

Daniel Gordis A Requiem for Conservative Judaism

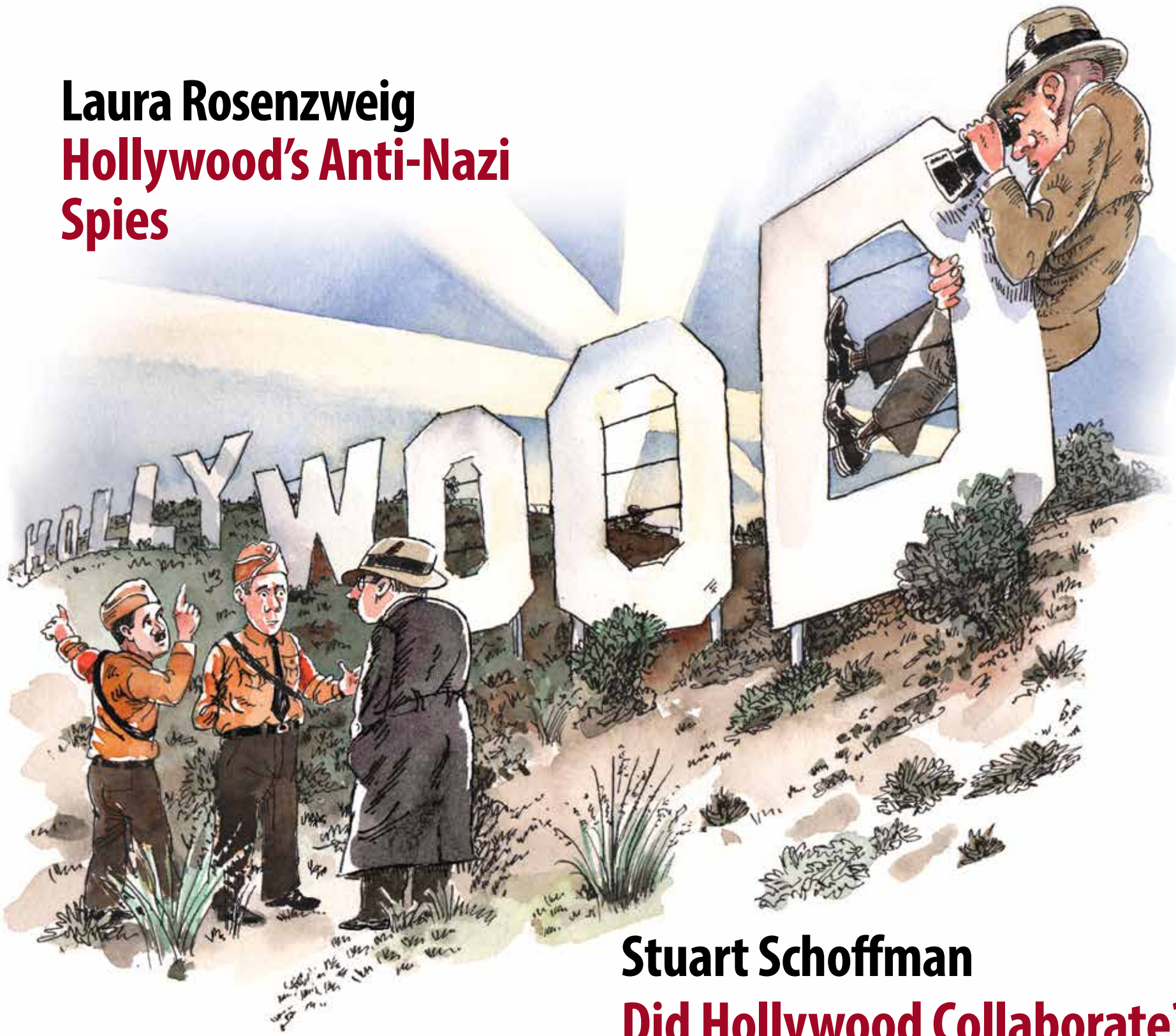
JEWISH REVIEW

OF BOOKS

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Laura Rosenzweig
Hollywood's Anti-Nazi Spies



Stuart Schoffman
Did Hollywood Collaborate?

Michael Weingrad

Israeli Sci-Fi & Fantasy: Not Quite Narnia But ...

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Paul Reitter **Bambi's Zionism** **Rebecca Schuman** **Kafka for Kids**

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Cyprus Bound

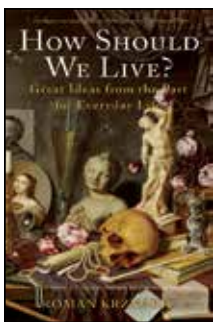
It is a great tragedy that religion has all but been made redundant in Israeli society. (“Fathers & Sons,” Fall 2013) Our “either or” attitude with regard to observance, while softening over the years, has been replaced by indifference. It is with a heavy heart that in my own rabbinate I have counseled couples to obtain civil marriage in other countries and then return home and choose a “*mesader kiddushin*” to their liking rather than have to deal with the rabbinate. This is just one example that can be made concerning the state of Jewish observance in Israel.

Eytan Keshet
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

A Salter Exchange Between Readers

“Whatever its source, such artifice and obfuscation can make Salter’s work, at its weakest, seem phony, a fancied depiction of a world that exists only in the minds of a small community of East Coast WASPs. In this mode, Salter most resembles Ralph Lauren, another name-changing Jew who internalized the lie and the fantasy. Like Lauren, né Lifshitz . . .” In “The Hunter” (Fall 2013) Rich Cohen beautifully captures my view of James Salter the novelist. While some of his paragraphs seem tantalizing the whole isn’t.

