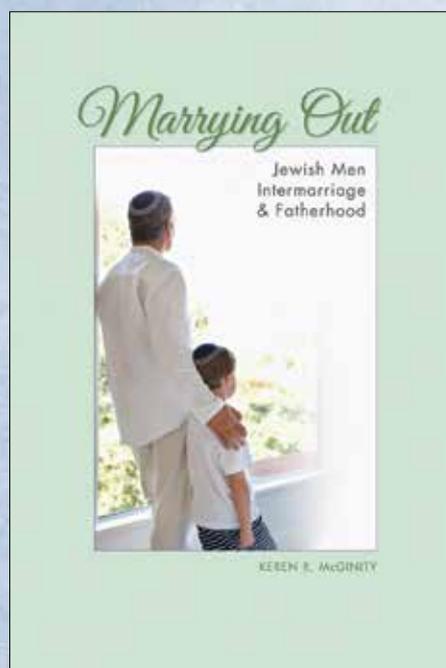
—*The Wall Street Journal*



Paul V. McNutt and the Age of FDR

DEAN J. KOTLOWSKI

The life of a great understudied figure in the era of FDR—a governor of Indiana, high commissioner to the Philippines, head of the WWII Federal Security Agency, and would-be presidential candidate—whose life underscores the challenges and changes Americans faced during an age of economic depression, global conflict, and decolonialization. While serving as high commissioner to the Philippines, McNutt helped 1,200 Jews flee Nazi Germany for Manila.

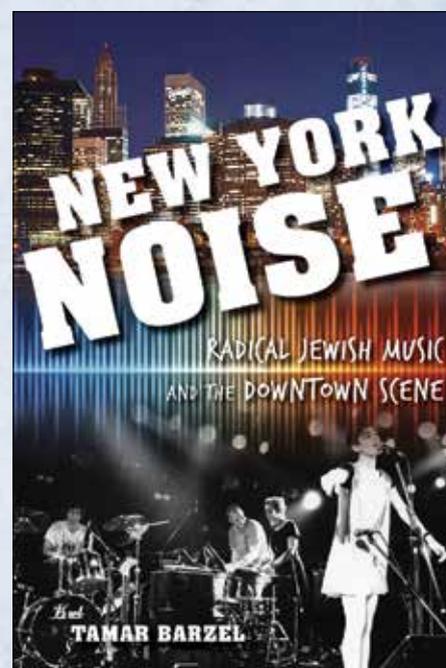


Marrying Out

Jewish Men, Intermarriage, and Fatherhood

KEREN R. MCGINITY

This major breakthrough in examining intermarriage through the eyes of a post-WWII cohort of Jewish men looks to understand their experiences as husbands and fathers, how Christian women navigate their own roles and identities while married to them, and what needs to change for American Jewry to flourish.



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Though relatively fleeting in rock history, the “RJC moment” forged a new vision of Jewish identity in the contemporary world, one that sought to restore the bond between past and present, to interrogate the limits of racial and gender categories, and to display the tensions between secularism and observance, traditional values and contemporary concerns.

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Fateless: The Beilis Trial a Century Later

BY STEVEN J. ZIPPERSTEIN

“Now there is nothing else for us but Beilis, only Beilis.”

—Sholem Aleichem, *The Further Adventures of Menachem-Mendel*

Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis

by Medel Beilis, edited by Jay Beilis, Jeremy Simcha Garber, and Mark S. Stein
Beilis Publishing, 336 pp., \$29.95

A Child of Christian Blood: Murder and Conspiracy in Tsarist Russia: The Beilis Blood Libel

by Edmund Levin
Schocken, 400 pp., \$29.95

Malamud: Novels and Stories of the 1960s

edited by Philip Davis
The Library of America, 916 pp., \$35

Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia

by Hans Rogger
University of California Press, 297 pp., out of print (but widely available)

Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis

by Robert Weinberg
Indiana University Press, 204 pp., \$24

In the fall of 1913, a hundred newspaper reporters packed the Kiev courtroom where for five weeks Mendel Beilis was tried for the murder of a 12-year-old whose body had been found, in the spring of 1911, in a cave near the brick factory where Beilis worked. He was accused of having murdered the boy in order to use his blood to make matza. That Thanksgiving, in New York, no fewer than six Yiddish-language theaters staged plays about him. Mendel Beilis' fame was lavish, if bitter and short-lived.

Nearly all of the journalists covering the proceedings, including most of those representing Russia's anti-Semitic press, saw the prosecution's efforts as corrupt, the by-product of mendacity at the highest governmental levels, a terrible, stupid tale of a Jew caught in the vise of dark medievalism. Beilis suffered more than two years of imprisonment before being exonerated by a jury that decided that, while he was innocent, a ritual murder had actually occurred.

Yet here, as is so often the case, life's protagonists disappoint, a reminder that their brush with history was an accident, a stumble. In art, certainly in film, those caught up in history's sagas tend to look like

Robert Redford (or at least Alan Bates, who played the Beilis character in the adaptation of Bernard Malamud's novel *The Fixer*), but more often than not, they look like the stooped, chinless Beilis.

And his is a tale, arguably, still more confounding than most. “The greatest handicap . . . is its

Russia's most vocal anti-Semites claimed that Kiev was overrun by Jews, who would soon turn it into another Berdichev.

improbability,” observed Maurice Samuel on the difficulty of writing *Blood Accusation: The Strange History of the Beiliss Case*, “and by this I mean not only the inanity of the attempt to prove the Blood Accusation but also the entire structure of the conspiracy. A bare recital of the facts, however strongly documented, would leave the reader incredulous.”

First of all, Beilis himself was miscast: The poster-child victim of anti-Semitism in the last years of the Romanovs was a Russian military vet-



Mendel Beilis leaving court in May 1913, his indictment for ritual murder clasped in his hand. (Photograph courtesy of Edmund Levin.)

eran with stalwart Russian friends and warm supporters even among the regime's vocal anti-Semites. Beilis yearned for the companionship of Russian prisoners to share his cell because he found them, on the whole, kind and sympathetic. Once his trial concluded, he was so sought after in Kiev by non-

Jews and Jews alike that tram conductors would call out, “Take Number 16 to Beilis.”

Then there was the story's femme fatale, Vera Cheberiak, who was the likely murderer of the boy. Nery, tempestuous, a voracious liar, and serial philanderer, she was a petty thief who appears to have

tried to cover up her thievery with the butchery of a playmate of her son who seemed likely to inform the authorities. Hardly anyone in the saga resembles, say, Rasputin, who really looked his part (though Cheberiak does seem to have also had mesmerizing eyes), not even Tsar Nicholas II, whose preoccupation with Jews was more aimless and muddled than many believed at the time and later.

Years ago the formidable historian Ben Zion Dinur, Israel's education minister under David Ben-Gurion, argued that nearly every aspect of Hitler's Final Solution had been previewed by the tsarist regime in its final years when the Beilis trial occurred. Here was a police state pursuing a concerted policy of persecution employing both the instruments of a vast bureaucracy and pogromist hoodlums to level a huge Jewish community. Such sweeping historical assertions can no longer be sustained in light of recent historical work that portrays a Russian regime less comprehensively focused on Jews or, for that matter, much of anything else.

But then how is it that Mendel Beilis stumbled into posterity, and what, if anything, do his travails teach about the larger contours of Jewish fate in the Russian Empire? In the wake of post-Soviet opening of archival material, the details of this affair can finally be reconstructed, in its dizzying twists and turns, nearly hour by hour. The story that emerges challenges, in ways small and large, long-regnant assumptions about the rhythms and routines of Jewish life in Russia, its miseries as well as its pleasures.

Beilis' story pushes into bold relief features of a Russian-Jewish life both alarmingly worse but also strikingly better than is often imagined. By far the best years of his life were those he spent in Kiev managing a brick factory, supervising non-Jews who lauded him as an exemplary manager, sometimes even as a friend, and who enthusiastically spoke on his behalf in court. True, he would be persecuted by an insipid and bumbling Russian bureaucracy, but he also found defenders from nearly every sector of Russian civil society. In its own way, Beilis' life is something of a Russian-Jewish success story. He was a happy man before he was made into a miserable one.

Beilis worked in a brandy distillery before he was drafted into the infantry at 18 and sent to Tver for a few years. After he was discharged, he married and worked for his wife's uncle, who owned a brick-making kiln in a town near Kiev. One of the city's Jewish grandees, Jonah Zaitsev, hired him away to manage a new brick factory, where he worked for 15 years evidencing barely a hint of discomfort with his Christian neighbors; during the 1905 Kiev pogrom a local priest protected him and his family from harm. His oldest son, one of five children, attended a secondary school with non-Jewish schoolmates at the local *gymnasium*. In his memoir, published in Yiddish and recently reissued in English, Beilis wrote, "I thanked the Lord for what I had, and was satisfied with my secure and respectable position."

Kiev had long been a magnet for Jews, mostly petty traders and laborers, but also some merchants and a thin stratum of very wealthy Jews, including some of the richest in the empire. Residency restrictions made it impossible for all but the most privileged Jews to live there before the late 1850s, but eventually they made up 11 percent of the city's population (over 30,000), mostly clustered in wretched outlying districts packed with tiny work-places and factories.

One hundred Jews were murdered in the Kiev pogrom of 1905, among Russia's most vicious anti-Jewish attacks. Still, it remained afterward, too, a place for the ambitious or restless to settle, a boisterous, crowded city where money could be made and where a decent life was at least conceivable. Jews filled the city's streets as small shopkeepers, carters, and peddlers (most of Kiev's staggeringly numerous liquor shops were run by Jews).

Russia's most vocal anti-Semites claimed that Kiev was overrun by Jews, who would soon turn it into another Berdichev. Jews complained they were made to feel unwanted because anti-Semites dominated the municipal government and much of the local press. Kiev had a richer array of anti-Jewish organizations than found elsewhere, though they often battled one another often with greater intensity than they fought Jews. Among the most visible

was the Union of the Russian People, or the Black Hundreds, who would play a prominent role in stirring up charges against Beilis.

In March 1911, the body of 12-year-old Andrei Yushchinsky had been discovered in a cave 300 yards away from Mendel Beilis' office. "As I looked through my window," he later wrote, "I saw people hurrying somewhere, all in one direction." This struck him at the time as odd, but he returned to his receipts. The investigation dragged on, little noticed beyond officialdom, and unlinked to Jews except, at least initially, by a handful of local fanatics.

At first the murder investigation was a straightforward one, albeit increasingly thwarted by local authorities, homegrown racist pressure groups, and eventually by some in Saint Petersburg. Two police investigators following credible leads that brought them to Cheberiak's doorstep were fired and even brought up on charges. One spent time in jail; both were disgraced.

A coroner's report—two were produced, in

fact—soon made it clear that the body had been stabbed repeatedly; the boy suffering a wild, frenzied attack even after he had died. From the outset, the conceivability of ritual murder was deemed sufficiently compelling to have been considered. The coroner investigated whether blood had been drained from the body after death, but found that this hadn't occurred.

Then in, July 1911, Minister of Justice Ivan Shcheglovitov gave the nod to pursue this as a ritual murder case. Fifteen police were dispatched to arrest Beilis, waking him in the middle of the night. Later, when he was sent from the local police station to prison a couple of miles away, he was accompanied by a solitary officer who, deciding that Beilis shouldn't be compelled to walk the distance, took him by public trolley. A neighbor of Beilis', who was a member of the Black Hundreds wearing the anti-Semitic group's pin on his lapel, embraced and kissed Beilis and announced to Beilis and the other passengers that he shouldn't fear because everyone knew he was innocent.

Meanwhile, in September 1911, P. A. Stolypin, minister of internal affairs and chairman of the tsar's Council of Ministers, was shot and killed in front of Nicholas II, in the Kiev Opera House. The assassin was an anarchist revolutionary, who was also an informer for the secret police, named Dmitri Bogrov. Bogrov was born into a family of converted Jews who were nonetheless seen as Jewish, and his origins seemed likely to further exacerbate anti-Jewish feeling.

The trial itself was bizarre. Witnesses for the prosecution acknowledged on the stand that they'd been bribed or in other ways compelled to testify against Beilis; the prosecution eventually could think of no better argument than that he was in cahoots with Vera Cheberiak, whom he clearly didn't know. The jury was rigged, and the judge showed unabashed bias.

Despite the coroner's evidence, eventually Beilis' defense team would feel compelled to insist that Yushchinsky's body had not been drained of its blood, leaving the impression—unfortunate, if also under the circumstances perhaps inescapable—that had such drainage happened it would have pointed toward Jewish culpability. At the time those believing in Jewish ritual murder held that the practice was maintained by a small secretive sect of Hasidim. Much effort on the part of Beilis' prosecution would consequently be devoted to linking the ritually indifferent Beilis—he worked on the Sabbath—to Hasidism. That Beilis knew a hay dealer named Shneyerson, who despite his last name was not related to the Lubavitcher dynasty and was, in fact, no less indifferent to the strictures of Jewish practice than Beilis, would occupy many, many hours of the prosecution's time.

During the trial, an acclaimed expert for the prosecution who affirmed that ritual murder was mandated in the Talmud proved unable to name any of its 63 tractates. In a rare moment of levity, an anti-Semitic priest with pretensions to vast textual expertise was asked when Baba Batra lived. (The question was, of course, a trick: *Baba* is Russian for a peasant woman, and *Baba Batra* is perhaps the best known of all talmudic tractates.) The befuddled witness made it clear that he had no idea what he was being asked. Nearly all the many Jews in the room—except, that is, for Beilis, who sat stone-faced



Vera Cheberiak, the likely murderer. (Courtesy of Edmund Levin.)



"In Memory of the Beilis Trial: Beilis Not Guilty, Jews Guilty." Yiddish postcard by Mitchel Loeb, ca. 1913. (Courtesy of YIVO.)

during nearly all the 34-day ordeal—laughed openly. Prosecutors privately recorded later that day that they knew they'd botched the testimony. But Beilis' lawyers, a stellar team made up of some of the leading jurists in the empire, all but one of them non-Jews, were convinced the jury would convict Beilis even though the prosecution had presented no solid evidence at all.

In stark contrast to the Dreyfus case in France, essentially all sectors of Russian society, except the far right, applauded Beilis' release.

Split down the middle six to six, Beilis' jury declared him innocent, since Russian law stipulated that such decisions rendered the accused free. But it also decided that a ritual murder had transpired, which permitted both sides to claim victory. Still, in stark contrast to the Dreyfus case in France, essentially all sectors of Russian society, except the far right, applauded his release. Russia's most prominent Jew-haters—the term “honest anti-Semite” was used at the time to describe them—felt the trial a terrible embarrassment and a setback.

Why did it happen? The reason for Beilis' selection was clear: He was the only Jew within spitting distance of the murder scene, living, as he did, in a district where Jewish residency restrictions were still in force. But little else about this episode makes much sense. Why focus on a Jew? Why the support given to the prosecution from the highest reaches of the Russian government, most consistently by Minister of Justice Shcheglovitov? And why proceed with it for years despite the fact, now clearer than ever because of the availability of archival sources, that those prosecuting Beilis knew him to be innocent?

At the time of the trial, the answers seemed self-evident: It was a plot by the tsarist government led by resolutely anti-Semitic Nicholas II, which sought to use Beilis as a distraction from mounting radicalism, or, perhaps, as a way of deflecting opposition to the restrictions on Jewish residency in discussions of the Pale of Settlement, or perhaps simply to set in motion a murderous wave of pogroms.

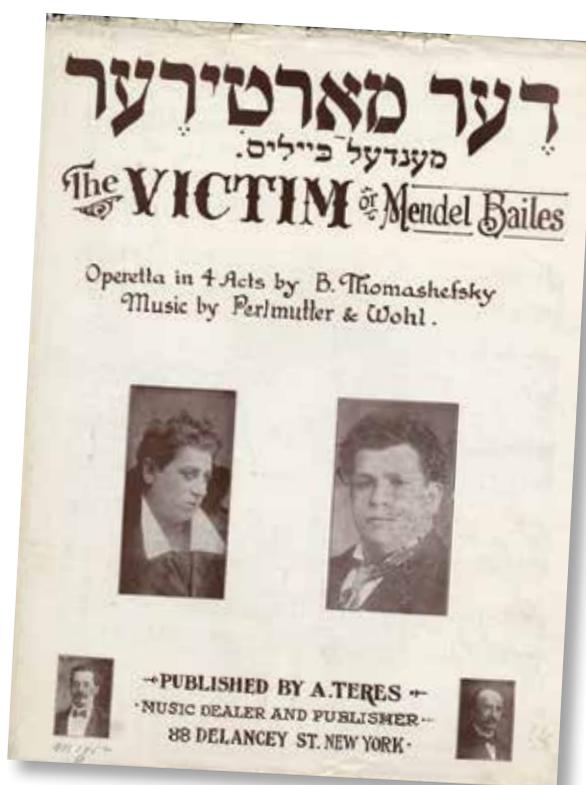
Books on the case, starting with Alexander Tager's 1933 path-breaking Russian-language study *The Decay of Czarism*, concurred that the sordid business was the work of a regime on the skids. And still many years later, this is essentially the viewpoint offered in Edmund Levin's new book, *A Child of Christian Blood: Murder and Conspiracy in Tsarist Russia: The Beilis Blood Libel*. As he sees it, the regime sought to persecute Beilis because of its single-minded policy of discrimination against Jews, which was born of the need to impose unity onto a multinational, pre-modern state. And, as he sees it, all this was traceable to Nicholas II himself.

Levin relates the mesmerizing details of the Beilis case with sure command of the archival material. Unfortunately, his historical scaffolding is rickety, the product of outworn notions about the workings of late imperial Russia. The trial itself is superbly described, but the larger context in which

it was conducted is scanted and the complex social and political terrain is flattened. His treatment of Nicholas II's personal involvement is indicative of the book's problems. Although Levin acknowledges the tsar's sentiments are “hard to discern,” he nonetheless insists “it stood to reason that a man who believed a divine whisper urged him to persecute the Jews was likely to welcome an endeavor that

sought to prove their fanatical malevolence.” Servitors like Shcheglovitov must have “believed he was doing what the tsar wished him to do.”

A first-rate summary of how leading histo-



The Victim, an operetta about Mendel Beilis, written by Boris Thomashefsky, 1913. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

rians of the period now view the trial's backdrop can be found in Robert Weinberg's excellent new volume, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis*, which tells the story through well-chosen and translated primary documents together with an insightful analysis. As Weinberg observes, almost half a century ago UCLA historian Hans Rogger, whom Levin cites often but mostly misunderstands, made a convincing case for a drastically different scenario. As Rogger wrote, first in 1966 in the journal *Slavic Review* and then in his groundbreaking volume *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia*, while Nicholas II's antagonism toward Jews certainly ran deep there is no evidence that the tsar instigated the case against Beilis. When the case was first launched, in 1911, he was not preoccupied with the threat of radicalism, and there was no need to thwart the prospect of the abolition of the Pale of Settlement then, which would never happen anyway. Moreover, the widespread belief that

the tsars had been behind the pogroms had been thoroughly dislodged by decades of research. Little, if anything, so terrified Russian rulers as much as mass violence in the empire's towns or villages. As Rogger noted:

There had been no grand design; there had not even been a tactical plan. There had been an experiment, conducted by a small band of unsuccessful politicians and honest maniacs to see how far they could go in imposing their cynicism and their madness on the state. They had succeeded beyond all expectation.