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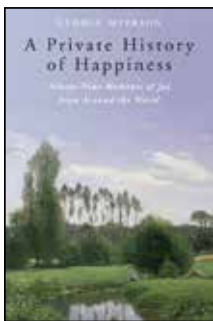
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Cohen’s use of analog to Isaac Babel is less convincing. Babel was a great artist, and he didn’t hide his Jewishness, not even from the Cossacks. As a convinced Bolshevik, like Trotsky, he believed that anti-Semitism was a bourgeois phenomenon not applicable to Lenin’s Russia. God, were they wrong. I love Babel’s art; his short stories have what James Salter said of an Italian woman in *Burning the Days* (his only readable book), the “ring of truth.”

Jacob Farber
via jewishreviewofbooks.com



Part of the greatness of both Isaac Babel and James Salter is their ability to be both of their time and yet transcend it and so create both a palpable sense of the era in which their characters are alive (with, yes, societal prejudices intact) and the language with which to speak this truth to future generations.

What those who accuse Salter of anti-Semitism ask is that he’d have made a better world than this one is, a Rodney King one resembling some cornball Christian heaven where everyone simply gets along. To judge James Salter on the basis, solely, of how good a Jew he is sounds strangely like what Hunter S. Thompson said about the boringness of baseball: a bunch of Jews arguing on a porch. This isn’t literary criticism, rather—like the “feminist” critics who have accused Salter of thought crimes against women because of the actions of his characters—it’s extra to the work itself.

If you’re a close reader of Salter, as I am (and I’m also a close reader of Babel) you find him positioning his characters to the side of any and all groups, including the most basic group, which is the heterosexual couple, in which these often tragic characters are trying to find respite from an existential loneliness. I suggest everyone re-read the magnificent story “American Express,” which is about two men—lawyers, sons of lawyers (and Jewish)—and money and women and power and morality. It culminates in this astonishing line: “They were like thieves.” Morality in every great writer is complicated because that’s how it is in real life.

Jane Vandenburg
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

“What those who accuse Salter of anti-Semitism ask is that he’d have made a better world than this one is . . .” I don’t know who Jane Vandenburg has in mind, and I don’t know what kind of question she is asking. For my part, I don’t think of Salter as a great writer (his anti-Semitism has nothing to do with it). Dostoevsky was an anti-Semite and a great writer nonetheless. On the other hand, Isaac Babel was a great writer no matter what one thinks of his private life. I usually don’t bring up a writer’s prejudices. In this case it is legitimate because I am responding to the reviewer’s assertion that Salter’s anti-Semitism made him a great writer. I took issue with this strange and unproven view. Bringing up “the ‘feminist’ critics who have accused Salter of thought crimes against women” doesn’t prove anything.

Jacob Farber
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

Time to Proselytize?

Sylvia Barack Fishman applies characteristically precise language to the rarely precise discussion of interfaith marriage. (“Exogamy Explored,” Fall 2013) She argues correctly that a Jewish education and various demographic factors provide a barrier against such marriages. The problem with this approach, however, is not its correctness. It is that Jewish parents aren’t providing their children with such an education or promoting Jewish friendship circles and so on. Non-Orthodox schools are closing, not expanding.

Naomi Schaefer Riley’s suggestion in the book under review, *Til Faith Do Us Part*, is not helpful either. As Fishman puts it, “One Mormon habit Schaefer Riley urges Jews to adopt is earlier marriage and childbearing.” Of course, like Jewish education, that’s a wonderful idea. But American Jews won’t marry earlier and have more children, so as a policy prescription such an exhortation is at best only marginally useful.

What can be done that fits with the data? There may be a hint in the religious fluidity inherent in the large number of interfaith marriages. A 2009 Pew study suggested that a staggering half of Americans have changed their religion. It is this fact that is useful for the Jewish people.

It is time for a more active effort to welcome converts to Judaism than the Jewish community has previously undertaken. Such an effort fits into the current American religious landscape. Larger numbers of converts would increase potential Jewish marriage partners. An active program to welcome converts provides a significant way to transform what would have been an interfaith marriage into a Jewish marriage.

I don’t know whether such an effort will be effective or not, and I am certainly not suggesting that this conversionary effort should be a substitute for all the valuable suggestions Fishman makes, especially the focus on Jewish education. But if what we are doing isn’t working, perhaps it is time to supplement those efforts with another approach.

Lawrence J. Epstein
Stony Brook, NY

Hollywood's Anti-Nazi Spies

BY LAURA ROSENZWEIG

With the recent publication of *Hollywood and Hitler: 1933–1939* by Thomas Doherty and *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler* by Ben Urwand, Hollywood's business dealings with Nazi Germany in the 1930s have become a renewed subject of historical controversy. (See Stuart Schoffman's review on page 17.) The papers of the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles' Community Relations Committee (held in the Special Collections of the Oviatt Library at California State University, Northridge) provide a surprising and—until now—unknown counterpoint to this discussion. The Northridge archives show that from 1934 until 1941 the same prominent Jewish studio heads who have come in for criticism, including Louis B. Mayer, Emanuel Cohen, and Jack Warner, secretly funded informants to infiltrate Nazi groups operating in Los Angeles. Working behind the scenes with local and federal law enforcement agencies, Congress, and the Justice Department, the Jewish executives of the motion picture industry played a key role in funding the American Jewish effort to resist the rise of Nazism in the United States.

In the 1920s the few Nazi Party members and sympathizers in America had kept to themselves. Most of them were recent immigrants from Germany who established small clubs in the cities in which they settled and waited for “*der Tag*,” the day when they could return home to a redeemed, new Germany. With the ascension of Adolf Hitler to power in 1933, these fragmented Nazi cells quickly organized into a single, national organization called the Friends of the New Germany. FNG's mission was to spread National Socialism and fascist ideas throughout the United States in preparation for the coming “Hitler Revolution” in America.

In March 1933, FNG opened the Aryan Bookstore at Ninth and South Alvarado streets in downtown Los Angeles. The shop sold pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic newspapers, leaflets, and books on the Jewish-Bolshevik threat in the United States; the promise of National Socialism; and the “Hitler Miracle” in Germany. That spring and summer, the group held public rallies and sponsored weekly lectures to attract new members. The following year, more than 50,000 people attended an FNG rally held in Madison Square Garden. Particularly interested in converting American veterans to their cause, FNG reached out to members of the American Legion and other veterans' groups in the city.

The effort to recruit American veterans roused the suspicions of Leon Lewis, a Jewish attorney, veteran, and former first national executive secretary of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Working within veteran circles in the city, Lewis quickly and discreetly recruited several non-Jewish veterans to infiltrate FNG, established a rudimentary code (the Los Angeles headquarters of FNG was known as

9-Minus, FNG in New York was 9-Plus, and so on), and set up procedures for reporting.

It did not take the veterans long to discover the nefarious political intentions of the Nazi group. Lewis' agents provided eyewitness accounts of secret meetings between FNG leaders and Nazi Party officials held on board German merchant marine ships in the Port of Los Angeles, the smuggling of large amounts of cash, and the surreptitious importation

squabbles as well as debates over the propriety of “spying,” B'nai B'rith could not help Lewis. Next, Lewis approached the group he referred to as “the monied men” of Jewish Los Angeles: the second- and third-generation descendants of the city's 19th-century Jewish pioneers. Lewis was confident that these men—bankers, real estate developers, merchants, judges, and doctors—would rally to the cause because “[they] had more to lose and more

They discovered a private, brown-shirted militia training and taking shooting practice in the hills above Hollywood.

of thousands of pounds of Nazi literature produced in Berlin for distribution in America. Perhaps the most disconcerting discovery was the organization of a private, brown-shirted militia training in urban street-fighting techniques and taking shooting practice in the hills above Hollywood. The veterans also reported that FNG officials had solicited their help in infiltrating the California National Guard in order to secure the floor plan of the Guard's Southern California armory so that they would be ready

to be afraid of [from the Nazi threat] than all . . . of the local B'nai B'rith membership combined.” After hearing his accounts of Nazi activity in the city, these men promised \$5,000 to fund the investigation. Eight weeks later, the “monied men” had only raised \$1,000 and demonstrated little resolve to contribute the remainder. Los Angeles, Lewis wrote to a colleague, was the “toughest city in the country in which to raise money for any purpose.”

It was only at this point that Lewis turned to the Jews of Hollywood. These men were Eastern European immigrants, still new in town, and, as Neal Gabler has described them, “fresh from the East, with the disreputability [of the motion picture business] clinging to them like tar.” They, and their products, were also special targets of FNG's anti-Semitic propaganda, so Lewis hoped that they would recognize the threat that local Nazism posed and support his network of spies.



Louis B. Mayer, co-founder of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation, ca. 1935. (© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS.)

for “*der Tag*,” now the day when the Hitler Revolution would begin in Los Angeles.

The veterans were stunned by the magnitude of the conspiracy they uncovered. Realizing that further surveillance was required, Lewis, who had paid them largely out of his own pocket, set out to secure the funding he would need to continue the operation. He turned first to B'nai B'rith, the parent organization of the ADL. Divided by internal

A special dinner meeting of Hollywood's Jews was called at the Hillcrest Country Club, which had been founded in the 1920s by Jews who had been excluded from membership elsewhere. On March 13, 1934, a parade of cars carrying studio heads, directors, producers, screenwriters, and actors rolled past Hillcrest's unmarked stone gates at 10000 Pico Boulevard. Among those in attendance that night were Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio executives Louis B. Mayer and Irving Thalberg, Columbia Studios' production chief Sam Briskin, Paramount Studios' head Emanuel Cohen, and RKO production executive Pandro Berman. Producers David O. Selznick, Harry Rapf, and Sam Jaffe, along with film directors Ernst Lubitsch and

George Cukor, were also in attendance. At dinner, Leon Lewis addressed the group, reporting that the now eight-month-old investigation had cost \$7,000, much of which he had provided. If his covert surveillance work was to continue—and his findings so far suggested that it was imperative—Lewis told the assembled moguls that they would have to take responsibility for the operation.

If Lewis' agents were to continue their covert surveillance, the Hollywood moguls would have to take responsibility for the operation.

His dinner guests were attentive. Just seven months earlier, Catholic Church officials had organized a nationwide protest and threatened a national boycott of motion pictures if Hollywood did not capitulate to a production code written and monitored by their chosen representatives. Church officials had summoned the studio executives to a meeting with Archbishop John Joseph Cantwell of Los Angeles. At the meeting, distinguished attorney and Catholic lay leader Joseph Scott had explicitly warned the movie men that some groups in America sympathized with Nazi aims and were organizing to attack Jews in America. "What is going on in Germany could happen here," Scott told the group, which had included Mayer, Cohen, Briskin, Universal Studios' producer Henry Henigson, and Paramount's legal counsel Henry Herzbrun, all of whom were at the Hillcrest meeting. It is hard to imagine that Joseph Scott's words weren't ringing in their ears as Lewis confirmed the extent of Nazi activity in the city in startling detail.

The minutes of the Hillcrest meeting show that local Jewish community leaders Rabbi Edgar Magnin, Judge Lester Roth, and banker Marco Hellman all spoke up in support of the proposed program. But the movie men were the decision-makers in the room. Louis B. Mayer was emphatic: "I for one am not going to take it lying down. Two things are required, namely money and intelligent direction . . . it [is] the duty of the men present to help."