The whole, wretched enterprise was initially launched by fanatics led at first by an unstable, charismatic seminary student named Vladimir Golubev, whose machinations would mesh, likely much to his surprise, with those of the minister of justice, as well as others in the tsarist administration. This ménage of the obscure and consequential acted without any cue from Nicholas II, though some of them were no doubt convinced that their activity could provide direction for a rudderless regime.

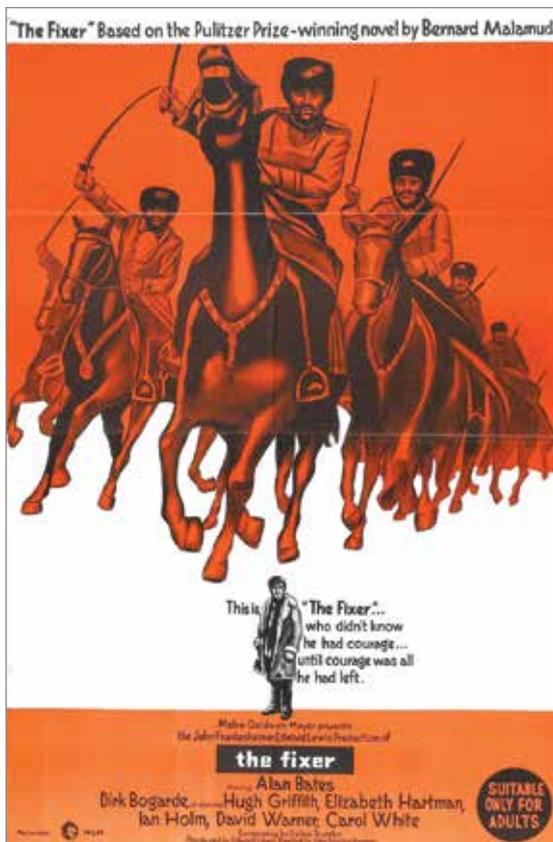
Golubev and fellow “honest maniacs” distributed anti-Jewish leaflets at Yushchinsky's funeral, interfered with the police investigation of Cheberiak, and pressed to have detectives unconvinced of Beilis' guilt fired or exiled, until the case took on a life of its own. This happened when others less delusional and more calculating and influential linked themselves to it. They did so, Rogger argued, not because they were enlisted by the tsar but, rather, because they had long ago lost faith in his or his family's capacity to hold Russia in check, and because they were now casting about for new, untested sources for Russian solidarity in the face of mounting threats internal as well as external.

If, as is almost certain, Shcheglovitov knew that there was no such thing as ritual murder, his unwavering commitment to the Beilis case and to the men who had inspired it was yet a matter of principle. Or, rather, it was the search for a principle, for a common belief which would rally and bind together the disheartened forces of unthinking monarchism . . . Lacking a monarch who could have embodied the autocratic principle with vigor and infectious conviction, they had only anti-Semitism and the notion of universal evil, with the Jews as its carriers, to make sense of a world that was escaping their control and their intellectual grasp . . . Judeophobia was to be the catechism and ritual murder the *credo quia absurdum* which would make possible a comprehensive attitude not only toward Jews, but toward men in general, toward history and society. Anti-Semitism was to become, in Sartre's words, at one and the same time a passion and a conception of the world.

In Rogger's view, Jews in Russia's last years before the outbreak of the First World War faced a dilemma far less coherent or coordinated than widely believed then or now, but also in its own way more ominous than they could have known. Anti-Semitism was not the engine of statecraft, but it was also no longer merely the inchoate plaything of the politically marginal. Russia's very salvation was

linked to a campaign against the Jews. Beilis was the test case. As an experiment it failed miserably (he was acquitted) but it also succeeded (half the jury was convinced of his guilt with all of Russia made to talk about Jewish perfidy).

The question of Beilis' guilt was irrelevant to his accusers: In this respect their calculations were sim-



Poster advertising *The Fixer* by Bernard Malamud, 1968.

ilar to those, also on the Russian ultra-right, who stitched together and then promulgated the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” They, too, knew well that the words attributed in their forgery to the invented Elders had never actually been spoken, but they were nonetheless convinced that they were as close to the real, terrible plans of the Jews as they’d likely ever know. The infamous forgery, like Kiev’s rigged trial, both pockmarked with lies and misdeeds, were justified by the overarching reality of Jewry’s unspeakable machinations.

So many touched by the affair ended badly. The Kiev prosecutors earned promotions once it was concluded, but the 1917 revolution consumed nearly all of them. Both Minister of Justice Shcheglovitov and Vera Cheberiak were sought out and murdered by Bolsheviks. In post-Soviet Russia, the murder victim Yushchinsky has been recast into a sainted figure, who is again widely believed to have been murdered for Jewish ritualistic purposes.

Even Bernard Malamud, whose fictionalized account of the trial, *The Fixer*, won both the Pulitzer and National Book Awards in 1967, and has been recently republished in The Library of America’s edition of his work from the 1960s, reaped his share of misery. Once the book appeared, he was hounded by Beilis’ heirs, and decades after his death, they hound him still in the new edition of Beilis’ *The Story of My Sufferings*, which was privately released by the family three years ago under the title *Blood Libel: The Life and Memory of Mendel Beilis*. A new epilogue to the memoir in-

sists that all that’s worthwhile in Malamud’s novel is plagiarized while taking it to task for departing from the details of Beilis’ life. A list of Malamud’s transgressions is provided that reads like the melding of a Soviet literary commissar’s report with that of an obtuse Jewish communal staffer. These charges first surfaced on the novel’s appearance, the same year Maurice Samuel’s *Blood Accusation* was published. In response Malamud sought, without success, to have the memoirs, which were no longer under copyright, reissued. (Perhaps he felt uneasy with the sometimes painfully close resemblance between his prose and that of Beilis—even paranoid relatives can have genuine cause for complaint.)

Malamud, who picked up bits and pieces of Russian-Jewish life while researching his novel and then went off to the Soviet Union for a week or two to glimpse some of the sights, produced a very American Jewish book, certainly not a history. Its primary inspiration, as he later admitted, was the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, and his portrait of Jewish life under the tsars is, unsurprisingly, flat, sparsely informed, and much influenced, as he gratefully acknowledged, by the flaccid anthropological study of Eastern European Jewry *Life Is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl*. (On the peculiar history of that book and its principal author who was, among other things, a Stalinist spy, see my essay “Underground Man: The Curious Case of Mark Zborowski and the Writing of a Modern Jewish Classic,” which appeared in the Summer 2010 issue of this magazine.) In fact, Malamud lifted passages almost directly from *Life Is with People*, much as he did from

Beilis’ memoir. The novel’s sinews are laid out in Philip Davis’ recent, superb biographical study, *Bernard Malamud: A Life*.

The enduring power of *The Fixer* is in its vivid portrait of protagonist Jakob Bok’s unrelentingly bitter fate. Like that of so many of the noble, hapless protagonists of Malamud’s fiction, it is the by-product of one, perhaps two small but fatal missteps: He nearly has sex with the daughter of a Black Hundreds’ devotee—a drunk and lout far more uncompromisingly bigoted than was Beilis’ real-life trolley-riding neighbor—and he hides that he is Jewish so that he can work in a brick factory located in a district closed to Jews. In contrast to Beilis, he is childless, a cuckold, and loathed by nearly all Gentiles he encounters. For moral and intellectual sustenance he relies on the life and thought of Baruch Spinoza, though, in this respect, he more closely resembles a figure from Isaac Bashevis Singer’s fiction than Mendel Beilis.

Everything about Malamud’s musings about Beilis upset his heirs but nothing more, it seems, than a stray comment of his, made soon after the novel’s appearance, that Beilis had “died a bitter man.” It is difficult for any reader of Beilis’ own still-riveting tale of misery to conclude otherwise. His celebrity was instantaneous, and he was promised huge sums if he traveled the United States on a lecture tour. Reclusive and exhausted by the years in prison, Beilis demurred and was then detained by the First World War. He spent time in Palestine, where his hosts were confronted with more pressing concerns than Beilis’ material support.

In 1921, Beilis settled in New York, where things

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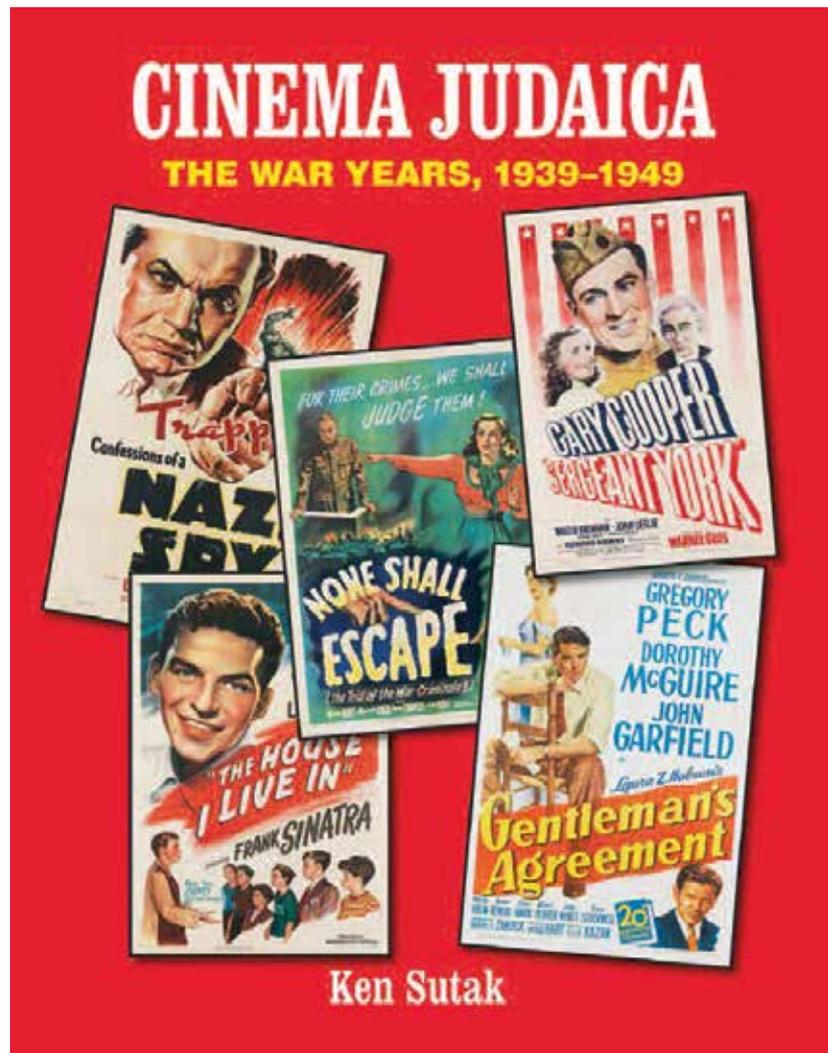
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worsened still. His oldest son, who had remained in Palestine, committed suicide; promises made to him in America, no doubt sincerely in 1913, had now dried up. His celebrity had waned; job offers were few and far between. Prospective employers were wary of

Maurice Samuel's *Blood Accusation*—Hans had no idea that Samuel was at work on it—appeared on their doorstep. As soon as he read it, he cancelled his contract and destroyed the manuscript. His papers, now at the Hoover Institution, offer no clue as

The Russian case always seemed to be a very simple one. The existence of a Jewish problem was generally recognized, as was the fact that discrimination, openly practiced, was rooted in the laws and administrative practices of a backward polity and society.

Beilis' memoirs, serialized first in the Yiddish press and then released as a book both in Yiddish and English, sold fairly well, but he died a poor man.

hiring him for menial work, but he was qualified for little else. For a while he sold insurance. His memoirs, serialized first in the Yiddish press and then released as a book both in Yiddish and English, sold fairly well, but he died a poor man. Thousands attended his funeral at the Eldridge Street synagogue.

"And that is, up to now, the last chapter in the story of my sufferings" is how Beilis summed up these grim New York years. Was it really much of a leap for Malamud to conclude that he died bitter?

Strangely enough, the historian Hans Rogger was also singled by his preoccupation with Mendel Beilis. Hans, who died in 2002, was my teacher. He was a historian of great discipline and achievement, arguably the leading scholar of Russian conservatism. In the early 1960s, he signed a book contract with a large trade publisher, I think Random House, to write the definitive work on Beilis. The manuscript was nearly completed, his widow Claire recalls, on the terrible morning when the copy of

to what the work might have looked like, though his stunning *Slavic Review* essay on the Beilis case, published in 1966, the same year as both Samuel's history and Malamud's novel, remains the finest account of its origins and implications.

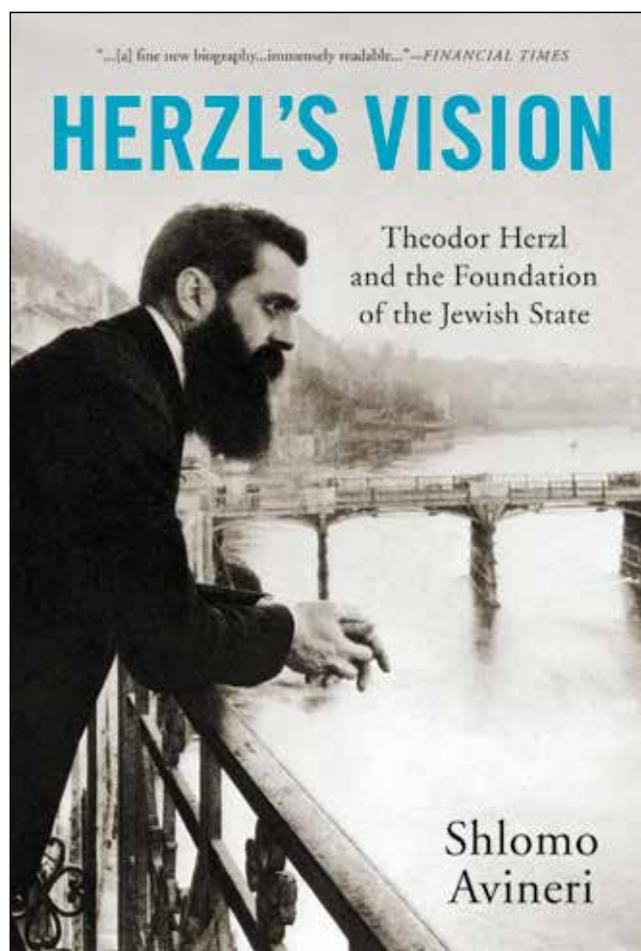
There was good reason for Hans, a man of stringent standards, to despair after reading Samuel's book. *Blood Accusation* is a first-rate popular history, still riveting half a century after its appearance. But Hans knew so much that Samuel didn't, and I've sometimes imagined arguing with him on that awful day, trying to dissuade him from doing what he did. But I met him years later and was uneasy for the longest time in the presence of his genteel, German-Jewish urbanity. I only became his friend long after the manuscript was gone.

In *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* Rogger cogently explained why the Beilis affair and, more generally, the Russian-Jewish past have proven so vexingly difficult to confront with clarity:

Beilis' tale, seemingly so transparent, but in reality so wildly complicated, provides a particularly bracing reminder in this regard. Lessons drawn from it have mostly been ill-conceived. The story of Beilis' own life before his arrest provides little support for those inclined to conflate Russian-Jewish life at the empire's end with the eventual horrors of Nazi Europe.

Still, those forces responsible for thrusting Beilis into the limelight, while not nearly as well organized or officially mandated as has long been assumed, were little less fierce in their loathing for Jews than those who were later at the helm of Hitler's Europe. To be sure they did not have the same genocidal plans, but in both cases one sees a hatred numb to the mundane demands of literal truth, while confident in its capacity to understand life's most important, terrible secrets in terms of Jewish perfidy.

Steven J. Zipperstein is the Daniel E. Koshland Professor in Jewish Culture and History at Stanford. He has published widely on modern Jewish history and culture and last spring was the first Jacob Kronhill Visiting Scholar at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York.



Herzl's Vision

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Why the Germans?

BY GAVRIEL D. ROSENFELD

Why the Germans? Why the Jews? Envy, Race Hatred, and the Prehistory of the Holocaust

by Götz Aly

Metropolitan Books, 304 pp., \$30

A World Without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide

by Alon Confino

Yale University Press, 304 pp., \$30

The two questions that make up the title of the German scholar Götz Aly's latest book are the ones that many historians of the Holocaust have been attempting to answer for decades. And as the book's subtitle suggests, the answer that Aly supplies is not radically new. The novel twist in his argument consists of the way he links envy and race hatred as causal factors: Aly argues that the German people's "gnawing envy" of the Jews ended up combining "with a collectivist longing for a life among equals" and "paved the way for [the] racial theory" that the Nazis employed in their genocidal assault on the Jews in their own country and beyond.

What made the German Jews so enviable, Aly explains, was the way that they took advantage of the new economic opportunities that arose in the course of the 19th century, as the old feudal order gave way to the modern world. More literate and academically agile than their Christian peers, German Jews were "eight times more likely to earn a better class of secondary-school degree" and used their "educational head start" to pursue "well-paying forms of intellectual labor." By 1914, Aly reports, they earned "five times the income of the average Christian." As a consequence, "the Christian majority, only too conscious that they needed to move up the social ladder, became obsessed with how quickly Jews were bettering themselves."

This economic disparity was hard enough for Germans to stomach, but it was all the more painful given their collective insecurity as the inhabitants of a historically divided polity. Thanks to the traumas of the Thirty Years' War and the Napoleonic invasions, the German people lacked a sense of "self-confidence" and thus sought to overcompensate by embracing an exaggerated sense of national identity. Tragically, according to Aly, this identity was based upon "weakness, timidity, self-doubt, resistance to progress, pent-up aggression, and xenophobia." The Germans' resulting "hypersensitivity toward minorities" explains why anti-Semitic outbursts erupted in the early 1800s, not only in the writings of intellectuals, such as Ernst Moritz Arndt, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, and Jakob Friedrich Fries, but in the form of pogroms, such as the Hep Hep Riots of 1819.

Anti-Semitism further intensified following the unification of the German Empire in 1871. Espe-

cially after the economic crash of 1873, the "losers" in the industrialization process—mostly members of the German lower middle class—found solace in the anti-Semitic agenda of Adolf Stöcker's Christian Social Party, which called for new restrictions on Jewish economic activity. Aly quotes the liberal

In a provocative twist, Aly goes on to argue that the envy felt by many Germans toward Jews was ironically bolstered by progressive ideals—especially those of democracy, freedom, and equality.

politician Albert Traeger as accusing Stöcker of exploiting "the jealousy of the incompetent . . . as a weapon against those with greater abilities." Equally telling was economist Werner Sombart's 1912 claim that because "Jews are quite a lot more clever and industrious than we [Germans] are," it was necessary to prevent Jews from holding academic chairs, otherwise "all university lectureships and professorships would be held by Jews or Jewish converts to Christianity."



Young Nazi party members and German youth destroy "anti-German" books in a public book burning, Berlin, May 1933. (Courtesy of Associated Press.)