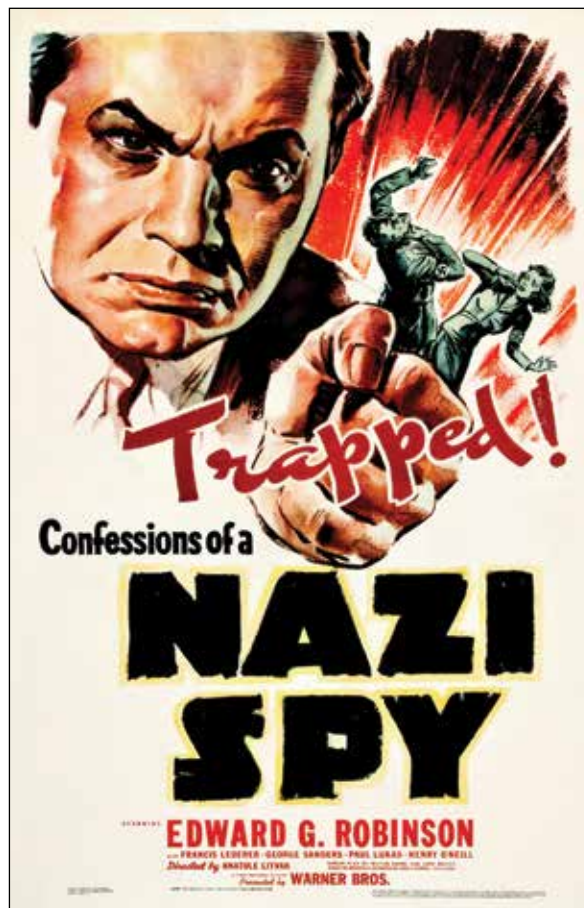
Irving Thalberg endorsed Mayer's position, as did the rest of the attendees. MGM producer Harry Rapf moved that a committee composed of one man from each studio be appointed, along with prominent members of the local Jewish community. Thalberg, Emanuel Cohen, and Jack Warner all pledged to raise \$3,500 from their studios. Universal committed to \$2,500, and Pandro Berman committed RKO to \$1,500, pointing out that RKO had only eight Jewish executives. The smaller studios—Fox, 20th Century, and United Artists—each pledged \$1,500. Phil Goldstone and David Selznick were asked to raise \$2,500 each from agents and independent producers. Within two months, \$22,000 (the equivalent of \$384,000 in 2013 dollars) of the promised \$24,000 had been raised by the new Los Angeles Jewish Community Committee (LJCC).

Between September 1933 and March 1934, while Leon Lewis was searching for financial support, he was also working to secure the political cover his agents might one day require. In March 1934, Congress approved funding for a national investigation into subversive Nazi propaganda activity in the United States. The congressional com-

mittee, which would eventually become the House Un-American Activities Committee, was led by Congressman Samuel Dickstein of New York and John M. McCormack of Massachusetts.

There is no evidence of the counsel that Lewis provided in the congressional committee's papers in Washington, but, at a time when political anti-Semitism in the United States was escalating, it is

not surprising that Lewis and his Jewish colleagues deliberately maintained a low profile. The Northridge archives show that Lewis traveled to Washington and consulted directly with Congressman Dickstein. Impressed with the information the undercover operation had gathered in Los Angeles, Dickstein named Lewis West Coast counsel to his committee, thus giving Lewis' agents political cover if their covert activities ever became public.



Original poster for *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* with Edward G. Robinson, 1939.

Between November 1933 and August 1934, Lewis provided evidence of Nazi propaganda activities in Los Angeles, prepared a witness list for the committee's field visit to Los Angeles, and even drafted the questions the committee used to interrogate those witnesses. When the committee's final report was issued in early 1935, Lewis was asked to comment on the final draft before it was published. However, neither Lewis nor Congressman Dickstein (who was also Jewish) ever made the work of the LJCC public.

In December 1934, after the House committee had visited Los Angeles and completed its national investigation of suspicious Nazi propaganda

activities across the country, Leon Lewis informed the leaders of the LAJCC that their work was done. Nazis in the city had scattered, Lewis told them, and new federal legislation would make it much more difficult for foreign agents to spread seditious propaganda. After 16 months of exhausting work, Lewis informed the Hollywood bosses that their fight against Nazism in Los Angeles was over and that he was returning to his law practice.

Lewis turned out to be mistaken on both counts. During 1935, FNG re-emerged as the German-American Bund, and over the next six years Nazi-influenced political activity and anti-Semitic incidents accelerated in Los Angeles. The Bund continued to spread National Socialist propaganda in Los Angeles, partnering with many of the more than 400 domestic fascist groups that emerged in the city between 1934 and 1941. Leon Lewis did not return to his law practice, but, instead, continued to direct Hollywood's spies through the end of World War II.

The information collected and distributed by Hollywood's spies between 1933 and 1941 was used in several federal investigations and prosecutions including the next iteration of the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1938, known as the Dies Committee: the 1942 federal indictment of William Dudley Pelley, whose fascist Silver Shirt party was modeled on the Nazi party, for sedition and treason (while the sedition charge was dropped, he was still sentenced to 15 years); and the 1944 federal sedition trial of 23 Nazi foreign agents, including "Gauleiter" Herman Schwinn, leader of the German-American Bund in Los Angeles. During these years, the supporting role that the LAJCC and other American Jewish defense organizations across the country played in providing these agencies with information on the Bund and its domestic allies was unknown to the public, and it has gone largely unrecognized by subsequent historians. Although the Hoover Library at Stanford University presently contains, for instance, a report prepared for the Dies Committee on subversive Nazi activity in Southern California, the catalogue citation still fails to mention its Jewish origins.