In a provocative twist, however, Aly goes on to argue that the envy felt by many Germans toward Jews was ironically bolstered by progressive ideals—especially those of democracy, freedom, and equality. The pursuit of democratization advanced anti-Semitism to the degree that the same masses clamoring to gain political rights from the elites sought to deny them to their Jewish competitors. Equally bound up with anti-Semitism was the craving for freedom and equality, which the German masses sought in a homogeneously defined "national community," which promised collective security in a changing world.

This clamoring for equality climaxed after World War I in the crisis-ridden years of the Weimar Republic when, against the backdrop of military defeat, socialist revolution, and national humiliation, the Nazi party promised the German masses true social equality by creating a nationally homogenous state

purged of its one powerful impediment—the Jew, whose manipulation of capitalism and communism threatened to keep Germans divided and weak.

The key tool employed by the Nazis in their quest for equality was racial theory. According to Aly, the German people's envy toward Jews fed into an exaggerated sense of racial superiority, which many observers at the time regarded as a "compensatory mechanism" for deep-seated feelings of "social inferiority."

He further adduces the class backgrounds of both the Nazi leaders and followers as evidence that the goal of "social mobility" spurred the anti-Semitic effort to dispossess the Jews. The fact that countless Germans ended up profiting from the Nazis' anti-Semitic policies by taking the Jews' jobs, businesses, and possessions explains why, in Aly's estimation, "the overwhelming majority of Germans remained silent about the state's persecution of Jews" and ultimately became active or passive participants in the Holocaust.

Aly's argument is in keeping with his other works on the Nazi era, such as his recent book *Hitler's*

Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State, which implicates not only the political right, but also the left, in the rise and success of the Nazi dictatorship. He especially indicts what he sees as his collectivist-oriented home country's insufficient respect for Anglo-American ideas of individual liberty. Aly's argument also reflects a contemporary agenda. In declaring in his conclusion that "the mortal sin of envy . . . is what made the systematic mass murder of European Jews possible," he maintains that the inability to banish such feelings from human life means that "another event structurally similar to the Holocaust could still occur."

Aly's account is in many ways compelling, but it is not as much of an explanation as he thinks it is. Envy accounts for a good deal of modern anti-Semitism, especially its economic variety, but it cannot provide an answer to the first question in his book's title: "Why the Germans?" This question calls out for a comparative analysis of German anti-Semitism with that of other European countries that Aly does not provide. Moreover, his focus on envy is difficult to square with Germany's embrace of racial anti-Semitism. Racial arguments about Jews were ultimately about Jewish *inferiority* and the menace that it posed to Germans. The poor, religiously traditional Jews of Eastern Europe who were murdered en masse in the Holocaust were not viewed as competitors to be envied; they were viewed as an existential threat.

Aly's underplaying of the phantasmagorical dimension of German anti-Semitism makes it seem overly rational and creates a skewed perspective of the historical reality of German-Jewish success and German-Christian backwardness. Yes, German Jews were disproportionately successful relative to their percentage of the overall German population (of which they were less than 1 percent), but they were small enough in absolute numbers to allow ample room for Christian Germans to thrive. Jews represented 10 percent of Prussia's university students in 1886, which, while impressive, means that 90 percent were Christian. Similarly, while 20 percent of Prussia's millionaires were Jews, 80 percent were Christian. These and similar statistics make clear that German fears of imminent Jewish domination were chimerical.

Moreover, as Aly himself notes, the gap between German Jews' and Christians' success rates was narrowing at the very time that Nazi-era hatred of the Jews was intensifying. Aly attempts to explain this paradox by postulating a law that "as soon as an economically and socially backward majority . . . narrows the gap with a more quickly ad-

vanced minority, the danger of hate and violence increases." But this fails to explain why Jew-hatred arose at an earlier time, when the equality gap between Jews and Christians was much larger.

Aly's law also undermines the historical lessons that he wants readers to take away from his narrative. If we follow his logic, it would seem that for hatred to be combated, envy must be eradicated. But if envy is rooted in economic inequality, then the seemingly reasonable solution—imposing economic equality—would exacerbate the same collectivist tendencies that Aly says are implicated in nurturing hatred in the first place. There were forces no less powerful than envy underpinning anti-Semitism.

Alon Confino's stimulating book advances a far less materialistic explanation of Nazi anti-Semitism. In his introduction, Confino criticizes recent theories of the Holocaust's origins—



A sign in a restaurant window prohibits Jews from entering, Vienna, ca. March 1938. (Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.)



Anti-Semitic float in a parade, Altenahr, Rhineland, ca. late 1930s. (Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.)

especially those that attribute it to modern imperialism, racism, and warfare—for neglecting to incorporate the subjective role of emotions, sensibilities, and the imagination. He stresses the necessity of addressing these matters because the Nazi decision to kill the Jews was ultimately "built on a fantasy, in the sense that anti-Jewish beliefs had no basis in reality." The Nazis, Confino writes, "waged a war against an imaginary enemy that had no belligerent intentions toward Germany and possessed no army, state, or government." Why, then, did they launch their murderous campaign to create a world without Jews? They did so, Confino argues, in the attempt to devise a redemptive solution to "the problem of the origins of historical evil."

Like Aly, Confino argues that the Nazis viewed the Jews "as the creators of an evil modernity that soiled present-day Germany." They blamed the Jews for nearly every negative economic, social, political, and cultural phenomenon that had roiled German life, including:

bolshevism, communism, Marxism, socialism, liberalism, capitalism, conservatism, pacifism, cosmopolitanism, materialism, atheism, and democracy . . . as well as for sexual freedom, psychoanalysis, feminism, homosexuality, . . . jazz music, . . . Bauhaus architecture, and . . . abstract painting.

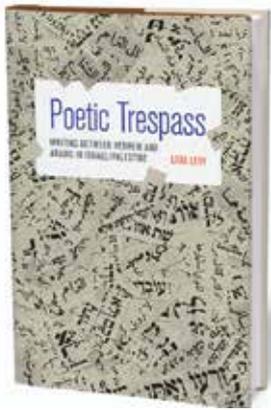
The only way to defend Germany from these modern forces, they believed, was by forging a supersessionist Nazi "modernity" that would be created via destruction—via the wholesale removal of the Jews (and Jewish influences) from German life.

Confino begins his narrative with a discussion of a notorious event that serves as his book's leitmotif—the fact that on Kristallnacht in 1938, the Nazis demolished not only Jewish businesses and synagogues, but destroyed the Hebrew Bible. In a series of chilling passages, Confino describes how:

thousands [of Torahs were destroyed] . . . in hundreds of communities across the Reich, and not only in such metropolises as Berlin, Stettin, Vienna, Dresden, Stuttgart, and Cologne . . . but in small communities [as well] . . .

In Fritzlar, a small town in Hessen . . . , Torah scrolls were rolled along the Nikolausstrasse as Hitler Youth rode their bicycles over them . . . [In] Herford, . . . they shredded it to pieces to a general bellowing and laughing. In the village of Kippenheim, . . . youth threw the Torah scrolls into the local brook . . . In Aachen, Nazis tore the Torah in front of the synagogue and put scraps in their pockets, claiming it would bring them good luck . . . And in Wittlich . . . "a shouting SA man climbed to the roof, waving the rolls of the Torah: 'Wipe your asses with it, Jews,' he screamed while he hurled them like bands of confetti on Carnival."

Confino contends that this very widely practiced act of cultural vandalism undermines explanations of the Holocaust as rooted in racial thinking, for the violence targeted the Jews' sacred religious text. This rampage can be understood, however, if—as Confino argues—the Nazis established their anti-Semitic world view upon a foundation of historic "Christian anti-Judaism." Echoing the findings of

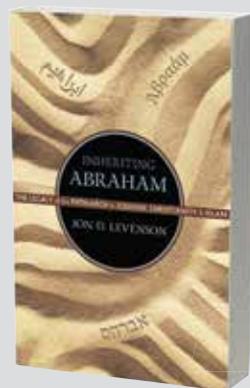


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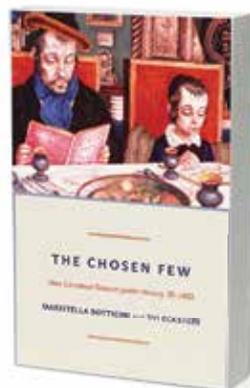


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earlier scholars such as Jacob Katz and Uriel Tal, Confino shows that Nazi and Christian hatreds were fully compatible. But he stresses that the Nazis went further in their anti-Semitic campaign, striving not merely to expunge the Jews from German life, but to eradicate the Jewish roots of Christian European civilization altogether. Burning the Hebrew Bible was thus a momentous turning point in a radical campaign.

Confino's analysis of this campaign proceeds chronologically, with his book's early chapters describing the Nazi regime's methodical organization of anti-Semitic rituals that subjected Jews to popular mockery, discrimination, and symbolic violence. Significantly, much of the effort to purge the malign "Jewish spirit" from German life was the product of grassroots efforts on the part of ordinary Germans, whether it was university students and professors organizing the burning of books written by Jewish and other "un-German" authors or ordinary villagers and townsfolk holding festive parades in which Jews were derided and humiliated in full public view. Confino's inclusion of photographs (uncaptioned) of these mass spectacles provides a chilling glimpse of the popularity of the Nazis' anti-Semitic crusade.

These ritualized events and the ensuing Nuremberg racial laws make clear that, contrary to Aly, Nazi anti-Semitism was motivated less by envy than by fear. The Nazis were obsessed with the threat that Jewish ideas posed to German culture and identity, whose purity they had to protect. To a degree, Confino agrees with Aly when he writes that the Nazis' quest to establish a racially purified vision of Germany's historical roots reflected its "overall insecurity about these roots," especially compared to the Jews' own ancient origins. Yet he is clear that it was ultimately fear—the fear of "contamination," the fear of upheaval in "a fast-changing world"—that led the Nazis to create their own origins myth by attempting to realize the fantasy of a world without Jews.

Only by grasping the depth of the Nazis' fears about the Jews as the ultimate symbol of evil can the regime's accompanying efforts to rewrite Jewish and German history be understood. At the same time that the Nazis were legislatively—and after Kristallnacht, physically—persecuting Jews, they were relentlessly purging German life of any Jewish presence. The physical symbols of Jewish life—synagogues—were erased from the German landscape; Jewish history was rewritten from a Nazi perspective in the form of new Nazi institutes of "Jewish studies"; and the Protestant faith was de-judaized via the "German Christian" movement—all for the sake of creating "a German national and Christian community that was independent of Jewish roots."

Given this agenda, the regime's turn to mass murder was the next step. Following Hitler's infamous January 1939 "prophecy" of the Jews' looming annihilation in the event of a world war, the ensuing eruption of military conflict sealed the Jews' fate. War provided new opportunities and methods to implement a radical vision that had already been established in 1933. In the years 1939–1941, the Nazis experimented with various methods—ghettoization, mass deportations, Einsatzgruppen shootings, and ultimately industrial mass murder in the extermination camps—but the

ultimate goal remained unchanged: "Jews did not deserve to live among humans."

It was not just the Third Reich's leaders, but ordinary Germans and Jews, who sensed the radical rupture represented by this campaign. Germans, Confino explains, recognized the transgressive nature of the Nazis' effort to destroy part of their own (Christian) cultural foundation in order to establish a new racially based empire. Soldiers, for example, wrote to their families (both in approving and horrified terms) of the moral Rubicon that had been crossed in the process of pursuing the Final Solution. Meanwhile, Jewish diarists trapped in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe were equally aware of the apocalyptic rupture that was taking place, confessing that the unprecedented magnitude of events defied description and logical explication.

Without understanding the Holocaust as an expression of the Nazis' desire to reorder the very nature of civilization, its singularity cannot be appreciated. Confino rejects the idea of the Holocaust's uniqueness, but he does distinguish the Nazis' murder of the Jews from their assault against other groups during World War II. He admits that the Nazis killed "inferior" German and Slavic civilians for racial reasons, but stresses that they did so without any of the comprehensiveness that they employed in trying to solve the "Jewish question." This is because the Nazis did not see racial purity as an end in itself, but merely a means for creating a new world purged of Jewish influence.

As an explanation of the Holocaust, Confino's argument is more convincing than Aly's. In addition to discussing the events of 1933–1945 in much greater detail, his book provides a deeper sense of how the German people's intensely emotional hatred of the Jews ultimately led to mass murder. In contrast to Aly's thesis, which ultimately universalizes the Holocaust by attributing it to a familiar and enduring human vice, Confino's thesis provides a deeper analysis of the radically transgressive nature of the Nazi mission.

The only flaw in Confino's penetrating work is his tendency to flirt with abstractions. While he skillfully shows how the Nazis pursued their own origin myth by attacking Jewish history and memory, he is less convincing in arguing that, in doing so, they were pursuing a rebellion against time itself. At various junctures in his book, Confino writes that the Nazis believed "the Jews represented time" in the sense of "evil historical origins"; that the Nazis wanted to create an "empire of time" in Eastern Europe by "destroying a key part of European civilization" as a means of re-forging it anew; and that they made the Jews a "people without time" by locking them in ghettos. These formulations are evocative, but are ultimately unnecessary.

Both Confino and Aly remind us of the centrality of anti-Semitism in the Nazi genocide. In doing so they correct the last generation's tendency to explain the Holocaust as the result of universal, modern forces. What Aly and Confino remind us of so powerfully is that the Holocaust also resulted from the adaptation of historical hatreds to new circumstances.

Gavriel D. Rosenfeld is professor of history at Fairfield University. His new book, Hi Hitler! How the Nazi Past Is Being Normalized in Contemporary Culture, is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.



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Mashed Potatoes and Meatloaf

BY NADIA KALMAN

A Dual Inheritance: A Novel

by Joanna Hershon

Ballantine Books, 512 pp., \$16

Joanna Hershon's fourth novel, *A Dual Inheritance*, seems at first to contain few surprises. The novel begins when Hugh Shipley, a WASP, and Ed Cantowitz, a Jew, meet during their senior year at Harvard. They are different in all the predictable ways: Hugh is tall and aristocratic; Ed is short, dark, and hairy. Hugh's childhood included country clubs, private schools, servants, a distant father; Ed's childhood included city public schools and a yelling father.

The broad outlines of their personalities, too, seem to fall into familiar, almost stereotypical patterns of opposition: Hugh's near apathy and Ed's scholarship-kid hustle; Hugh's noblesse oblige and Ed's materialistic aspirations; Hugh's ascetic remove from the girls who throw themselves at him and Ed's way with women. Nor do the broad outlines of their adult lives carry major surprises. One does good in the Third World; the other goes to Wall Street (no points for correct guesses). Both are very prominent and successful, in the way that Harvard men, in novels, almost always are. That the two men fall out over the affections of Hugh's one true love, the portentously named Helen, is also not unexpected.

And yet, from these overly familiar ingredients, Hershon concocts something satisfying and unexpected. She's like someone who invites you over for meatloaf and mashed potatoes. You may not be very excited about that meal, but once you begin eating you realize that the food is superb and that you've been missing meatloaf.

Hershon's secret is that she understands her ingredients very, very well. For instance, you are not surprised to find that Hugh is a sailor, but would you have pegged him as a weeper? And yet, following a heartbreak, Hugh "began what became (at least to his father) a comical extended crying jag, which would last on and off well into the fall." Weeping is his human, unromantic, and un-romanticized response. There are two surprises here. The first, of course, is Hugh's waterworks. The second is that, after a moment, this new detail seems not surprising, but necessary, obvious, and wholly right. It is so with almost all the unexpected moments in the novel.

Midway through the novel, when the two friends are already middle-aged, Hershon achieves a similar effect as she describes Ed's stroll through New York City:

It was getting dark earlier now, and the air was crisp; everything was beautiful in that sad kind of way that he absolutely fucking hated.

The sentence begins with a common observation about fall, beauty, and sadness, but it's Ed who's thinking this, and the last three words in the sentence are both unexpected and a perfect fit for his character.

You are not surprised to find that Hugh is a sailor, but would you have pegged him as a weeper?

Of course, I thought as I read, of course, Ed would just hate having melancholy autumnal thoughts. This kind of response can only be evoked by a writer who takes care in establishing characters.

The anti-mythologizing, anti-dramatizing tendencies of this novel are another pleasant surprise. Take Helen, whom we encounter through the hazy,



Joanna Hershon. (Courtesy of Jay Fram.)

idealizing gaze of the man who loves her and then through the eyes of others who bear her no particular fondness. To Hugh, Helen may seem like, "Grace Kelly's more distinctive sister," but to an older friend of his family, she's "always seemed a touch off, no?"

In Hugh and Helen's eventual adult relationship, and in others, this book may be suggesting that the idea of one true love is a fallacy, as much as the characters (and some readers) would like to believe otherwise. Ed, for example, encounters and re-encounters a good-looking, smart, practical, loyal, and Jewish woman named Connie. She pops up at least once a decade, and finally he, like the reader, begins to wonder whether they're meant to be:

He remembered Connie's warmth, her humor . . . He remembered the sense that, while he was in her company, she was always looking out for him, and he remembered thinking that she, Connie Graff, was the woman he was supposed to end up with. And it was exactly this sense that

he had turned from. He remembered when he'd turned from it—from her; it had felt, with its requisite bit of pain, exactly like freedom.

The beginning of this passage suggests that we are building toward a big romantic finish, as Ed recalls Connie's sterling qualities and his sense that Connie "was the woman he was supposed to end up with." But, in life, people are usually not so rationally romantic. After considering the possibility of this fate-favored love, Ed, rather casually, decides against it. In moments like this one, it is almost as if Hershon carefully builds a reader's expectations, only to undercut them in a way that, too, seems perfectly logical and necessary.

In the novel's masterful concluding sequence, Hugh and Ed, long estranged, are reunited at a daughter's wedding. Helen and other important characters are there, too.

Such a set-up inevitably creates expectations for a wordy, lengthy, dramatic scene of conflict and reconciliation; that scene never comes, even though several of the characters try to precipitate it. Hugh (again, surprisingly) wonders whether he might have done more good for the world if he had left off humanitarianism and tried to make some "real dough," a line of speculation that leaves Ed feeling not vindicated (as he perhaps would be in a less subtle book) but merely uncomfortable. Ed tells him he doesn't really mean that, and Hugh responds with anger:

"You don't think I mean what I say? Why? Because you know me so well? . . . Because we both know you don't know me at all."

"True," Ed said. He let himself look at Hugh directly. "Or," he let his eyes apologize, "I might."

As soon as Ed expresses them, we realize that his doubts about Hugh's potential as a financier are wholly correct: So, again, we have a reversal, and a reversal of that reversal, and land in a place that feels right. But all that is not nearly as important, to Ed or to the reader, as Ed's struggle to reconnect. In this beautiful passage, we see how people—even stubborn, angry, self-righteous people—work to mend broken bonds and how, sometimes, they might even succeed.

When covering as much physical and temporal distance as Hershon does here, authors often end up creating characters as simple and distinct as paints on a color wheel. Such characters are easy to remember, and they certainly don't distract the reader from a novel's ideas. I am glad Hershon didn't take this route and that her people are as complex, surprising, and rewarding as they are. Hershon hints at her aims for the novel in the passage below, also from the conclusion, and from Ed's perspective:

Helen hadn't mentioned his questionable business practices or the *Times* article or prison,

mo•sa•ic

/mō zā' ik/

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and he wondered if and when she would. It then occurred to him that she might see him as nothing more than some kind of colorful character, a notion that made him queasy.

Ed's queasiness with simplification (arising, perhaps, out of a fear of being ethnically pigeonholed as a Jew) is shared by the author. Hershon almost always makes choices that prioritize accuracy and faithfulness to the characters' individual personalities.

What, then, are we to make of the novelist's very occasional, seemingly half-hearted gestures toward some larger theoretical framework? The

Perhaps Hershon is herself influenced by a literary culture that sometimes deems realistic stories by women, about relationships, insufficiently substantial.

title and epigraph refer to dual inheritance theory, which, roughly, is the idea that cultural as well as genetic developments influence our actions. It is mostly left to the reader to draw the lines between such theories of "gene-culture coevolution" and the events in the novel. I was able to do that a few times: Although scenes are generally finely drawn, there are some set pieces depicting Ed's father's racism and Hugh's father's anti-Semitism, which seem to strain toward a larger point, just as ideas of communal and tribal qualities seem to appear every hundred pages or so, and then vanish without much effect. Perhaps Hershon is herself influenced by a literary culture that sometimes deems realistic stories by women, about relationships, insufficiently substantial. If she does not cede quite enough authorial control to allow her ideas about dual inheritance to emerge through her characters, she is, thankfully, also uncomfortable making more than a half-hearted attempt to submerge her characters in abstract ideas.

Ultimately, in the strongest parts of this novel, the ideas *are* the emotions, depicted carefully, moment by moment, and decade by decade. In a novel that pays such deep attention, emotions—and the characters they delineate—are enough. Like Allegra Goodman, Joanna Hershon seems more influenced by Victorian authors—perhaps George Eliot or Anthony Trollope—than by the new literary maximalism or other recent trends. In any case, as cooks and authors know, theory is no match for the unexpected. A few pages before the end, Ed's daughter makes a decision about a love affair:

His daughter took a shuddering breath. "We'll see," said Rebecca, and now he couldn't tell if she was shaking because of the change in the weather, or if, in fact, she might just cry. "I mean—we'll see," she repeated. "Who knows?"

He gave her a good strong hug. "Nobody."

Nadia Kalman is currently writing her second novel.

And How Do You Like Israel?

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

Making David into Goliath: How the World Turned Against Israel

by Joshua Muravchik

Encounter Books, 296 pp., \$25.99

Those of us who love Israel often imagine that its charms are irresistible. That may have been what Moshe Dayan was thinking when he went to see the co-pilot of a Libyan airliner shot down (with a tragic loss of more than 100 lives) when it strayed over Israeli-controlled airspace in February 1973. I remember listening long ago to a radio broadcast of Dayan's visit to the injured man in a hospital—in Beersheva, if my memory serves me correctly. The enormous anxiety that the Libyan co-pilot must have felt on account of being in Israel at all had clearly been intensified beyond all measure by the unexpected arrival at his bedside of the one-eyed monster famed, loathed, and feared throughout the Arab world. In broken English, his weak voice quavering, the co-pilot greeted Dayan with a heap of awkward honorifics and salutations. He sounded like he was begging for his life. “And how do you like Israel?” Dayan cheerily responded.

This peculiar encounter took place less than six years after the Six-Day War, the conflict over which Dayan had presided as Israel's minister of defense and which represented, as Joshua Muravchik reminds us, a critical turning point in the evolution of the Western world's attitude toward Israel. In the decades before the war and during the fighting, Israel had basked in its approval; after the war, people tended to like Israel less and less, as a result of the processes that Muravchik deftly describes. What happened was, by his account, not primarily the fault of Israel itself but of large numbers of its former supporters, who either suffered from a failure of moral imagination or yielded to Arab pressure, or both.

The problem began on the revolutionary left, which already in 1968 was celebrating Yasser Arafat and the terrorists of Fatah as underdogs and “the comrades of such chic, romanticized figures as Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara.” The Arab oil embargo in 1973 further softened the ground, as did the Arab countries' anti-Israel campaign at the United Nations that culminated in the General Assembly's passage of the infamous “Zionism is racism” resolution. On the European front, the Jewish-born but utterly alienated Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky strenuously strove to break the long-standing links between European socialists and Israel and to create sympathy for the PLO. In academia, the Palestinian-American professor of English Edward Said produced in 1978 his blatantly unhistorical but vastly influential attack on “orientalism” (in his book by the same name), which helped (as Said had very

much wished) to redefine Zionism, as Muravchik puts it, “against its will as a movement of white people competing for land with people of color.” Said's

“selective indignation” of some of the people who lambasted Israel on this occasion after keeping silent about other, worse massacres in the Arab world

The problem began on the revolutionary left, which already in 1968 was celebrating Yasser Arafat and the terrorists of Fatah as underdogs.

success in this venture “meant that from then on the Left would be aligned overwhelmingly and ardently against Israel.”

While locating the origins of the post-1967 anti-Israel animus squarely on the left, Muravchik does not exempt the right, in Israel itself, from responsibility for the deterioration in the atmosphere. He notes, without explicitly endorsing or criticizing, the commitment of Likud governments from 1977 onward to the settlement of the West Bank and Gaza and the opposition those policies generated overseas. Muravchik places greater emphasis, however, on the damaging impact of the Lebanon War of 1982, which was mired in deception, excessively ambitious, and “culminated in an especially vicious episode, the massacre of non-combatants in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla.” While he complains about the

in which Israel was not even indirectly involved, Muravchik seems to identify with those Israelis who felt that “their country had been complicit in a shameful act.” The punitive recommendations of the Kahan Commission that investigated the massacre, he says, “partially rehabilitated Israel's reputation,” Muravchik notes:

But the harm done by the whole Lebanon venture was never fully repaired. Public opinion polls in the United States showed that support for Israel eventually returned to its pre-Lebanon War levels, but in Europe the recovery was only partial. The combined impact of Lebanon and Begin's settlement-building campaign would become specters haunting Israel's global standing.

Even though he highlights the way these ghosts troubled Israelis as well, Muravchik does not think that they scared Israel's adversary culture into existence. This he traces to the worldwide collapse of socialism, which undermined Israel's regnant ideology and left few people capable of “articulating a compelling vision of Zionism without the ‘Labor’ part.” What came to fill the vacuum, according to Muravchik, was an amorphous ideology called “post-Zionism,” many of whose adherents went so far as to abandon any loyalty at all to the idea of a Jewish state.

Muravchik's sketch of Israel's “adversary culture” ranges from a review of the “new historians”—Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, and Ilan Pappé—who began in the late 1980s to debunk the standard Zionist/Israeli narrative to Israel's equally subversive “critical sociologists,” such as Oren Yiftachel, to reporters and columnists and editors of *Ha'aretz*, including Gideon Levy and Amira Hass, who have relentlessly held their own country up to obloquy. He follows Anita Shapira in tracing the path of radical dissent from the new historians to other academics, but he doesn't cast all of the blame on them.

In agreement with the now penitent “new historian” Benny Morris, Muravchik regards the late 20th-century anti-Israel trends in Israeli culture as more than anything else a local reflection of “the post-1960s rise of Leftism throughout academia



Moshe Dayan visiting the front in Egyptian territory, 1973. (Photo by Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone/Getty Images.)

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in America and Europe.” Whatever may have been their sources of inspiration, however, they constitute a dire menace:

For those who wish to rally people to the cause of Israel’s destruction, these alienated Israelis constitute an unmatched resource. They provide a trove of home-grown testimony that their country is guilty of every imaginable crime and sin . . . America’s adversary culture was no less extreme in its alienation, no less ferocious in its condemnations of its own country. But America, the mightiest country in history, is comparatively invulnerable to the words of its detractors. The same cannot be said for Israel.

Readers who share Muravchik’s concern about the worldwide reach of Israel’s alienated intellectuals may nevertheless find his account of their intellectual roots somewhat puzzling. The story he tells is one of refugees from the left, disoriented by the failure of socialism, who in the end find their bearings, once again, on the left. What does he think is happening?

Muravchik’s analysis of this matter comes into clearest focus when he turns from Israeli intellectuals to anti-Israel activists in Western countries. After citing the late Rachel Corrie’s complaints about racism, classism, and sexism, he notes that her “litany of malign-isms reflected the metamorphosis of Leftism. Conflict between groups continued to be seen as the engine of progress, as Marx had posited, but particularly after the upheavals of the 1960s race and other demographic categories replaced class as the crucial axis.” The left had never been friendly to Israel, Mu-

ravchik observes, but in its “new interpretation of history, Israel became a more central target.”

Among those whom he identifies as foes of the Jewish state on account of its location “on the wrong side of the Left’s new paradigm,” Muravchik pays special attention to the people that John

One cannot be equally dismissive, however, of all the left-wing critics of Israel named by Muravchik.

Mearsheimer, co-author with Stephen Walt of the 2007 assault on American supporters of Israel, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, has listed as “righteous Jews.” What distinguishes these figures (Noam Chomsky, Richard Falk, Judith Butler, and other such critics of Israel), Muravchik writes, “is an identity as Leftists far stronger than any they might feel as Jews.” Since they are, for that very reason, unable to exercise any significant influence within the American Jewish community, “an organization was formed in 2008 that aimed, in the words of its vice president, at ‘moving Jews’ further to the left and especially to a position more critical of Israel.” This is J Street, which has itself earned a place on Mearsheimer’s roster of good guys.

Muravchik concludes his book with a description of the ways in which “the global Left including Israel’s home-grown Leftists” have unfairly pinned all of the blame for the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, the Second Lebanon War in 2006, and

the fighting in Gaza in 2008 on Israel. He is pleased to note, however, that for all the damage the left’s misrepresentations have done to Israel’s standing around the world, American support for the Jewish state remains strong. He is not, however, sanguine: “Although the American people’s sympathy for Israel has been durable, however, it is not guaranteed to last forever. The ideological Left, the bastion of contemporary anti-Israel sentiment, has always been weaker in America than elsewhere, but its influence is not inconsequential.”

It is strongest on college campuses, where the works of Israel-bashers are ubiquitous. “In addition, although the ideological Left may be small in numbers, it is able to exert influence with a much wider public by advancing its positions through groups that present themselves as liberal rather than radical: human rights organizations, labor unions, churches, and even Jewish groups like J Street.”

Bearing in mind Israel’s heavy reliance on the United States, Muravchik fears the success of these forces in the battle for American public opinion. They could achieve such a success, he says, without obtaining a clear victory. “The anti-Israel camp does not need to win America fully to its side. Merely to neutralize it would radically alter the balance of power and put Israel in great jeopardy.” In the absence of American support, Israel’s enemies would be in a position to threaten “a second Holocaust.” Muravchik admits that the threat from Israel’s enemies does not at the moment possess much potency, but he still feels impelled to warn how the “relentless campaign to recast” Israel “as a malevolent Goliath places it in great peril.”

In his effort to explain the post-1967 surge

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in hostility toward Israel, Muravchik exercises a certain amount of caution. He is aware, for one thing, of Yoram Hazony's explanation for the rise of post-Zionism and treats it respectfully, but he nevertheless dismisses it. Contrary to Hazony, who in his 2000 book, *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul*, traced post-Zionism back to the ideas propounded by Martin Buber and his colleagues at The Hebrew University during the Mandate period, Muravchik asserts that these people's thinking lost its influence after Israel gained its independence.

There are, however, other factors that Muravchik overlooks with less justification. Of all of Israel's adversaries on the right, he singles out only one, Charles de Gaulle, for special attention. That Europe is still suffering from the after-effects of right-wing and Nazi anti-Semitism, and that the revival of anti-Israel sentiment on that continent reflects this, has recently been the theme of many different books and articles, none of which receive any attention in *Making David into Goliath*. In his discussion of America, too, Muravchik pays no heed to anything that has taken place on the right. He makes no mention, for instance, of Pat Buchanan's ugly insinuations and denunciations of Israel and its friends' alleged stranglehold over American foreign policy-making.

Nor does he devote any attention to opposition to Israel that can be branded as neither left nor right. Muravchik's discussion of Mearsheimer and Walt focuses mostly on their moral approbation for certain renegade Jews. He does note that their notorious book complained about the Jewish lobby's deflection of "U.S. policy toward unjust support for



Anti-Israel demonstration in London, January 2009. (Photo by Claudia Gabriela Marques Vieira.)

Israel at the expense of America's own interests." But instead of attempting to measure the "realist" contribution to the campaign against Israel, Muravchik points to evidence that Mearsheimer, at least, is at bottom an anti-Semite.

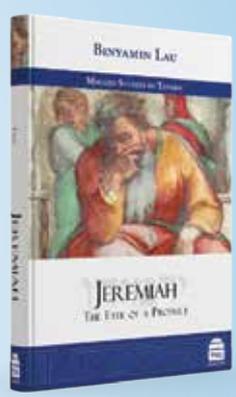
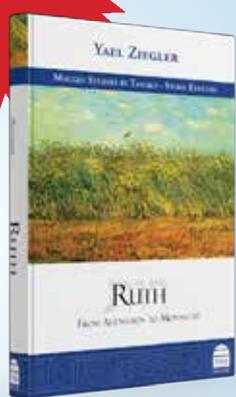
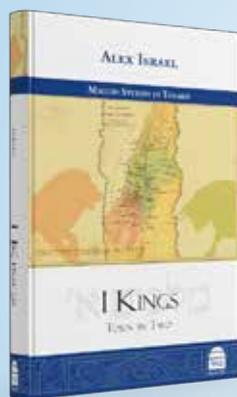
The ideological adversaries on the left whom Muravchik singles out are, no doubt, a serious menace,

even if they are not the only one on the horizon. They ought to be combated (and I say this as someone who has spent a lot of time criticizing their books) but they must also be understood, in all their complexity and diversity. It is not enough to characterize Israel's critics as simply applying the ideas of the academic left to the Israeli scene. Some of them are highly sophisticated (and, it has to be admitted, morally conscientious) thinkers who have been striving for years to win over the disenchanted supporters of Israel who have not yet stepped over the line dividing Zionists from post-Zionists or anti-Zionists (and who might very well belong to or sympathize with J Street). This is not to deny that there are anti-Zionist works that do not deserve a serious response. By virtue of its title alone, Max Blumenthal's recent *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel* would have seemed a perfect foil for a discussion of Muravchik's new book. But Blumenthal's spectacular historical ignorance, cavalier way with facts, and undisguised loathing for Israel makes it impossible to accord him even a small measure of respect.

One cannot be equally dismissive, however, of all the left-wing critics of Israel named by Muravchik, such as Avraham Burg, Judith Butler, and Oren Yiftachel. While expressing empathy for the Jews of Israel, they call for the abandonment of Zionism in the name of higher principles, derived from either their overall philosophical convictions or some conception of Jewish tradition. To cope with them, a defender of Israel must show either that their principles are wrong or that their application to Israel would result—perhaps even in terms of their own values—in the creation of worse problems than the ones we have now. Muravchik's timely warnings against the danger such critics pose to Israel's standing in American public opinion have to be complemented by vigorous refutations of what they have to say.

Allan Arkush is professor of Judaic studies and history at Binghamton University and the senior contributing editor of the *Jewish Review of Books*.

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Shifting Sands

BY JEHUDA REINHARZ

How I Stopped Being a Jew

by Shlomo Sand, translated by David Fernbach
Verso, 112 pp., \$16.95

Shlomo Sand is, by now, probably the best-known anti-Israel Israeli intellectual. Born in 1946 in a DP camp in Austria to Holocaust survivors, Sand is a professor of history at Tel Aviv University. He believes, following theorists such as Benedict Anderson, that nations are, in the nature of the case, modern inventions, and that Israel is a particularly bad one.

How I Stopped Being a Jew is Sand's most recent (and shortest) book on this general theme. He burst upon the ideological scene a few years ago with *The Invention of the Jewish People*, quickly followed by *The Invention of the Land of Israel: From Holy Land to Homeland*. These earlier books are fairly elaborate deconstructions in which the Jewish people turn out to be a figment of the imagination and the connection of the Jews to the Land of Israel (*ahavat yisrael*) a myth. In the first book, Sand rehashed an old and discredited theory that Ashkenazi Jews are descendants of the Khazars, who are said to have converted to Judaism and created an empire in the Caucasus in the 8th century. The Khazar theory was refuted yet again by several distinguished historians who reviewed the book in Israel, Europe, and America (it became a widely translated best-seller), but of course both the motivation and the wide appeal of Sand's arguments lie elsewhere, a subject to which I shall return. (Incidentally, Sand's academic expertise also lies elsewhere: He is an expert on the work of the radical 20th-century French thinker Georges Sorel.)

Even if Sand's historical argument about the history and makeup of world Jewry were correct (he'd also like to trace much of North African Jewry back to Berber tribes, diminishes the history of ancient Israel at every turn, and so on), would it make a difference? In a classic essay about the biblical Moses, Ahad Ha'am, the father of cultural Zionism, reflected upon history and historical truth:

And so when I read the Haggadah on the eve of Passover, and the spirit of Moses the son of Amram . . . who stands like a pillar of light on the threshold of our history, hovers before me and lifts me out of this nether world, I am quite oblivious to all the doubts and questions propounded by non-Jewish critics. I care not whether this man Moses really existed; whether his life and his activity really corresponded to our traditional account of him; whether he was really the savior of Israel and gave his people the Law in the form in which it is preserved among us; and so forth. I have one short and simple

answer for all these conundrums. This Moses, I say, this man of old time, whose existence and character you are trying to elucidate, matters to nobody except to scholars like you. We have another Moses of our own, whose image has been enshrined in the hearts of the Jewish people for generations, and whose influence on our national life has never ceased from ancient times till the present day. For even if you succeeded in demonstrating conclusively that the man Moses never existed . . . you would not thereby detract one jot from the historical reality of the ideal Moses—the Moses who has been our leader not only for forty years in the wilderness of Sinai, but for thousands of years in all the wildernesses in which we have wandered since the Exodus.

that the Jewish people had been doing it for a very long time. Sand, of course, grants the reality of pre-modern Jewish religion, but he takes a very narrow and peculiarly modern idea of what a religion is, and he seeks repeatedly and implausibly to sever it completely from both Zionism and Israel.

Does Sand really believe what he writes? He himself participated in one of the most unusual social events of the second half of the 20th century: the *kibbutz galuyot*, the meeting in Palestine—later Israel—of millions of Jews from different parts of the world and their amalgamation into a new Jewish society and successful nation state. There were huge cultural differences among these diverse Jewish groups. In looks, language, traditions, occupations, social structures, and relations



Shlomo Sand. (Courtesy of Gali Tibbon/Guardian News & Media Ltd.)

In short, it was, in part, precisely through the image of Moses and other shared figures, stories, authoritative texts, ideas, and rituals that the people of Israel—which is what they called themselves—sustained themselves in exile, or *galut*—which is what they called it.

A little later in the essay Ahad Ha'am writes: "And it is not only the existence of this Moses that is clear and indisputable to me. His character is equally plain, and is not liable to be altered by any archeological discovery. This ideal—I reason—has been created in the spirit of the Jewish people; and the creator creates in his own image." He understood as well as Shlomo Sand (or better) how all peoples invent and sustain themselves, but he also understood

with their non-Jewish environments, a Jew from Russia and a Jew from, say, Yemen had little in common. Nonetheless, they found the inner resources to establish a state, to live together, to intermarry, and to develop a modern country where most of the inhabitants now seem content—Shlomo Sand among them, as he grudgingly admits.