In 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II, Warner Brothers released *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, starring Edward G. Robinson and George Sanders. *Confessions* portrayed Berlin's nefarious efforts to recruit Americans to undermine the U.S. government. The film portrayed the full scope of Nazi activity in America that Hollywood's spies had been tracking for six years: secret meetings on board merchant marine ships, strong-arm tactics to intimidate German-Americans, and the recruitment of American veterans to their cause. After years of wrangling with domestic and foreign censors over political content in film (a story covered by both Urwand and Doherty in their books), this was Hollywood's first explicit indictment of Nazism in the United States. What Americans who viewed *Confessions* did not know, however, was just how long the Jews of Hollywood had waited to tell the story.

Laura Rosenzweig is a lecturer in Jewish Studies at San Francisco State University. She is working on a book entitled *Hollywood's Spies: Jewish Infiltration of Nazi and Pro-Nazi Groups in Los Angeles, 1933–1941*.

Pew's Jews: Religion Is (Still) the Key

BY DON SEEMAN

A tasteless but revealing old joke goes something like this: Dr. and Mrs. Shapiro of East 78th Street don't care much for religion, but they are eager to give their daughter Rebecca the best possible education. So they send her to the finest local private school, which happens to be St. Anne's. All goes well until one day Becky comes home and proudly recites her catechism at the kitchen table, whereupon the normally reserved Dr. Shapiro jumps up red-faced and bangs his fist on the table: "Rebecca," he cries, "there is only one God, and we don't believe in Him!"

One of the most provocative findings of the recent Pew Research Center study, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," is that a growing minority of self-identified American Jews—22 percent overall and 32 percent among those born since 1980—define themselves as "Jews of no religion." This means they declined to specify Judaism when asked about their religion but did say that they identified as Jews in some other way. But what are we to make of poor Dr. Shapiro? Would it be proper to consider him a "Jew of no religion" despite his commitment to the exclusivity of a God in which he no longer believes? Or would he be among the 78 percent of American Jews described as "Jews by religion," because historical Judaism is still the religion he actively rejects? Being a Jewish atheist may after all be a different sort of thing than being a (formerly) Christian one. And what about the catechism-reciting Rebecca? These are not trivial questions. They get at the deep structure of Jewish life in modernity and the inadequacy of many of the sociological measures we use to describe "Jewish identity."

The distinction between "religious" and ethnic or cultural—in Israel they would say "national"—Jewishness can prove particularly difficult. Is the proper frame of comparison for American Jews "Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims" or "Irish, Italians, and Koreans"? The truth, of course, is that one cannot answer that question in the abstract because it depends on what you are looking for. But the deeper answer is that the distinction between religion and ethnicity was not native to Judaism at the dawn of modernity, was never uniformly welcomed or accepted, and is still relatively alien to many non-Ashkenazi communities. Perhaps more surprisingly, this distinction apparently fails even today to adequately describe American Jews.

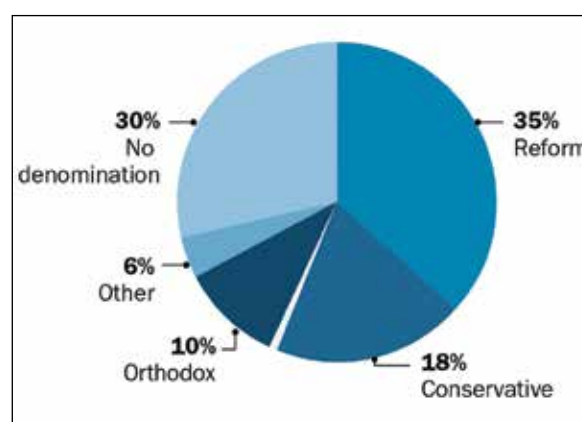
When Abraham Geiger argued, as one of the 19th-century architects of Reform Judaism, that modern Jews had outgrown their need for trappings of peoplehood like language, attachment to land, and a shared ritual life, his deep anxiety over not being considered sufficiently German ran close to the surface. The cultural Zionist Ahad Ha-Am later struck that nerve hard in his great essay "Slavery in Freedom," which mocked the Jews of Western Europe for reducing Jewishness to a mere religion as a way of seeking acceptance from societies that would never really accept them. Yet even in

America, where strategies of acculturation, accommodation, and assimilation have basically worked, American Jews still tend to think of Jewishness in terms of peoplehood from which religion cannot be

eliminated. Understanding the implications of this fact seems far more important than the increasingly frantic discussion of denominational market shares.

It is instructive to compare Pew's "Portrait of Jewish Americans" with its 2012 study, "Mormons in America: Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society." Like Jews, Mormons represent around two percent of the American population, but that is where the similarity seems to end. Unlike Mormons (a religion that actually grew up in America), Jews overall seem quite certain of their place in American society, relatively untroubled by prejudice and well-integrated—which is one way of reading intermarriage rates approaching 60 per-

cent. But the distinction between Jews and Mormons is most visible when it comes to matters of religion. A whopping 98 percent of Mormons surveyed say that they accept the resurrection of Jesus and 87 percent say that they pray every day. The only comparably high overall numbers for Jews is that 94 percent say they are "proud to be Jewish," without, however, being able to agree on what precisely that might entail. Even "leading an ethical life" and "remembering the Holocaust" are considered "essential to being Jewish" by only 69 and 73 percent of Jewish respondents, respectively.



Jewish denominational identity. (Courtesy of the Pew Research Center. From "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," © 10/1/2013.)

Needless to say, the Mormon study offers no category for "Mormons of no religion," for, by and large, such people regard themselves simply as ex-Mormons. Most Jews surveyed, by contrast (62 percent), say that being Jewish is "mainly a matter of ancestry and culture," including 55 percent of those who said that they themselves were "Jews by reli-

The disappearance of religion may spell the collapse of meaningful secular Jewishness as well.

gion." Most also say (though the question is ambiguous) that one can be Jewish even if one works on the Sabbath (94 percent) or does not believe in God (68 percent). In fact, just 26 percent of Jews surveyed say

that religion is very important in their lives, compared to 56 percent of the general U.S. population. So, are we witnessing a renaissance of secular Jewish life in America, as the increase in "Jews of no religion" (who are also described in the report as "secular or cultural Jews") might seem to indicate?