The State of Israel is one of the most surprising and successful political accomplishments of the modern era. Where does it come from? Sand recognizes that a national reality has been created in Israel. He stresses that this new reality is important, indeed inescapable, for him, and he defines himself as an Israeli. And yet he is blind to the fact that Zionism succeeded in large part because the Jews

already were a people belonging—and seen by others to belong—to a distinct nation.

How was it possible for the Jews, in the hour of their greatest collective despair following the destruction of European Jewry, faced with the political and military opposition of the entire Arab Middle East, the animosity of the British, and the relative indifference of the Americans, to manage a political feat that has no parallel in modern history? Sand's answer, unsupported and unsupportable, is that it was a response to the Holocaust. Whose response? Anyone familiar with the discussions at the UN in 1947 knows what a small role the Holocaust played in the considerations about the future of Palestine. Furthermore, the basic institutions of a Jewish state had already been established long before the UN resolution of November 1947.

In the endless Arab literature on the conflict with the Zionists over Palestine, there is virtually no recognition that Jewish attachment to the land originated in anything other than the persecutions suffered by Jews in Europe. This is an astonishing blind spot and undoubtedly a major obstacle, perhaps the major obstacle, to peace. To dismiss Jewish peoplehood and *ahavat zion* as modern inventions at best loosely inspired by obscure religious beliefs, as Sand repeatedly does, is bad history and bad politics.

How *I Stopped Being a Jew* is a quasi-memoir, but Sand doesn't tell us whether there was ever a time when his own Jewishness had any positive content. As a budding Marxist, his father had rebelled against his religious upbringing in his youth,

but Sand doesn't describe his own childhood. He does mention that it wasn't until he was an adult that he read from the haggadah on Passover.

At some point, Sand adopted the Russian Jew-

securing the individual's total support for it." Israel, in Sand's opinion, does not deserve such assistance. Nor should it be able to manipulate the memory of the Holocaust:

To dismiss Jewish peoplehood and *ahavat zion* as modern inventions at best loosely inspired by obscure religious beliefs, as Sand repeatedly does, is bad history and bad politics.

ish writer Ilya Ehrenburg's post-World War II credo to remain a Jew as long as a single anti-Semite remained on earth. But, Sand proceeds to say, "And yet, as the years have passed, and in view of the radicalization of Israeli politics, especially the shifts that have taken place in its politics of memory, my assurance in this definition of my identity has steadily eroded." At bottom, Sand's abandonment of the defiant but apparently rather shapeless Jewish identity to which he had previously adhered stems from his dismay at what he perceives to be the way in which others have put Jewishness to use.

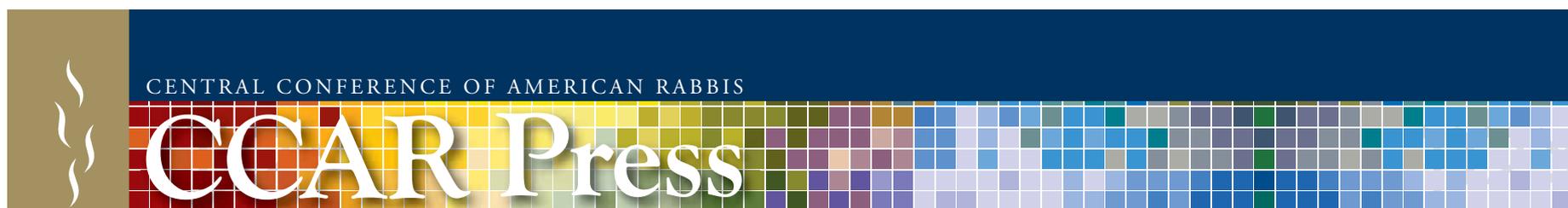
The real meaning of being a Jew in the State of Israel today, Sand says in a statement of breathtaking disingenuousness, is to be, "first and foremost, a privileged citizen who enjoys prerogatives refused to those who are not Jews, and particularly those who are Arabs." And what does it mean to be a secular Jew outside of the State of Israel? Basically nothing: "We must recognize that the key axis of a secular Jewish identity lies nowadays in perpetuating the individual's relationship to the State of Israel and in

Despite Israel being the only nuclear power in the Middle East, it regularly reinforces terror in its supporters across the world by pointing on the horizon to the spectre of a repeated Holocaust.

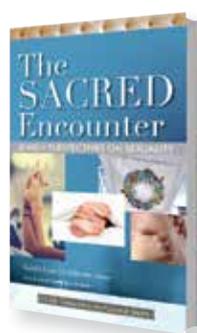
Having witnessed what he views as the pernicious and dangerous uses to which Jewishness is now being put, Sand wishes to shed his "tribal Judeocentrism," just as his father once fled from Judaism.

It is Sand's personal right to regard himself as an Israeli rather than a Jew, but the vast majority of his fellow Israelis are bound to and proud of their Jewish heritage and are just as keen as Sand for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Imagining, as he does, that identities are easily invented, Sand posits an imagined non-Jewish Israeli identity, a kind of Israelism, shared by both Israeli Jews and Arabs. It would be pretty to think so, but most of Sand's neighbors know otherwise.

It is perhaps here that one should note that the actual Middle East inhabited by a theocratic Iran with nuclear ambitions and Arab regimes whose



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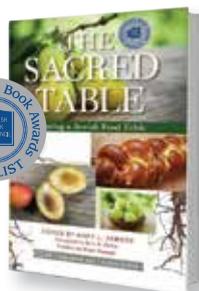
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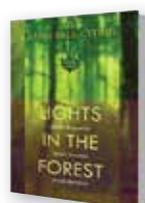


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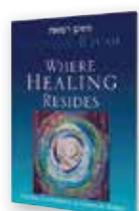
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wishes and intentions regarding Israel are far from neutral is nowhere in evidence in Sand's writings. Indeed, according to mainstream Arab opinion, Sand should return to Europe, where he was born.

According to Sand, by the end of 2012, his work had been translated into 21 languages. Why are Shlomo Sand's books so popular?

In 2013, Monika Schwarz-Friesel, a professor at the Technische Universität in Berlin, and I published an analysis of thousands of emails sent to the Israel embassy in Berlin and to other Jewish institutions and persons in Germany, along with emails sent to Israeli embassies in several other European countries. What became clear from both the lan-

What became clear from these letters from ordinary Europeans was that Jew-hatred has not disappeared.

guage and content of these letters from ordinary Europeans was that Jew-hatred, with its traditional tropes and obsessions, has not disappeared. Nor, contrary to common assumptions, is it restricted to right-wing extremists. It is firmly anchored in the affluent, educated middle class of Western society, and its major target is the State of Israel as a Jewish state. Arab propaganda, well organized and lavishly financed, undoubtedly plays an important role in disseminating the seeds of Judeophobia, but they fall on historically fertile soil.

Shlomo Sand, who blithely writes of "the philo-Semitic, 'Judeo-Christian' Europe of today" is blind to this phenomenon. In fact, he is worse than blind. In several places in *How I Stopped Being a Jew*, he flirts, consciously or unconsciously, with anti-Semitic tropes himself. To give just one example, toward the end of the book he writes "the State of Israel belongs more to non-Israelis than it does to its citizens who live there. It claims to be an inheritance more of the world's 'new Jews.'" If you don't know who these "new Jews" who own Israel are, Sand immediately provides a helpful list in parentheses:

For instance, Paul Wolfowitz, former president of the World Bank; Michael Levy, the well-known British philanthropist and peer in the House of Lords; Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former managing director of the International Money Fund; Vladimir Gusinsky, the Russian media oligarch who lives in Spain.

Sand and his Jewish colleagues, in and outside of Israel, ought to pause and reflect about the direction in which their endeavors are headed. It would be a tragic irony if they helped prepare the intellectual ground for a new and much fiercer wave of anti-Jewish agitation.

Jehuda Reinharz is the president of the Mandel Foundation and the president emeritus and Richard Koret Professor of Modern Jewish History at Brandeis University. He is the author of many books, including his ongoing biography of Chaim Weizmann, the third and final volume of which is forthcoming.

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Is Beauty Power?

BY DIANE COLE

Helena Rubinstein: Beauty Is Power

curated by Mason Klein

through March 22, 2015 at The Jewish Museum, New York, Boca Raton Museum of Art April 21 to July 12, 2015

Helena Rubinstein: Beauty Is Power

(Exhibit Companion Guide)

by Mason Klein

The Jewish Museum, New York and Yale University Press, 168 pp., \$50

Helena Rubinstein: The Woman Who Invented Beauty

by Michèle Fitoussi, translated by Kate Bignold and Lakshmi Ramakrishnan Iyer

Gallic Books, 384 pp., \$15.95

Helena Rubinstein had such a flair for self-invention—was she born in 1870, 1872, or 1880?—that even the venerable Harvard University Press' reference work, *Notable American Women: The Modern Period*, informs the reader that Rubinstein attended the University of Kracow and studied medicine in Switzerland. In reality, she never finished secondary school, and hers was much more of a rags-to-riches story than she liked to admit. Her professed scientific expertise was part of the show, an expression of sheer entrepreneurial chutzpah and unrivalled self-marketing. Indeed, Rubinstein—known to all as Madame—was the P.T. Barnum of beauty.

By the time of her death in 1965, she had come a very long way from the genteel poverty of her distinctly unchic childhood home in Kracow's Jewish district of Kazimierz, where she had been born Chaja Rubinstein. In her deft, highly entertaining biography, *Helena Rubinstein: The Woman Who Invented Beauty*, Michèle Fitoussi estimates Madame's personal fortune at the time of her death at about \$100 million. As for her business empire, "The Helena Rubinstein brand was established in more than thirty countries, owned fourteen factories and had a staff of 32,000 in salons, factories, and laboratories in fifteen different countries."

And today? Her once independent company, now owned by L'Oréal, no longer maintains a single store in the United States, and Rubinstein's name and once ubiquitous brand have receded from the spotlight. Yet *Helena Rubinstein: Beauty Is Power*, the absorbing and handsomely mounted exhibition on display at New York's Jewish Museum, makes a strong argument for her importance, and not only as an early Jewish female entrepreneur. Rubinstein was also a prodigious art collector who once bought out an entire gallery show of the work of Elie Nadelman, many of whose distinctive art deco sculptures

are displayed here. She was also an influential decorator whose eclectic taste, showcased in her beauty salons and homes, broadened traditional notions of art while also promoting a modernist sensibility.

In keeping with Rubinstein's taste for a decorative mélange, the galleries at The Jewish Museum

Mason Klein writes in the accompanying catalogue. "Conversely," he writes, "she used the private domestic space of her several homes to dramatically define and champion a multicultural identity and a nonhierarchical assessment of beauty."

I'll return to what this suggests about Rubin-

When the sun-baked local women would come into her uncle's store, they would often comment on Rubinstein's pale, unwrinkled face.

juxtapose modernist, surrealist, and cubist paintings by Picasso, Braque, Léger, and Miro among others with arresting masks, statue heads, reliquary figures, and marionette headdresses from across African, Oceanic, and Latin American cultures—all of them pieces that were once part of her collection.

stein's own identity as an assimilated Jewish woman. But I think that the most striking impression that those who view the exhibition (which will travel to Florida after its run in New York) or read Fitoussi's biography will come away with is the inextricable mix of charm, targeted business savvy, and steely determination that made Rubinstein so forceful and flamboyant a personality. How else could Rubinstein have transformed herself from Chaja to Helena to "Madame"?



Helena Rubinstein, center, with her mother and three of her seven sisters in Poland, ca. 1888. (Courtesy of the Helena Rubinstein Foundation Archives, Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY, Gladys Marcus Library, Special Collections.)

The exhibit demonstrates how, through her own mix of personal and business alchemy, Rubinstein managed to effect a larger cultural impact than is generally acknowledged. "Through carefully considered publicity, she made her personal aesthetic taste an integral feature of her business," exhibition curator

Given Rubinstein's opulent later life and her predilection for massaging the details of her earlier one—her Torah-studying unsuccessful businessman of a father would become, in her telling, the owner of a vast estate—it's illuminating to see the exhibition's single trace of Rubinstein's modest Kazimierz origins, a family photo from about 1888. In it she takes the central, dominant position amid three of her sisters and their mother. As the oldest of eight sisters in a traditional Orthodox family, Rubinstein had been expected to be the first to marry. Rubinstein, however, refused to submit to an arranged marriage. At odds with her father, she moved first to one aunt's home in Krakow, then another's in Vienna (where she improved her German while working for that family's luxury fur business), and finally to an uncle in Australia. Although Rubinstein claimed to have always dreamed of the adventure of going to the outback, Fitoussi sets the record straight: "Everyone

viewed the Australian solution as an honorable way out for an unmarried young rebel." On her passport, she gave her first name as Helena.

At first, it was not a very promising rebirth. In 1896 at age 24 (both Fitoussi and Klein accept 1872 as her birthdate), Rubinstein arrived in the isolated,

sheep-farming town of Coleraine, Australia. Her new life consisted of little more than tedious non-stop work as housekeeper and store clerk for her uncle. But during her time in Vienna, she had honed her gift for sales. And among her belongings were 12 jars of facial cream that her mother had given her. When the sun-baked local women would come into her uncle's store, they would often comment on Rubinstein's pale, unwrinkled face. How, they wondered, did she manage to maintain such a smooth complexion? In that question, Rubinstein spotted the market opportunity that would change her life. It was her special facial cream, Rubinstein would respond, would you like to try it? Of course they would. Soon she had far more requests from customers eager to buy the cream than her mother could possibly supply from Poland (it was made by family friend Jacob Lykusky and his brother). The only solution, Rubinstein realized, would be to figure out how to manufacture the cream herself. It took her several years and several moves, from Coleraine to Brisbane to Melbourne, to gather the financial and pharmaceutical backing to do so. Fortuitously, Australian sheep wool provided an inexpensive local source for the essential ingredient of lanolin. She opened her first beauty salon in Melbourne and offered for sale the Valaze (supposedly Hungarian for "gift from heaven") beauty cream that would begin to make her fortune. It was also in Australia that she met her future husband, Edward Titus, another Polish Jew with a talent for reinvention. It wasn't long before they left Australia behind for London, Paris, and ultimately New York.

By the 1930s, Helena Rubinstein's salons were offering a glamorous array of "skin analysis, full body and facial massage, makeup, deportment and exercise classes, hairdressing, and lectures," Klein writes. She had also formulated a full "Day of Beauty" that she marketed to clients with great success. As for applying those beauty lessons

once they returned home, the list of products for sale ran to "629 creams, lotions, powders, rouges, lipsticks, nail and eye treatments, perfumes, colognes, soaps, and masks." Rubinstein even made an early, though ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to find a market for men's beauty products.

The Jewish Museum exhibit does a particularly good job of using advertisements and news and magazine accounts from the first decades of the 20th century to show how Rubinstein the woman became synonymous with Rubinstein the brand and how to-

gether they became ubiquitous. This early example of what is now called "branding" was largely due to Titus, who had a knack for advertising and publicity campaigns that captured the spirit of the moment. "Beauty Is Power" was one of his early slogans, a clever appeal to women eager for independent lives at the start of the suffrage movement. In another astute move, Rubinstein's face—which, thanks to carefully retouched photographs, never seemed to age—often accompanied print advertisements as a personal promise of quality. Titus is also the one who cannily dubbed her "Madame," an alluring aristocratic title for an exotic guru of beauty who spoke English in an accent no one could quite place. At the same time, his connections with various social and artistic circles in London and Paris increased the visibility of her brand among the elite style-setters of the time. It was Titus, you might say, who helped put Rubinstein's name, as well as her make-up, on everyone's lips.

Rubinstein's great success funded not only a lavish lifestyle but a lifetime habit of accumulation. In addition to her extensive Western and non-Western art collections and the various homes and beauty salons she was constantly redecorating, Klein writes, "She had an irrepressible impulse to assemble a potpourri of objects—mounds of pearls and emeralds, costume jewelry, luxurious fabrics, Venetian Rococo mirrors" and more. Several display cases at the exhibit are devoted to the eye-catching, dramatically oversized, vividly colorful cuff bracelets, rings, and heavy necklaces she favored. One part of the exhibit is given over to the charming miniature rooms Rubinstein had displayed at her Fifth Avenue salon. Each reproduces in tiny, meticulous detail such diverse decors as a 19th-century London curiosity shop that Dickens would be proud of and an early 20th-century Montmartre artist's studio reminiscent of a scene from *La Bohème* (they are on loan from the Tel Aviv Museum of Art). Today Rubinstein would be called a shopaholic, but if you acquire enough art you become a patron.

Her status as such is nowhere more apparent than in the gallery wall given over to an array of some of the many portraits she commissioned of herself through the decades. Most are idealized evocations of an ever-youthful Rubinstein often made to seem, even in her 60s and beyond, an alluring temptress. By contrast, in 1957 English painter Graham Sutherland dared to depict her in harsh brushstrokes as an aged autocrat, hawk-eyed, regal, and wary in a dazzling red and gold Balenciaga gown, her bejeweled hands folded in front, her hair pulled back in her characteristic severe chignon. Most revealing of all are the series of 12 sketches by Picasso in 1955, which capture an extraordinary range of moods, from the imperial to the sedate, from death-haunted fear to cold-blooded rage. Retouched photos and fawning portrait artists could lie, but Picasso's eye did not.

So, beyond the brand, who *was* Rubinstein? Her marriage to Titus formally ended in 1938 (they had two sons, in whom neither parent, sadly, seemed to take much interest), and with her remarriage to Prince Artchil Gourielli-Tchkonka, who claimed Georgian nobility and was more than 20 years her junior, Rubinstein re-invented herself, yet again, now as a titled princess, a fairy tale come true, more or less (Gourielli-Tchkonka's claim on the title was a bit tenuous). Princess or not, Rubinstein continued to demonstrate products and



Rubinstein ad, which appeared in *Vogue*, 1945. (Courtesy of the John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.)



Helena Rubinstein with her miniature 18th-century Spanish dining room, part of a diorama collection at her Fifth Avenue flagship salon. (© Tel Aviv Museum of Art.)

expound on beauty for countless press interviews all over the world. “There are no ugly women, only lazy ones,” was one of her favorite sayings. Never lazy herself, she never stopped selling. Or bossing: A photograph shows her, in her last years, holding

personal beauty, both of which she felt should be interpreted individually and subjectively.

Her embrace of modern art was sincere, but Rubinstein’s patronage was an outgrowth of her

When she was rejected as a tenant by a swank Park Avenue residence that did not allow Jewish residents, she simply bought the entire building.

court while sitting up in her stylish Lucite bed, her executive staff sitting at attention all around her, awaiting orders in their daily morning meeting with Madame.

What’s clear throughout the exhibit is that the more successful Rubinstein became, the more her public and private personae melded together. It is almost impossible now to distinguish between Helena Rubinstein the woman and Helena Rubinstein the brand, what was for show and what was authentic. But what a showwoman she was: Although she was known for her extensive wardrobe of to-die-for haute couture designs by Balenciaga, Chanel, and Schiaparelli, among others (several are on display), in the exhibit she is also seen in a 1964 photo spread from *Life*, in one of her manufacturing plants, wearing the simple white lab coat required of her salon employees, as she vigorously stirs a giant vat of cosmetic cream. At four feet 10 inches tall, Rubinstein stands not that much higher than the vat.

Just as Rubinstein invited the press into her lab—which she sometimes ingeniously described as her “kitchen”—she also projected herself as the gracious hostess showing off her elegantly decorated salons and luxurious homes in New York and Paris. These rooms, featuring bold colors and eclectic art displays, made for chic photo features in *Life* and *Look* and other magazines, as well as stunning backdrops for fashion shoots. Nor did she hesitate to invite herself into millions of American living rooms. In 1958, Madame herself appeared in 60-second television ads, in which she (or rather, the mellifluous Russian actress dubbing her voice) intoned, “I’m Helena Rubinstein. Give me just 10 minutes of your time and I’ll make you 10 years younger.”

It was this illusion of youth and beauty that made Rubinstein’s fortune and gave her power. She sold her customers as much through her own carefully crafted celebrity as through persuasion. In this sense, she was a visionary of the business world that surrounds us today. It is overreaching, though, to state as an exhibition wall text does that:

Art and cosmetics embodied Rubinstein’s overarching dual enterprise: to establish a correspondence between modern art and

first passion—the business of boosting the bottom line—not the other way around. As with everything in Rubinstein’s life, art was part of her brand, and the luxury in which she surrounded her customers was part of the illusion she offered.



Helena Rubinstein in a Red Brocade Balenciaga Gown by Graham Sutherland, 1957. (Courtesy of the Daniel Katz Gallery, London. © Estate of Graham Sutherland.)

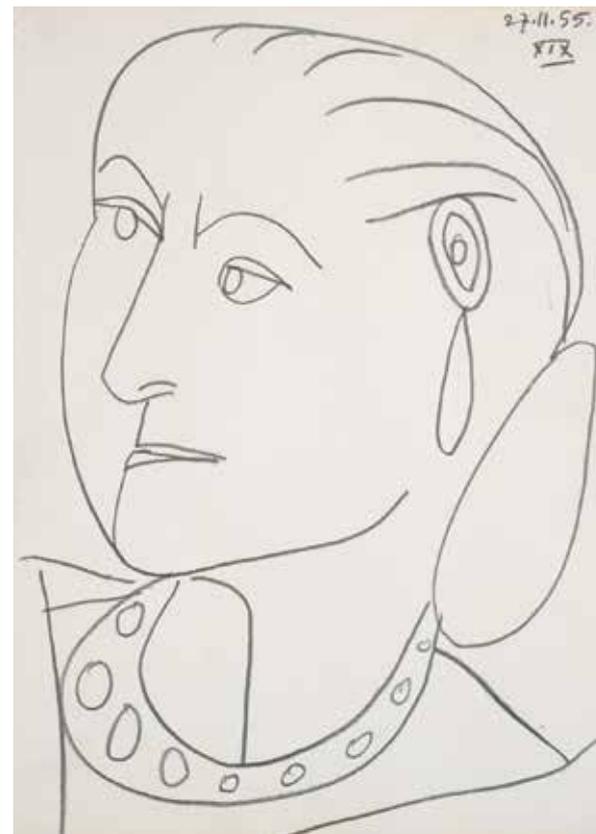
I’m also given pause by Mason Klein’s argument that Rubinstein empowered women by encouraging them to take charge of their images through their own choices and use of cosmetic products. If so, it was, at best, a by-product of her canny advertising and steady focus on building a business empire based on female consumers.

The exhibition’s most provocative idea is that of make-up as a method of re-invention. That is also perhaps the most pertinent reason for revisiting the life of Helena Rubinstein—the consummate self-reinventor—at a venue such as The Jewish Museum. Rubinstein never hid her Jewish heritage (much is made here of the fact that she never changed her last name) and she fended off anti-Semitism with vigor. When, for instance, she was rejected as a tenant by a swank Park Avenue residence that did not

allow Jewish residents, she simply bought the entire building. But she was, at best, ambivalent about Judaism, whose religious practice she had abandoned early on. “Scarcely unaware of her ethnicity,” Klein writes, “Rubinstein nevertheless allegedly also made disparaging comments about Jewish taste or certain neighborhoods . . . as ‘too Jewish.’”

This uneasiness, caught between ethnicity (to use Klein’s word) and mainstream taste, suggests, among other things, an intriguing clue to the life-long rivalry between Rubinstein the immigrant Jewish upstart and her cosmetics competitor Elizabeth Arden. Arden also came from modest origins, but her Anglo-Saxon looks and lineage allowed for a more immediately acceptable mainstream image.

In some ways Helena Rubinstein’s life story is emblematic of 20th-century diaspora success. She



Portrait of Helena Rubinstein XIX 27-11-1955 by Pablo Picasso, Himeji City Museum of Art, Japan. (© 2014 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artist Rights Society, ARS, New York.)

acquired, incorporated, and layered adaptation upon adaptation from each new world she entered. She did so with a hungry zest to succeed, and she successfully built an empire. But after her death, it all crumbled. Her business was sold, her massive collections auctioned and dispersed to museums and private buyers around the world. It is not the least of the accomplishments of Mason Klein and The Jewish Museum to have brought so many of those objects back together again.

From this perspective, the rise and fall of Helena Rubinstein, the woman and the brand, approaches tragedy. But The Jewish Museum’s excellent exhibition commands less despair than wonder. It demonstrates that beauty can be power, but it is also fickle, an illusion that inevitably fades.

Diane Cole is the author of the memoir *After Great Pain: A New Life Emerges* and writes regularly for *The Wall Street Journal*, among other publications.

The Argumentative Jew

BY LEON WIESELTIER

To the women and men of Kesher Israel

The most common understanding of disagreement, in the private sphere and the public one, is that it represents a failure. A single understanding, a shared understanding, is preferred to a multiplicity of understandings, which is rejected as an epistemologically fallen condition. We begin with many, but we aspire to one: The grip of the holistic fantasy is profound. Disagreement is a kind of fragmentation, but we wish to be made whole. The many factors that are responsible for intellectual disharmony—rhetorical, conceptual, psychological, cultural, political—are regarded pejoratively as impediments that need to be refuted or discarded, as obstacles in the way of a higher arrangement. That higher arrangement is consensus. Who does not prefer consensus to conflict? Is quarrelsomeness not a vice? Surely a quarrel is a kind of conflict, a state of affairs in need of correction. A quarrel demands resolution and reconciliation. To see things differently is to surrender to difference, whereas sameness or similarity of perspective brings us closer and even unites us. The dream of intellectual concord is also a dream of social concord. The

abolition of disagreement, when it is not coerced, is a promise of union and peace.

Recently I came upon a fine example of this consensualist mentality. In 1943, not long before she starved herself to death in England in solidarity with the people of occupied France, Simone Weil wrote a short essay called “On the Abolition of All Political Parties.” It was published posthumously in 1950, and it has recently appeared in an English translation

We live in the arduous interim between the belief in truth and the discovery of truth.

by my late friend Simon Leys. Weil begins her essay with an endorsement of Rousseau and proceeds to develop her own alarmingly Rousseauist vision of perfect society-wide agreement. “Rousseau took as his starting point two premises,” she writes. “First, reason perceives and chooses what is just and innocently useful, whereas every crime is motivated by passion. Second, reason is identical in all men, whereas their passions most often differ. From this it

follows that if, on a common issue, everyone thinks alone and then expresses his opinion, and if afterwards all these opinions are collected and compared, most probably they will coincide inasmuch as they are just and reasonable, whereas they will differ inasmuch as they are unjust or mistaken. It is only this type of reasoning that allows one to conclude that a universal consensus may point at the truth. Truth is one.” Weil describes these assumptions as the basis of “our republican ideal.” There exists, of course, another republican ideal, which recognizes the inevitability, and even the nobility, of “faction” and chooses compromise and respect over conformity and massified certitude. Reading Weil, one yearns for Madison. Weil’s remarks also nicely illustrate the way in which a horror of disagreement may culminate in a philosophical monism. It is hard to stay away from metaphysics when one’s subject is truth.

But there exists another school of thought about these questions. It may be found in ancient and early modern India, as Amartya Sen showed in his great essay “The Argumentative Indian,” but its most sophisticated and most robust home is in Judaism, from its beginnings in ancient rabbinical literature all the way to the present day. The Jewish tradition—the tradition of the argumentative Jew—is a long and great challenge to the consensualist mentality. It repudiates, sometimes in theory, always in practice, the cult of unanimity. It displays an almost erotic relationship to controversy. (Like all erotic relationships, this one sometimes devolves into decadence, which in the early modern centuries was known as *pilpul*.) In the Jewish tradition, disagreement is not only real, it is also ideal—at least in the unredeemed world, which is the only world we know. In its millennia of disputations, even mistaken opinions are not without legitimacy. Minority opinions are not obsolete opinions: They are preserved alongside majority opinions because their reasoning may one day be useful again. Arguments that are adjudicated practically remain alive theoretically. Indeed, both sides of a particular argument may be “the words of the living God.”

The full text of the talmudic passage is this: “Rabbi Aba said in the name of Samuel: For three years the house of Shammai and the house of Hillel disagreed. The former declared: the law should be made according to us, and the latter declared, the law should be made according to us. Then a heavenly voice proclaimed: These opinions and those opinions are the words of the living God, and the law is according to the house of Hillel.” The passage seems to shut down the very debates that it has just sacralized—except that the establishment of the law does not dissolve the legal discussion. The argument survives the decision, which is made among the elders according to majority rule, so that the community may function. But the argument was never itself purely functional. It was, instead, intrinsically valuable. (A practical spirit motivated also the medieval and early modern enterprise of legal codification, but insofar as the codes represented a suspension of the work of analysis, a claim to intellectual closure, they were ferociously opposed.)



Simone Weil in the School of Yavne. Illustration by Mark Anderson.

This same epic quarrel between the house of Hillel and the house of Shammai is described in a mishnah as “a quarrel for the sake of heaven [which therefore] will endure.” The endurance of a quarrel: What sort of aspiration is this? It is the aspiration of a mentality that is genuinely rigorous and genuinely pluralistic. The tradition of commentary on that mishnah is a kind of history of Jewish views on intellectual inquiry—from the Levant in the 15th century, for example, there is Ovadiah Bertinoro’s remark that “only by means of debate will truth be established,” an uncanny anticipation of Milton and Mill, and from Hungary in the 19th century there is the gloss by Rabbi Moses Schick, who himself had a role in a community-wide schism, that “sometimes it is our duty to make a quarrel . . . For the sake of truth we are not only permitted to make a quarrel, we are obligated to make a quarrel.”

And argument is emphatically man-made. In the talmudic passage cited here, we witness a moment of high religious drama: the abdication of the divine from the human quest for truth. The heavenly voice announces the permanent validity of both sides of an argument and leaves the labor of clarification in our hands. The sacralization of disagreement in Judaism is accompanied by the renunciation of any heavenly role in the attempt to verify legal and philosophical propositions. There is even a midrash that imagines God himself sowing the Torah with perplexities, by imbuing each of his edicts with “49 reasons to rule ‘pure’ and 49 reasons to rule ‘impure.’” We are not given the answers. We must find them. At least intellectually, this God has absconded.

“It is not in the heavens”: The scriptural phrase became a recurring refrain. Disputation is an entirely immanent activity. This is an extraordinary expression of confidence in reason and in the mortals

who engage in reason. In this practice of earthly self-reliance, thought is preferred to epiphany, and revelation is a thing of the past. (There are a few works of medieval Jewish jurisprudence that claim to derive their rulings in one way or another “from the heavens,” but a close inspection of their conclusions shows that their claim to a transcendent origin of human opinion is a theological and literary conceit.) Since the end of prophecy and divination, ideas and practices must be validated by principles and by reasoning from principles. Certain problems, to be sure, will not find their solutions, as the ancient rabbis said, until the arrival of Elijah, that is, until the advent of the messiah; but that is really a mythological way of saying that those problems are, to borrow the old phrase of a British philosopher, essentially contested. We are to learn to live with disagreement and not to think less of it because it cannot be miraculously consummated.

Learning to live with disagreement, moreover, is a way of learning to live with each other. Etymologically, the term *machloket* refers to separation and division, but the culture of *machloket* is not in itself separatist and divisive. This is in part because all the parties to any particular disagreement share certain metaphysical and historical assumptions about the foundations of their identity. But beyond those general axioms, the really remarkable feature of the Jewish tradition of *machloket* is that it is itself a basis for community. The community of contention, the contentious community, is not as paradoxical as it may seem. The parties to a disagreement are members of the disagreement; they belong to the group that wrestles together with the same perplexity, and they wrestle together for the sake of the larger community to which they all be-

long, the community that needs to know how Jews should behave and live. A quarrel is evidence of coexistence. The rabbinical tradition is full of rival authorities and rival schools—it owes a lot of its excitement to those grand and even bitter altercations—but the rivalries play themselves out within the unified framework of the shared search. There is dissent without dissension, and yet things change. Intellectual discord, if it is practiced with methodological integrity, is compatible with social peace.

The absence of the God’s-eye view of an issue, and the consequent recognition of the limitations of all individual perspectives, has a humbling effect. A universe of controversy is a universe of tolerance. *Machloket* is not schism, and the difference is crucial. Though disagreement may lead to sectarianism, most disagreement in the history of this ever-thinking people has been contained, and has been brilliantly developed, on this side of sectarianism. I do not mean to exaggerate the loveliness of the system: There has been heresy and there has been heterodoxy, and Jews have persecuted other Jews for their opinions. Intellectual integrity is always a risk to community, because some minds may think themselves, rightly or wrongly, beyond the limits. But the tradition of Jewish debate, especially legal debate, is striking for how rich it remains within the limits. Whether or not heresy and heterodoxy are forms of heroism, it is important to acknowledge that fidelity, and the internal growth of a tradition inside its carefully examined boundaries, may also be heroic.

Thus described, the Jewish model of quarrelsome unity may be hard to grasp. Can a religious way of life really endure such a high degree of inconclusiveness? Or put differently, can pluralism comport with absolutes? The conventional answer, in our time, is that it cannot, and so it must be something else. It must be perspectivism, or pragmatism, or relativism. The contemporary discussion of these questions by Jewish commentators has been rather slavishly dominated by the anti-rationalist clichés of contemporary philosophy. My own view is that any attempt to relieve the argumentative tradition of its rationality; or to seek a release from its dissonance, by denying either its commitment to truth or its commitment to many-mindedness; or to reduce rational argument to the emotional expression of an individual or a group—all this represents both a misunderstanding of the achievement of the Jewish style of controversy and an impoverishment of it. Reason is often depicted as repressive and orthodox, but it is in fact open-ended and infinitely patient, which is why thinkers in our times are still arguing with thinkers in ancient times and building upon their work. The enterprise of argumentation is ancient but not antiquated.

Truth may be one, as Weil said—but even so, what is it? We live in the arduous interim between the belief in truth and the discovery of truth. It is never too late for a rational objection or a logical advance. The contemporary anxiety about reason is misplaced: Emotion is private and opaque, but reason is public and lucid. This is proven on every serious Jewish bookshelf. Judaism evolved and progressed and flourished as an alliance of the heart and the head. The heart alone would not have sufficed, certainly not for a tradition whose essential act is the act of interpretation.

Leon Wieseltier is the literary editor of *The New Republic*.

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Commentary

Yiddish Genius in America

BY RUTH R. WISSE

The autobiographical novels of the great Yiddish poet Jacob Glatstein, *Ven Yash iz geforn* and *Ven yash iz gekumen* (When Yash Set Out and When Yash Arrived), were his literary response to the trip he took back to Lublin in 1934 to visit his dying mother. Coinciding with Hitler's political takeover in Germany, this voyage at what turned out to be the midpoint of his life (1896–1971) left him feeling that the person returning to America bore greater responsibilities than the one who had left. The novels, which were published together in excellent translations as *The Glatstein Chronicles* by Yale University Press' New Yiddish Library a few years ago, reflect that new sense of responsibility. (Caveat emptor: I edited the volume.)

Glatstein had arrived in America just before the outbreak of the First World War as a young man of 17. After struggling to get a foothold in New York, he gradually became part of its Yiddish literary community. When he felt confident enough of his English, he began to study law at NYU night school, but soon after he felt confident enough to quit law school to devote himself to poetry. In 1919 with Aaron Leyeles and Nahum B. Minkoff—another fugitive from law school—he issued the Introspectivist Manifesto, which is the most ambitious such artistic mission statement ever written for Yiddish literature. In 1926 he got an editorial job at the *Morgn Zhurnal*, a politically moderate, Zionist-tending daily newspaper. He remained an avid reader of Anglo-American literature and collected his Yiddish poems every few years in slim, elegant volumes.

Glatstein's biographer, when he gets one, will probably want to linger on the 1920s and early 1930s, before his trip back to Poland, as a time of literary ripening. Take his poem "Zing Ladino," which was first published in 1929 and appeared in book form in 1937 in a section called *zilbeccentrishkayt*, syllable-centricity. Even the non-Yiddish reader can see, or rather hear, the poet creating what seems like a language of his own as he sings of that other Jewish vernacular, Ladino:

*Zing ladino, blonder zenger,
Undzer tsoyberzhargonino
Alkolirte rederay
Altsetsungte shprakheray
Zunfargino, gino, gino.
Gingoldiker oyfshtal, oyfpral—
Algefarggedankeray.
Ale broytn, ale toytn,
Ale taygn, ale tundren,
Ale vundren alkolirn
Alkharuzin
Alushpizin
Ale knoytn, ale hoytn
Gelroyt un falashino,
Palestino daberino,
Undzer, undzer universladino
Blonder aladino zing.*

"Zing Ladino" eventually appeared in Glatstein's 1937 collection *Yiddishtaytshn*, which Benjamin Harshav brilliantly translated as "Exegyiddish," and the poem playfully invites its own exegesis.

The poem resembles a drinking song in which poets raise a toast to their literary brotherhood. The slightly scrambled language complicates and rejuvenates the theme as the Yiddish poet salutes his Ladino counterpart by adapting Yiddish to Sephardi sound patterns. He affirms their artistic affinity despite the differences in the *alkolirte rederay*, "multi-

guests who are traditionally invited into the sukkah. The play between *al*, the definite article in Arabic, and Yiddish *ale* which means "all," fuses east and west: *Ale knoytn, ale hoytn* are all the wicks and all the skin colors of our yellowed people who include the *Falashino*—Sephardi-Ethiopians. Palestine is trying to get people to speak Hebrew, hence *Palestino daberino* from the Hebrew verb *daber*, to speak. People say that Jews are a mongrel people, but their *Falashino* mixture is really *Aladino*, wondrous as Aladdin's lamp. The poem revels in its alleged il-

Ostensibly singing the praises of sun-drenched Arabic-tinged Judezmo, the poem actually shows off Yiddish through a run of sound-plays and neologisms.

colored talkabouting," of *undzer tsoyberzhargonino*, "our marvelous jargon." People may say that these are not real languages, but the speaker is there to demonstrate the wondrous malleability of vernaculars that are too often scorned for their instability and lack of grammar. Ostensibly singing the praises of sun-drenched Arabic-tinged Judezmo, the poem

legitimacy, invites celebration of its ingenuity, and unapologetically integrates whatever it needs for self-expression. Though some of Glatstein's poems of this period comment on the decline of Yiddish and on his personal difficulties, one has the sense of an exuberant poet in his prime.

Glatstein conceived of his fictional autobiography as a trilogy. Part One was the trip from America back to Poland, Part Two was the time spent in Poland, and Part Three would have described his reentry to America. He published the first two parts in 1938 and 1940, but he never wrote the third. In the first two books and elsewhere, he wrote about the looming catastrophe in Europe.