The answer, at least in statistical terms, is clearly no, but it is important to understand why. Critics have, fairly, pointed out that Pew neglected to ask questions about the meaningfulness of participation in many religiously unmarked but culturally significant activities such as Jewish film festivals, courses in academic Jewish studies, or participation in non-denominational festivals of Jewish learning such as *Limmud*. There is no reason to deny the significance of these aspects of American Jewish life, and future studies should find ways to include them. Nevertheless, we should still expect to find some indication of a renaissance in secular Jewish culture in the Pew findings if one was really underway.

What we find instead is that Pew's "Jews by religion" are also much more likely to identify with Jewish culture and peoplehood broadly than their brethren of "no religion." On the question of whether Jews have a special responsibility to take care of other Jews, 71 percent of Jews by religion answered affirmatively, compared with just 36 percent of the Jews of the "no religion" group. On contributing to a Jewish charity, it was 67 percent to 20 percent. The hallmark of secular national identity in Israel is a sense of attachment to the Jewish State, but here 69 percent of Jews by religion said that they were either "very" or "somewhat" attached to Israel compared with just 45 percent in the no religion category. And in case anyone thinks that Israel's complicated politics contributed meaningfully to this discrepancy, Pew finds that 85 percent of Jews by religion evince a "strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people," compared with just 42 percent among Jews of no religion. What is going on here?

Those who read quickly through "A Portrait of Jewish Americans" may well miss the fact that "Jews by religion" does not mean the same thing as "religious Jews." As the Pew analysts themselves note, "some Jews by religion are non-believers, while some Jews of no religion are ritually observant." This makes Pew's decision to describe "Jews of no religion" as "secular or cultural Jews" puzzling. In fact, some secular Jews may be "Jews by religion" in the terms established by Pew, not only because they self-identify as such but because, like Dr. Shapiro, Judaism is still the religion that shapes their denial.

What all this suggests is not that secular Judaism or Jewishness is on the rise, but rather that there is a necessary symbiosis between secular and religious Judaism and that the disappearance of religion may spell the collapse of meaningful secular Jewishness as well. Indeed, this may be the secret discovered by Israeli Knesset member Ruth Calderon and other figures associated with the contemporary renaissance of secular (*hiloni*) engagement with Jewish tradition in Israel. In order to remain strong and, above all, transmissible over time, does secular Judaism, need, as Ahad Ha-Am thought, to sink its roots deep in the generative loam of a tradition through which the Living God presumes to speak? This is not the language of academic social science, but it is not a crazy read of the Pew report, either.

Pew's "Jews of no religion" should not be described as "secular Jews," rather they are that part of the Jewish community that is increasingly alienated, impatient, or in many cases simply uninterested in Jewishness in *any* of its forms. Mostly, they are looking for the exit door. While 91 percent of "Jews by religion" who are raising children say that they are raising their children Jewishly in some way, 67 percent of "Jews of no religion" who have children say that they are not raising their children to be Jewish at all. That is called voting with one's (children's) feet.

Reform Rabbi Leon Morris of Sag Harbor may have ruffled feathers when he opined in *Ha'aretz* that Pew's Jews of no religion "are neither Ahad Ha'Am nor Ruth Calderon," but instead betray "an identity that is not only absent of faith, Torah and mitzvot, but also largely absent of anything that matters much at all" with respect to Jewishness. Yet that conclusion is hard to avoid. One of Pew's most important and no doubt troubling findings (in Chapter Seven) is that "Jews of no religion" are no more involved in the Jewish community than people of "Jewish background" (born Jews who do not identify as such) and people of Jewish affinity (non-Jews who identify in some way with Judaism—often Christians who identify with Jesus as a Jew).

The path to Jewish peoplehood in America, in other words, runs directly through religious communities. It is not just that Jews by religion are exponentially more likely to know a Jewish language, join *any* kind of Jewish organization, feel committed to Israel or to a larger Jewish people, or decide to raise their children as Jewish *in any sense*, as described above. It is that the overall decision to take Jewishness seriously involves a meaningful engagement of some kind with Jewish religion, the absence of which entails not secular Judaism in America (at least not at the statistical level—there are always exceptions) but disengagement.

A social scientific study is reliable to the extent that its results are replicable, internally consistent, and free from error. It is valid if it asks the right questions. I don't doubt the Pew's reliability, but I do have doubts as to its validity, at least in some respects.

Consider the question of denominational affiliation of American Jews. Respondents who identified as Jews by religion were asked with what denominational or other religious affiliations they identified. On this basis, Pew found that Orthodox Jews represented about 10 percent of the American Jewish community, Conservative Jews about 18 percent, and Reform Jews around 35 percent of all Jews surveyed. It is of more than passing inter-

est that among *Jews of no religion* one percent also identified as Orthodox, six percent as Conservative, and 20 percent as Reform. So once again, the meaning of these categories remains tantalizingly open to question.

But does simply asking people about denominational affiliation get to their religious position within the Jewish community? Pew insists that most denominational shifts in American Jewry take place leftwards (Orthodox Jews becoming Conservative, Conservative becoming Reform) and makes no mention at all, for example, of the outreach efforts of the Chabad movement. Can one really paint an accurate picture of American Jewry in which Chabad does not appear? The number of independent Chabad centers



Chabad outreach vehicle on Fifth Avenue, New York City.

in my own city of Atlanta has doubled and trebled over the past 15 years, not to mention their presence on over one hundred college campuses nationwide. Moreover some leaders of liberal Judaism are clearly nervous: There really is no other way to understand the odd claim by the Reform movement's President Emeritus Rabbi Eric Yoffie that Chabad competes unfairly with liberal movements by placing insufficient religious demands upon the people who make use of its services.

Many Chabad institutions do not maintain formal membership rolls the way denominational synagogues do, and their membership tends to be fluid. Even people who frequently attend Chabad synagogues or events may also maintain membership in other movements. Yet, because they failed to ask directed and empirically informed questions to respondents on this score, Pew completely missed an important phenomenon in American Judaism. From my own ethnographic research, I can describe dozens of individuals who would never, on a survey, say that they are "Orthodox" or "Hasidic" or even "observant," yet whose religious lives have been transformed in the past 10 years through participation in a local Chabad center alongside or in place of some other Jewish religious institution. Of all of the Pew study's findings, I remain most skeptical that its denominational breakdowns present a valid account of American Jews' religious lives.

And who, by the way, are the one percent of "Ultra-Orthodox" Jews who say that they have Christmas trees in their homes according to Pew? This may be a trivial question, a statistical glitch thrown up by

a tiny sample, but it suggests the skepticism that one must evince for any quantitative study that is not informed by interpretive qualitative research. When 30 percent of respondents tell Pew that one may be a Jew while believing in Jesus as the Messiah, do they mean that this is an acceptable Jewish belief or do they have in mind some version of the traditional Jewish legal opinion that "an Israelite, though he sins, remains an Israelite"? In the absence of any more fine-grained interpretive data, one can only guess.

Demographic surveys do not provide answers to social policy questions. The consensus of the heads of three liberal rabbinic seminaries at a recent round table on rabbinic education was that at least some of the liberal denominations (in particular the Conservative movement) are facing contraction over the next years while the proportion of Orthodox Jews in the Jewish population will probably rise. Referring to these statistics and to the rising alienation represented by the "Jews of no religion" category, the distinguished sociologist Steven M. Cohen (who served as an advisor for the Pew study) recently told a conference call of

Jewish lay and professional leaders that he thought the demographic "sky was falling" on American Jews. This has led in some quarters to calls for radical programs like "secular conversion" or for allowing Conservative rabbis to perform intermarriages, presumably so that they can "reclaim" their lost market share. But these moves will prove counterproductive over the long term.

Indeed, one of the highlights of the Pew report is that for those Jews who choose to remain Jews, religion and peoplehood still cannot be separated. This is a good thing because it means that the old wellsprings of our creativity have not dried up, and we can still create communities of shared commitment—religious, cultural, and national—in which to wrestle with the significance of our heritage.

Is any of this surprising? Jews have learned to thrive under modern conditions and will learn to thrive in whatever comes next. Pew's "A Portrait of Jewish Americans" suggests that religious commitments will continue to play a central and irreplaceable role. But this is not just because some people are "Jews by religion." It is because Jewish faith itself begins with the paradoxical double promise God made to Abraham: "I will make of you a great nation . . . Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Don Seeman is professor of religion and Jewish studies at Emory University. He currently holds a Social Science Research Council grant for an ethnographic study of contemporary Chabad.

Conservative Judaism: A Requiem

BY DANIEL GORDIS

The numbers are in, and they are devastating. The Pew Research Center's "A Portrait of Jewish Americans" portrays a community in existentially threatening dysfunction. Some of the numbers are already well-known: Intermarriage rates have climbed from the once-fear-inducing 52 percent of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey to 58 percent among recently married Jews on the whole. (The rate would be about 70 percent if one were to leave out the Orthodox, who very rarely intermarry.) Only 59 percent of American Jews are raising their children as Jews "by religion," and a mere 47 percent of them are giving their children a Jewish education. And the communal dimension of Jewish life, which has for millennia been the primary mainstay of Jewish identity formation, is all but gone outside the Orthodox community; only 28 percent of those polled believe that being Jewish is essentially involved with being part of a Jewish community.

Stakeholders in the status quo are running for cover, questioning the Pew methodology, and quibbling with its results. But one fundamental conclusion is inescapable: The massive injection of capital into the post-1990 study "continuity" agenda has failed miserably. Non-Orthodox Judaism is simply disappearing in America. Judaism has long been a predominantly content-driven, rather than a faith-driven enterprise, but we now have a generation of Jews secularly successful and well-educated, but so Jewishly illiterate that nothing remains to bind them to their community or even to a sense that they hail from something worth preserving. By abandoning a commitment to Jewish substance, American Jewish leaders destroyed the very enterprise they claimed to be preserving.

Nowhere is this rapid collapse more visible than in the Conservative movement, which is practically imploding before our eyes. In 1971, 41 percent of American Jews affiliated with the Conservative movement, then the largest of the movements. By the time of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, the number had declined to 38 percent. In 2000, it was 26 percent, and now, according to Pew, Conservative Judaism is today the denominational home of only 18 percent of Jews. And they are graying. Among Jews under the age of 30, only 11 percent of respondents defined themselves as Conservative.

Barring some now unforeseeable development, the movement's future is bleak. As Rabbi Edward Feinstein, one of the movement's leading pulpit rabbis noted at the recent post-Pew United Synagogue Convention, "Our house is on fire . . . If you don't read anything else in the Pew report, [you should note that] we have maybe 10 years left. In the next 10 years, you will see a rapid collapse of synagogues and the national organizations that support them."