On his return from Europe, Glatstein began writing a weekly column in his newspaper first under the pseudonym Itzkus and then, at the editor's urging, under his own name. Introspectivism had insisted that everything including current events was grist for poetry, but Glatstein's new job came at some apparent cost to his poetry, since during the late 1930s he published relatively little verse. He concentrated on the Yash novels and on journalism.

In addition to ringing what he called "the silent bells" of warning for Polish and European Jewry, Glatstein wrote about the anti-Semitism of such literary figures as Theodore Dreiser and Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky's Jew-hatred was a lifelong sore point: How could a writer who "put God on his table/like a bottle of whiskey/and guzzled" fail to appreciate the God-intoxicated Jewish people? He also wrote with rare prescience about Stalin and communism, once proposing a rejection of the Comintern (Communist International) in favor of something he called the Yidntern. Although he refused to soften his stance on communism and the Soviet Union because of its opposition to Hitlerism, he also despaired of the tepid response of the world's democracies to events like Italy's conquest of Ethiopia or Hitler's steady suppression of



Jacob Glatstein. (Courtesy of the Yiddish Book Center.)

actually shows off Yiddish through a run of sound-plays and neologisms with what Janet Hadda calls *komponentn-visikayt*, or component-awareness.

Zunfargino gin, gino evokes the generosity and absolutism of the setting sun. Al Charizi is the 13th-century poet and translator of Maimonides and *kharuzim* are verses, making *Alkharuzin* the fictional creator of intellectual versification. This provokes *Alushpizin*, which plays on the seven heavenly

freedom in Germany. And, of course, he worried over the fate of Yiddish.

These preoccupations coalesced in his most famous poem dated April 1938, in which he loudly slams the gate against Western civilization, saying: "Good night, wide world./Big, stinking world./Not you, but I, slam the gate." Glatstein recorded this poem, so one can still hear him in his own strong voice damning:

Swinish German, hostile Polack,
Thievish Amalekite—land of swill and guzzle
Slobbering democracy,
With your cold compress of sympathy
Good night, brash world with your electric glare.

A joke circulated at the time about a German or Polish Jew who goes to a travel agent to arrange for his departure from Europe. The man names one destination after another and the agent explains why immigration is impossible to each country in turn. Finally the exasperated Jew says, "Haven't you got another globe?" Against that plaintive Jewish question "Good Night, World" slams the door.

Glatstein is, after all, an American, not the captive Jew looking for a visa, but the man in the freest country on earth. As that free man in a free country, he hands the world back the "Jesus-Marxes" the Jews bequeathed it and curses the bad bargain Jews made in leaving the *nigun*, the hummed melody of the Shabbos table, for Wagner's idol-music. "Choke on each drop of our baptized blood!" Glatstein says to the Gentiles, reversing the direction of the Jews who pleaded to be allowed into Western civilization.

This was still 1938. Then came the war and rhetorical postures gave way to the dawning horror at the realities of Hitler's Final Solution. Glatstein became one of the great eulogists of European Jews. His lamentations, poems of the *Khurbn* in unusual forms of paradox and wit, many of them addressed to God, will probably remain at the heart of Glatstein's legacy.

Did all this somehow preclude writing the third part of the Yash trilogy? Glatstein's problem was certainly not writer's block: He filled several thick collections of essays and literary criticism during and after the 1950s, and he was a more prolific poet after the war than he had been before. The literary scholar Dan Miron reports that shortly before his death in 1971, the poet told him that learning of the destruction of Polish Jewry made it impossible for him to complete the "*Yash proyekt*." This seems at best a partial explanation, since Glatstein did announce a forthcoming novel entitled *Ven Yash iz tsurikgekumen* (When Yash Came Back), and an excerpt he published in the Tel Aviv quarterly *Di Goldene Keyt* in 1958 indicates that he was following the style of the second volume that combines imagined scenes with memories and reportage. This would have required describing the way of life to which Yash returned. Judging from what Glatstein did write in the post-war years, it was the return to America rather than the destruction of Polish Jewry that he could not handle.

Here is a short lyric from the early 1950s, "*Vi a pastke*" (Like a Mousetrap), that is typical in tone of Glatstein's 1956 collection, *Erdene Reyd* (Earth-bound Speech):

Like a little mousetrap
A little shul stands in Long Island.
The congregants are few.
No-one has yet discovered
Whether God
Ever drops in there for a while.

The rabbi's piety
Is Conservative.
From his silent synagogue-study
He sends God a letter
At the old address:
Come and hear my sermon about you on Sabbath.
Don't forget.

The congregants are small in number.
There's room for God's honor.
But no one knows whether God
Drops in there for an hour.

The comic analogy between rodent and omnipotent is reinforced by the connection of the Yiddish terms *zikh araynkhapn* and *khapt zikh arayn* (to drop in) with *khapn*, to trap. Everything here is puny, the synagogue, the number of congregants, the divine rendezvous. Not the rabbi but his piety is conservative, exemplifying the caution and constraint of the denomination. In place of God's majestic call to Abraham and giving the Torah through Moses we have the American rabbi summoning God to listen to *him*, with the rhymes driving home the irony: *konservativ*, sends him a *briv*; at the old *adres*, come and *nisht farges* (Don't forget). The intimate passion of the Hasidic ideal of *dveykes*, cleaving to God, has

Postdoctoral Fellowship at Yeshiva University's Straus Center

The Zahava and Moshe Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University invites applications for the Tikvah Postdoctoral Fellowship. One fellow will be appointed for the 2015-2016 academic year, upon the approval of Yeshiva's provost, the director of the Straus Center and a co-hosting academic department. The fellowship is open to all scholars whose work relates to the intellectual heritage of the West, including, but not limited to, fields such as politics, philosophy, Jewish studies, literature, history, economics, religious studies, theology and the sciences.

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Applicants should submit an application letter articulating their unique suitability for this fellowship and their interest in furthering the mission of the Straus Center in particular and Yeshiva University in general; a curriculum vitae with a list of publications; an example of published work; syllabi of courses taught, designed or planned; and several letters of recommendation.



Applications should be submitted no later than January 15, 2015 to the Office of the Provost, Yeshiva University, 500 West 185th Street, Belfer Hall 1304, New York, NY 10033.



Yeshiva University

been exchanged for the possibility of an occasional drop-in.

Corresponding to the American rabbi who treats God as a potential congregant is the subject of a second poem, the American prophet (*Der novi*) who substitutes facts for faith. Not like Elijah fed by ravens, but a well-fed high earner, today's prophet is a young orator. He is a psychologist, an economist, or a Pew Report sociologist, one of those experts who serves the goddess statistics. After a little more in this vein the poem concludes: "The mitzvot

His lamentations, poems of the *Khurbn* in unusual forms of paradox and wit, many of them addressed to God, will probably remain at the heart of Glatstein's legacy.

that he demands are banal./Applause thunders in the hall." Quantification and the methods of social science have replaced Judaism's moral and spiritual categories.

Nor does the poet's censure stop at leadership. A businessman driving to *shul* in his fancy car is portrayed the way anti-capitalist literature often sets up its mark—as the man of wealth who thinks he can buy happiness:

The automobile devours
And elegantly desecrates
Chunks of Sabbath boundaries.
A retired businessman hastens to shul
Where prayers are offered
For good health and length of days.

The adjective *tsurikgetsoygener* (retired) suggests the man is both retired and drawn back to synagogue, expecting compensation for his attendance in the form of improved health. The rhyme of *me-khalel* (for desecrating) with *mispalet* (for praying) makes the point that the vehicle of his faith is now the car, entirely free of the structure of observance that once defined the boundaries of Judaism by prescribing precisely how far one could travel on the Sabbath. Since this businessman walks to *shul* from only the parking lot, it is technically his car that transgresses.

Satire tends to direct its barbs from an elevated perch. Mendele Mokher Seforim did this, for example, when he described Jews arguing in a bathhouse as if they were members of the British Parliament: The distance between the benches of Parliament and the benches of the bathhouse points up the absurdity of the way Jews practice imaginary, rhetorical politics, while letting the world determine their fate. Glatstein's satire comes from the other direction. He describes American Jews in the terminology of their forefathers. Portraying them through the prism of *mitzvot*, sanctity, God, the Ba'al Shem Tov, Isaiah, and Abraham shows up how stunted their Jewishness has become.

The very title of "Sunday-shtetl," one of the most biting poems in this vein, implies that the Jewish Sabbath is now subject to the Christian calendar. Here is Cynthia Ozick's marvelous translation:

Rabbi Levi Yitskhok's drayman—the one who wore *tales* and *tfiln* as he smeared the wheels of his wagon with tar—

turns up in the shape of a bunch of Jews
hanging around their houses,
washing the car
(while the shtetl drowns
in its Sunday snooze),
adding up bills and working out deals
to pay up what's owed to the pinochle fund-raiser
they attended last night at the Center.

The ideal reader of this poem would know the story of the disciple who informs the Hasidic

rebbe Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev that his drayman has been desecrating his *tales* and *tfiln* by wearing them while greasing the wheels of his wagon. To which Levi Yitzhak replied, "How marvelous are Your Jews, O God, that they worship You even while performing menial labors." As opposed to those bygone Jews, their American descendants nervously turn down the pressure of their hoses when they wash their cars on a Sunday morning lest the noise offend Christian neighbors on their way to church.

Our draymen-in-disguise,
hosing down their wheels,
cut the stream to cut the noise.
Lost souls, they look for safekeeping
to the deserted synagogue
that waits to fill up on Yom Kippur.

These Sunday Jews are secret Jews
smiling for the neighbors.
The church bell tolerantly skips over
the doorposts of the Jews.
They listen
with pricked-up ear,
in Marrano fear.

Glatstein was hardly alone in belittling the conformism of the suburbs and the declining vitality of Jewish religion in America; his originality lay in the form in which he shaped his criticism. Surveys and sociological essays chart the decline of Jewishness in America in the language of the problem they describe, and novelists like Philip Roth have generally taken as their standard an even higher degree of assimilation than that of the bourgeois Jews they satirize, but Glatstein's poem *embodies* the Jewishness from which American Jewry has fallen. When they lived as slaves in Egypt, Jews were assured that God would pass over the homes whose doorposts marked them as Jewish, but in suburban America they depend on the tolerance of the church not to identify them as Jews. Glatstein's Yiddish wit implies that American Jews have lost not only the original strength of their faith but also the ironic self-awareness of the first-generation of Yiddish renegades like himself. The allusive language is what makes the point; they no longer even get the joke.

In another poem the speaker addresses the generation of Jewish grandchildren ("Eynikl-doyres"), telling them, "I did not run away as far (*Ikh bin azoy*

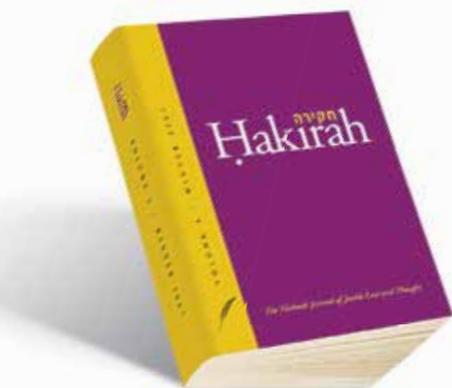
vayt nisht antlofn) from the founder of Hasidism (*fun bal shem*) as you run from your grandfather (*vi ir antloft fun ayer zeyde*)." The American youngsters are not even heretics; Yash could not hope to find his place among them.

How is it that the decline of Jewish religion, which had not surfaced as a subject in Glatstein's first four books of verse or in either of the Yash novels, should trouble so many of these post-war poems? It is really, I think, the same question—or at least has the same answer—as the question of why he never completed his trilogy. Yash, the literary stand-in for Glatstein (it was, in fact, his nickname), had been altered by history, whereas American Jewry had not.

The transition from religious to cultural Jewishness had once seemed to most of the Yiddish intelligentsia part of an inevitable process. Because the Yiddish language was itself the repository of Judaism, those working in the language felt it was *memeyle*, inevitably invested with Jewishness. Glatstein had learned that this was not so. Soviet authorities and their American supporters used Yiddish to attract its speakers and writers with the illusion of Jewishness while demanding that they betray it for a supposedly higher ideal of revolutionary internationalism. Equally fatal, in Glatstein's estimation, was the patina of sentiment indulged by many in his circles who romanticized the past while giving up everything of their tradition that had been of value:

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Yiddish poets,
why such yearning
after what remembered burning
of Sabbath candles turning
to tapers round a bier?

Yiddishkayt—the subject and title of this poem—had been heralded by several modern Jewish movements as the cultural substitute for Judaism, on the assumption that the Yiddish language had absorbed religion’s universal humanistic values and could become their repository going forward. But once you stopped lighting Sabbath candles in the present, they turned into memorial candles for a sentimentalized past.

Glatstein was as hard on himself as he was on his co-religionists. Reflexively addressed to the Yiddish poet, “*Yiddishkayt*” ends with a challenge that I took for my personal motto when I became a teacher of Yiddish literature:

Nostalgia-yiddishkayt is merely a lullaby for the old
whose gums knead their soaked challah.
Should we provide the mushy portions,
the hollow, outlived words,
we who dreamed of being
men of a new Great Assembly?

The Men of the Great Assembly (*Anshei Kneset Ha-gedola*) appear at the start of perhaps the most familiar Mishnah, *Pirke Avot* (Chapters of the Fathers):

Moses received Torah from Sinai and handed it on to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise many disciplines, and make a hedge around the Torah.

To stand in this line of transmission was a far cry from the razzle-dazzler showing off his syllable-centricity. Yash, who aspired to be the chronicler of the Jewish people during the most critical period in its history, could not rejoin American Jewry.

But perhaps I have put the matter too strongly. Glatstein’s dismay at the condition of Jewishness and Yiddish in America may have interrupted the Yash project less than his exhilaration, his joy, at the rise of Israel. Along with other American Yiddish poets in the 1930s, Glatstein had voiced understandable resentment of “*Palestino daberino*,” the exclusive emphasis on Hebrew at the expense of Yiddish in the Jewish Yishuv of Palestine. Then, along with many of those same Yiddish poets, he was drawn to Israel after the *Khurbn*—if one may say so, more passionately than even the most passionate Zionist, since no one more than the Yiddish poet understood what Hitler had destroyed. The *Khurbn* obliterated the civilization that created Yiddish, leaving a worldwide network without its generative center. What Jews then needed was a physical place of refuge that neither Soviet Russia nor America could provide and a new spiritual foundation for Jewish life.

Glatstein’s reports on his trip to Israel in 1962 sound very much in tone like the reporting by Yash in the volumes that bear his name. Yash was always

being buttonholed by people with stories to tell, and this is precisely what happens to Glatstein in Israel:

As I reached the national memorial of our catastrophe, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, I was approached by a Jew who introduced himself as follows: “You have the honor of speaking with one of the two surviving Jews who participated in the founding of Tel Aviv.”

Glatstein then relays the man’s description of how some 60 Jewish families had set out from Yaffo 53 years earlier to establish the first modern Jewish city. Did this encounter really occur at the entrance

Glatstein was hardly alone in belittling the conformism of the suburbs and the declining vitality of Jewish religion in America; his originality lay in the form in which he shaped his criticism.

to Yad Vashem? Whether it did or not, by situating this account of the birth of Tel Aviv at the memorial for the Jews of Europe the author reverses the direction in which he had been headed.

The magnetism of Israel was enhanced for Yiddish writers by the presence there of a small but strong Yiddish publishing center that was supported by Zalman Shazar, the third president of the State. Yiddish writers provided warm welcome to those who came from abroad. Glatstein describes how the poet Avrom Sutzkever takes him on a walking tour of old Yaffo, of which he knows every nook and cranny. On the steps of a house near the Romanian restaurant where they dine on karnatzel, they are engaged (*fartshepet*) by three elderly women who want to know from the American visitor whether he has come to settle. Their conversation is in Hebrew, and one of the women tells him proudly that they are all native-born. She says she blesses every day that she lives in this land, but then, switching into Yiddish she adds a little mischievously, “[*Ober*] *alts ineynem iz nishto bay keynem*” (but you can’t have everything). Glatstein ends this report by echoing this sentiment, but he adds, “*akhuts baym ineynemdikh yidishn folk*,” “except as a member of ingathered Jewish people.”

Unable to report positively on the Jews of America, Glatstein can hardly stop beaming at the reconstruction of Israel where he is only a visitor, as he had been on his last visit to Lublin. Based as Yash was on the biography of Yankev Glatshetyn, he could not have “returned home” to Israel since he belonged in America, and he could not thrive in the third volume of a trilogy based on the idea of America as his home. Happily, what Glatstein could not in his memoirs, he could do as poet.

In the first poem of Glatstein’s last collection, *Poems from Right to Left*, the speaker is greeted on his arrival in Israel by a weary immigration officer, a *pakid*, who asks him with a yawn a standard question he has asked hundreds of times before, “Where are you from?” In Yiddish, “*Shalom! Funvanen iz a yid?*” To which the Yiddish poet answers surprisingly, “*Yeder yids funvanen/Iz fundanen*,” “Every Jew’s whence/is thence.” At first the official wrinkles his brow and fails to grasp the witticism. The poem then takes us, the way one takes a child by the hand, through every slow step of dawning appreciation. Suddenly, the *pakid* brightens up and

the creases disappear from his forehead. “He asks me to repeat it again and again, and hey—I am not lazy and do his bidding.” Since when did a poem become a language lesson, a patient tutorial?

Glatstein’s ingenuity had formerly been spectacularly quick—blink, and the fireworks have shot up and disappeared. By contrast, the progress here is so painstaking that we feel poetry being pushed against its grain, subordinating novelty and the pleasures of surprise to a more prosaic process. In obliging the official, the poet seems to be teaching us something new about poetry when it tries to speak across a real linguistic boundary. The poet wants to be understood by the official who does not know that there

is anything special to understand. But then once he gets it, he wants to spread the cheer. The official rings for others to gather—not for any emergency but to form a minyan of Jews who can appreciate, “intuitively, the meaning of the words that I no longer say but rather happily sing for them. They take up the tune and grasp the full meaning of my Jewish visa—my Yiddish visa.” The weary official becomes the conductor and, together with his colleagues and the poet, all are “caught up in dance like Lubavitch Hasidim.”

This light-hearted and apparently childlike poem speaks volumes. The language of European Jewry may appear foreign to the Israeli, but it contains in pure form the moral claim of Israel, which is that every Jew’s whence is thence. Though it sounds paradoxical, it couldn’t be more straightforward. The sustaining attachment to the Land of Israel that animated Yiddish—and Lubavitch—refreshes what otherwise threatens to become dulled.

Glatstein had conceived the Yash trilogy as an autobiographical bridge between the old home and the new, with titles of departure, arrival, and return marking the stages of his journey. The project was activated by the shock of going back to a birthplace in Poland that was much more threatened than the community he had left. But the transformation he witnessed in Poland and the cataclysm that followed also changed him and his world. He could not bring Yash back to an America that would serve as an alternative to the destroyed communities of Europe, and he could not take Yash to the place where he saw a Jewish future emerging.

It was enough that Glatstein wrote the elegy for the Jews of Poland; he did not want to write a requiem for Yash. So the work stayed unfinished. Writing in his own voice, Glatstein described and celebrated Israel, as Yash—caught between *der alter heym* and America—could not.

Ruth R. Wisse recently retired from the Martin Peretz Professorship of Yiddish Literature at Harvard University and is currently a distinguished senior fellow at the Tikvah Fund. Her book, *No Joke: Making Jewish Humor* (Princeton University Press) is forthcoming in paperback. A version of this essay was delivered at YIVO in March 2014.

Thoroughly Modern Maimonides?: A Response

BY JOSEF STERN

I wish to thank Lawrence Kaplan for his praise of my recent book *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide*. Pursuing the “give-and-take” spirit of his “Thoroughly Modern Maimonides?” (Fall 2014), I would like to continue the conversation and respond to some of the issues he raises.

Kaplan writes that “one key statement . . . I would have liked to see Stern contend” with is “For only truth pleases God and only falsehood angers Him,” [*Guide* 2:47] which implies that only truth, not the search for truth, is of value.” Well, the first thing to be said is that for Maimonides this—his own—anthropopathic statement about God is not literally true, since neither truth nor falsehood either pleases or angers God, who is utterly impassive and neither pleased nor angered by anything.

The context of this statement is a chapter in which Maimonides explains that many prophetic texts are written as parables and use figurative language; hence, they should never be interpreted literally in order to arrive at correct “intelligible beliefs.” How, then, should this “key statement” be understood in its context? At the beginning of *Guide* 1:36, Maimonides explains “in what respect it is said that God is pleased with, or made angry” at something. “Anger,” he continues, is “exclusively used

with reference to idolatry,” and idolatry, he next says, is a false belief about God, especially believing Him to be a body or to have emotions. That is, the worst belief, indeed a form of idolatry itself, is believing an anthropomorphic or anthropopathic sentence about God literally, even when it occurs in scripture. Likewise, what “pleases” God is following one’s intellect to believe demonstrated truths rather than following the words of a text literally. Nothing in this chapter bears on truth versus the search for truth, so I would not infer one to the exclusion of the other from this lone sentence out of context.

Two brief points: First, Kaplan quotes my statement that “One senses that [Maimonides’ negative attributes] are ‘correct’ only relative to our other linguistic alternatives for talking about God” and comments that in my “careful” use of the words “one senses” there is “a tip-off that Stern is on shaky ground.” However, in the very next sentence I state that I am referring to a specific “alternative nonaffirmative method of describing God,” which I go on to identify as Al-Farabi’s logical category of “indefinite nouns” and which I contrast with negative attributes. Neither negative attributes nor indefinite nouns yield truths, but the former are “correct,” a recommended mode of expression, because they raise fewer prob-

lems than the latter. What is “shaky” here?

Second, Kaplan questions my interpretation of Maimonides’ term “conduct” saying that I “overlook” its use in *Guide* 1:57 in the phrase “conducting the mind to the truth of the matter.” But it is Kaplan who overlooks my discussion on the previous page of my book of that very occurrence of the term. He may disagree with my interpretation (although he owes us an explanation why), but that is not overlooking.

Kaplan makes the interesting proposal that when Maimonides describes Moses in his parable of the palace as “putting questions and receiving answers” he is referring to *Guide* 1:54, where Moses is also described as “making requests of God and receiving answers.” I had suggested that the Q&A refers to Maimonides’ own skeptically oriented invented dialogue between Aristotle and himself in *Guide* 2:19, explicitly described as “questions and answers.” Because Maimonides abruptly shifts to an interrogative style—departing from his usual third-person discursive writing—I interpreted that Q&A as Maimonides’ depiction for us of the Q&A in the palace. But apart from quibbles about “requests” versus “questions,” Kaplan’s idea is as possible as mine.

What I do not understand is why Kaplan



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concludes that 1:54 “suggest[s] a progression to ever-higher levels of knowledge.” Moses, we are told, made two requests of God: knowledge of God’s “essence and true reality” and “His attributes.” In response, he was denied the former, which is knowledge of metaphysics including truths about God, and granted the latter where the attributes are identified with divine “actions,” which Maimonides goes on to explicate as the natural laws through which God governs the natural (sub-lunar) world, i.e., Aristotelian physics. Although there is no depiction of a skeptical exchange in 1:54, there is also no “progression to ever-higher levels of knowledge”—if what Kaplan means is knowledge beyond the limits of *physics* as understood by Maimonides. Maimonides’ mitigated skepticism is directed exclusively at meta-

physics and not only allows for, but encourages, knowledge of physics. Kaplan’s proposal, then, confirms the skeptical reading of the parable of the palace rather than counts against it, and I thank him for this corroborating text.

Finally, Kaplan rejects my thesis that Maimonides makes intellectual perfection a regulative ideal whose intellectually oriented practices count as much as their goal. He asserts that this “pretty picture” is “highly appealing to the modern temper” but “you must not call it Maimonides.” It is good to hear that my account falls well on modern ears. However, as I argue at length in my book (an argument to which Kaplan does not object), Maimonides’ practice-oriented conception of perfection must be situated within the Hellenistic tradition that understands philosophy as spiritual

exercises that cultivate a way of life aimed at happiness. Thus my account of Maimonides’ conception of intellectual perfection has strong roots in the past, as well as modern interest. So who is the Maimonides that Kaplan claims my “pretty picture” does not depict?

May the open but critical exchange of ideas characteristic of Kaplan’s review continue—and knowing the intellectual personalities of modern Maimonides scholars, I am sure that it will!

Josef Stern is the William H. Colvin Professor of Philosophy at The University of Chicago, and the author, most recently, of The Matter and Form of Maimonides’ Guide (Harvard University Press).

Thoroughly Modern Maimonides?: A Rejoinder

BY LAWRENCE KAPLAN

I very much appreciate Josef Stern’s courteous, thoughtful, and substantive reply to my critique of his skeptical reading of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, which affords me the opportunity to continue our “open but critical exchange of ideas” about Maimonides.

Stern, of course, is correct in asserting that “the first thing to be said” about Maimonides’ statement in *Guide* 2:47 “For only truth pleases God and only falsehood angers Him” is “that for Maimonides this . . . anthropopathic statement about God is not literally true, since neither truth nor falsehood either pleases or angers God, who is utterly impassive and neither pleased nor angered by anything.” Indeed, this is precisely why after citing this statement I immediately proceeded to paraphrase it in non-anthropopathic terms, maintaining that for Maimonides “only truth . . . is of value.” To sharpen Stern’s point, we may say that the person who believes God *literally* gets angry *metaphorically* angers God. While Stern’s elucidation of Maimonides’ statement in its context is well taken, the ringing nature of this Maimonidean declaration suggests that its implications extend well beyond that context.

That this is so is borne out by Maimonides’ very similar statement in *Guide* 1:54:

He who knows God finds favor in His sight . . . Accordingly, those who know Him are those who are favored by Him, and permitted to come near Him, whereas those who do not know Him are objects of His wrath and kept far away from Him.

Here, as in 2:47, it is the knowledge about God, not the search for knowledge about Him, that is of value. Note, particularly, that Maimonides here proceeds to say “We have gone beyond the limits of this chapter,” thus underscoring the statement’s general significance.

Stern claimed that Maimonides’ statement that “the description of God . . . by means of negations is the correct description” (1:58) means “correct’ only

relative to our other linguistic alternatives for talking about God.” In response to my criticism that his claim is on “shaky ground,” Stern points to his very next sentences, where he refers “to a specific ‘alternative nonaffirmative method of describing God,’ [namely] Al-Farabi’s logical category of ‘indefinite nouns’ . . . Neither negative attributes nor indefinite nouns yield truths, but the former are ‘correct,’ . . . because they raise fewer problems than the latter.” But this begs the question. If one assumes that Maimonides’ affirmation that “the description of God . . . by means of negations is . . . correct” means “correct’ only relative to our other linguistic alternatives,” then the question arises as to what other linguistic alternative he is referring, and Stern’s answer is as good as any, perhaps the best possible. But what I was questioning is the basis for that initial assumption.

I apologize for overlooking Stern’s reference to Maimonides’ discussion of the term “conduct” in *Guide* 1:57. In partial extenuation, let me note that Stern does not, as he does in his letter, cite Maimonides’ remarks, but only paraphrases them. More to the point, his paraphrase weakens their force. Maimonides states there that negative attributes “conduct the mind to the truth of the matter”; Stern paraphrases this as saying that “they conduct us in the right direction.” My question remains, in fact it is sharpened: Why does Stern choose to weaken Maimonides’ statement in *Guide* 1:58 “that negative attributes conduct the mind toward the uppermost reach that man may attain in the apprehension [of God]” by referring to Maimonides’ discussion of the term “conduct” in 1:46, instead of referring to his use of the term in 1:57, the very chapter Stern himself referred to on the previous page?

I am pleased that Stern considers my proposal that Maimonides’ description of Moses in his palace parable as “putting questions and receiving answers” (3:51) refers to his similar description in 1:54 of Moses “making requests of God and receiving answers” to be as possible as his own. But Stern’s surprising equation of Moses’ inability

to know God’s “essence and true reality” with his supposed inability to know “truths about God” is simply wrong. Maimonides, as both Herbert A. Davidson and I (naïve readers that we are) stress, consistently distinguishes between the two. Moreover, Moses’ knowledge of the attributes of action includes, at least in 1:54, the celestial spheres and the incorporeal intellects. While Maimonides in 1:54 does not treat Moses’ knowledge about God, in 1:58–59 he affirms that Moses’ positive knowledge of the cosmos served as the basis for his negative knowledge about God. Stern’s conclusion that 1:54 corroborates his skeptical reading thus lacks any basis, as far as I can see.

This is not the place for a full critique of Stern’s attempt to situate Maimonides within the Hellenistic tradition of philosophy as spiritual exercises in support of his skeptical reading of the *Guide*. I note that in *The Matter and Form of Maimonides’ Guide* page 8, note 7, and page 313 he quietly concedes that it is not clear how and even if this tradition reached Maimonides. Stern plausibly contends that Maimonides’ statement in 3:13 that “when man knows his own soul . . . and understands every being according to what it is, he becomes calm and his thoughts are not troubled by seeking a final end for what has no final end” may be viewed as a type of spiritual exercise. But, contrary to Stern, Maimonides does not claim here that “inquiry calms,” but that understanding calms. Inquiry that does not result in understanding is ineffective therapy.

Josef Stern evidently believes that his skeptical reading of Maimonides, for all its apparent modernity, is true both to the *Guide’s* letter and its spirit. In short, his answer to the question of my review’s title “Thoroughly Modern Maimonides?” is in the affirmative. With the greatest respect for the wide learning, close reading, and analytic acuity displayed throughout his book, I remain unconvinced.

Lawrence Kaplan is professor of Jewish studies at McGill University.

Accounting for the Soul

BY ABRAHAM SOCHER

Edith Brotman's new book *Mussar Yoga*, with its cover photo of a woman in a graceful Tree Pose silhouetted against sea and sky, made me smile when it landed on my desk. Is this, I wondered, the asana for guilt? Because they never stinted on guilt, the old mussarniks. They also renounced Jewish mysticism, paid little attention to their bodies, and even less to other spiritual traditions. So *Mussar Yoga* makes for a surprising deli combo platter of the spirit, even in our easy-going mix-and-match America.

To be fair, Brotman is more or less aware of the incongruity. "If you are searching for a pure or traditional approach to *Mussar* or yoga," she writes, "this is not the book for you." And there is something to Brotman's idea beyond feel-good American syncretism. The mussar movement attempted to inculcate ethical character traits through a regular practice of disciplined self-reflection, and yoga attempts to do something similar through the body.

In 1844 and 1845 Rabbi Israel Salanter, the founder of the mussar movement, had a publisher in Vilna reprint several works of Jewish ethics urging both students and laymen to set aside time to study them regularly and apply the lessons to their own lives. One of them was *Cheshbon Ha-nefesh* by Mendel Lefin. The title means, roughly, an "accounting for the soul," and it offers a brilliant method for doing just that.

Lefin enumerated 13 basic virtues and asked the reader to associate each with a short saying or maxim upon which to concentrate. Lefin then instructed the reader to make a simple spreadsheet with the virtues running down the page (one for each week) and the days of the week across the top. So if the reader acted haughtily on, say, Tuesday of week 6, when he should have been concentrating on humility (*anava*), he put a black mark in that box. The 13 virtues (which could be customized) corresponded to the 13 weeks of a season, so that the reader concentrated on each virtue four times a year.

Cheshbon Ha-nefesh is Brotman's principal model for *Mussar Yoga*. Her list of 13 virtues is somewhat different (notably missing is Lefin's 13th virtue of *perishut*, literally "separateness," roughly speaking, chastity), but the system is the same. Each virtue is now linked to a set of two or three yoga poses. In the place of maxims she introduces mantras that are

as likely to derive from the Beatles ("All you need is love") as the Bible ("Love your neighbor as yourself").

Rabbi Salanter probably knew that Mendel Lefin was a modernist when he had *Cheshbon Ha-nefesh* reprinted, but he certainly didn't know that the whole system—13 virtues/four yearly cycles, maxims, moral spreadsheets, and all—was secretly cribbed wholesale from Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. Franklin told his readers that he devised the system after having conceived "the bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection," which, he cheerfully admitted turned out to have been harder than he thought. Nonetheless, it really was a brilliant scheme, the first best-selling American self-help system. In fact, there is now even an app for that "arduous project," called Ben's Virtues.

Max Weber famously saw Franklin's system as a secularization of puritan introspection into capitalist productivity. If so, perhaps Salanter unconsciously returned it to its more natural home among the kind of strict pietists who, when faced with temptation, tried to envision the day of their deaths and the punishment that lay beyond.

Not everyone was convinced of the value of mussar. When Salanter's disciple Rabbi Isaac Blazer tried to introduce it into the curriculum of the great yeshiva of Volozhin, Rabbi Hayyim of Brisk rejected the suggestion out of hand. In the account of his grandson, Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, he replied:

If a person is sick, we prescribe castor oil for him. . . . [But] if a healthy person ingests castor oil he will become very sick. . . . [I]f you are spiritually sick. . . then you must use more powerful drugs. . . the remembrance of the day of death. We in Volozhin, thank God, are healthy. . . . If the

mussarniks of Kelm and Kovno. But Ben Franklin probably wouldn't have minded.

On the few occasions when I have gone to a yoga class, I've left feeling alert, relaxed, and refreshed—in short *good*. I've sometimes even had the heretical thought "why don't I feel this good after *shul*?" After all, the *Shema* is a meditation and the *Amida* is a carefully choreographed prayer (three steps forward, three steps back, the necessary bows, the optional swaying). Of course, the problem may be—in fact, certainly is—me. I remember my own brief time in a mussar yeshiva and the elegant intensity with which one particular student would pray, his back ramrod straight, his hands eloquently beseeching. And then, also, the old mussar voice comes back to me: "Who said you were supposed to feel good?"

The Brisker Rav may have been right to reject mussar for Volozhin and Ms. Brotman may be correct in diluting it for her readers now (though when one sees a headline like "I love me" one may wonder how much is left), but it did produce some truly saintly personalities. The main stories about Rabbi Salanter are not about his talmudic genius or his ritual piety but rather the extraordinary care he took in ordinary interactions: the time he missed Kol Nidre to take care of a stranger's crying baby, the lengths he took to avoid embarrassing recipients of charity, the afternoon he spent trying to lead a lost cow back to its farm, and so on.

Last Shabbat, I was playing with my six-year-old daughter Bayla and we started flipping through *Mussar Yoga*. We tried Up Dog, Down Dog, the Boat Pose (a kind of open-armed crunch Brotman places under Generosity), Reverse Warrior (Humility), and a couple of others. Incidentally, it turns out that the sun salutation exercise, the most common sequence in contemporary yoga, is even more recent than Franklin's *Autobiography*, a 20th-century invention, as I learned from "Yoga: The Art of Transformation," an extraordinary museum exhibit that I saw in its Cleveland incarnation. Anyway, eventually I pulled something and had to rest in Savasana, the lying-down—literally "corpse"—pose.

Lying there on my family-room carpet, I remembered the story of Rabbi Salanter's death. He was living alone in Koenigsberg, sick and very poor. Some of his students paid an elderly attendant to stay with him overnight. When they came the next morning, he had passed away. They asked what his last words had been. The attendant said that Rabbi Israel had spent the night reassuring him that the body of a man was harmless, and that there was nothing to worry about in being alone with a corpse.

Abraham Socher is the editor of the Jewish Review of Books and professor of religion and Jewish studies at Oberlin College.

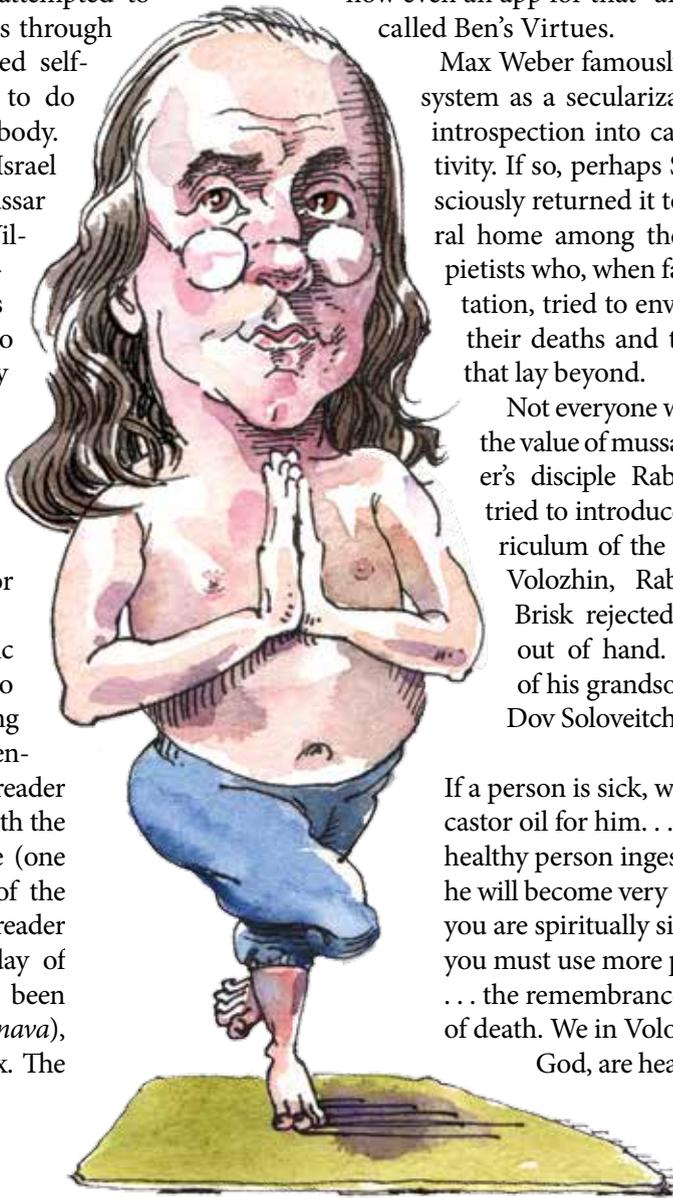


Illustration by Mark Anderson.

scholars of Kelm and Kovno feel compelled. . . let them drink to their hearts content, but let them not invite others to dine with them.

One can only imagine the Brisker's response to *Mussar Yoga*, or, for that matter, the response of the



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