The likely demise of Conservative Judaism greatly saddens me. I was raised in a family deeply committed to the Conservative movement. My paternal grandfather, Rabbi Robert Gordis, was in his day one of the nation's leading Conservative rabbis, a long-time member of the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary, one of the Conservative movement's most

articulate spokespeople, and president of the Rabbinical Assembly. My mother's brother, Rabbi Gershon Cohen, was chancellor of JTS from 1972 until 1986. There are other Conservative rabbis strung along our family tree, me among them. I came of age in the Camp Ramah system, was ordained at JTS, and was the founding dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, the Conservative movement's West Coast rabbinical school. Even if I've long since meandered to a different religious community, the impending demise of Conservative Judaism means the disappearance of the world that shaped me.

My personal sadness, though, is of no account compared to the loss this represents for American Jewish

Barring some now unforeseeable development, the Conservative movement's future is bleak.

life. Not long ago, it appeared that Conservative Judaism might be an option for those for whom the rigors of Orthodoxy were too great, but for whom Judaism as a conversation framed around profound issues and texts was still compelling. That was the era in which Conservative rabbis, reasonably conversant in Jewish classical texts and able to teach them to their flocks, could mitigate the increasingly pervasive tendency of liberal Judaism to recast Jewishness as an inoffensive ethnic version of American Protestantism-lite.

But this reframed Judaism, saying little and welcoming all, has proven irresistible to an American Jewish generation to which difference is offensive and substance is unnecessary. Gabriel Roth's response to the Pew report in *Slate* is a case in point. He notes, *inter alia*, "Here are some of the things I cherish about Jewishness: unsnobbish intellectualism, sympathy for the disadvantaged, psychoanalytic insight, rueful comedy, smoked fish."

That Jewish self-conception must be offensive to Protestants and Catholics, who are entitled to believe that they, too, are capable of unsnobbish intellectualism, sympathy for the disadvantaged, and psychoanalytic insight. But the real issue is that Judaism recast as a variant of American upper-crust social sensibilities simply says nothing sufficiently significant to merit survival. Indeed, Roth then predicts quite convincingly, "For my grandchildren, the fact that some of their ancestors were Jewish will have no more significance than the fact that others were Welsh."

Conservative Judaism was supposed to have prevented the American Jewish slide into this abyss. Despite the triumphalism so in vogue in contemporary American Orthodoxy, the fact remains that a plurality of American Jews will not adopt the halakhic rigors that lie at the core of Orthodox communal expectations. There are theological, moral, intellectual, and "lifestyle" reasons for that. For those people for whom Orthodoxy was not an option, it was Conservative Judaism that offered a vision of Jewish communities colored by reverence for classical Jewish

learning and for Jewish tradition, albeit with a somewhat looser adherence to its particulars.

Sans Conservative Judaism, the vision of a traditional, literate non-Orthodox Judaism will be gone. And that is a terrible loss, for Orthodoxy no less than for American Jewish life at large.

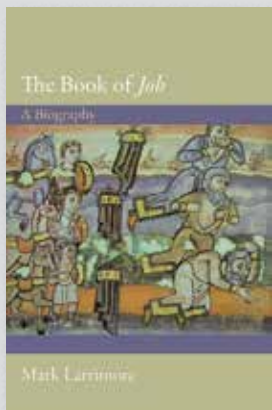
Given the enormity of the loss, it behooves us to ask, "What went wrong?" There were many factors, of course. America's openness proved to have a Homeric siren-like allure too powerful for many to resist. And then, with no courage of whatever convictions they might have had and animated primarily by fear, leaders of all varieties of liberal Judaism decided to lower the barriers in order to further constituency retention. They expected less of their congregations, reduced educational demands, and offered sanitized worship reconfigured to meet the declining knowledge levels of their flocks. In many cases, they welcomed non-Jews into the Jewish community in a way that virtually eradicated any disincentive for Jews to marry people with whom they could pass on meaningful Jewish identity.

But those, of course, were precisely the wrong moves. When people select colleges for their children, professional settings in which to work, or books to read, they seek excellence. Lowered expectations mean less commitment and engagement; less education means greater ignorance—why should that attract *anyone* to Jewish life? It didn't, as it turns out.

Much ink has been spilled on these and other causes of the Conservative movement's demise, and this is not the place to review the arguments. But one factor has been almost entirely overlooked, and it ought to be raised, because if we can articulate where Conservative Judaism went wrong, we can begin to describe some of the characteristics of what one might hope will arise in its place.

Because many of the leading Conservative ideologues of the mid-20th century had hailed from Orthodox circles, it was important to them to sustain the claim that Conservative Judaism was halakhic Judaism. Yes, they acknowledged, Conservative Jewish life looked very different from Orthodoxy (women could assume roles that they could not in Orthodox settings, for example), but that was simply because Conservative Judaism was reclaiming the "dynamic Judaism" to which the rabbis of the Talmud had actually been committed. It was Orthodoxy that was a corruption of authentic Judaism, they insisted, and Conservative Judaism had come on the scene to protect ("conserve") the genius of legal fluidity that had always been key to rabbinic Judaism.

That argument was not entirely wrong. In somewhat different and obviously much-softened language, it has even been adopted by some leading modern Orthodox rabbis. Nor was what doomed Conservative Judaism the incessantly discussed vast gulf in practice between the rabbis and their congregants. What really doomed the movement is that Conservative Judaism ignored the deep existential human questions that religion is meant to address.



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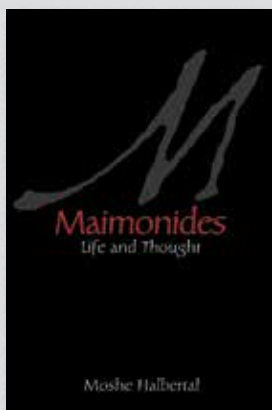
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As Conservative writers and rabbis addressed questions such as “are we halakhic,” “how are we halakhic,” and “should we be halakhic,” most of the women and men in the pews responded with an uninterested shrug. They were not in *shul*, for the most part, out of a sense of legally binding obligation. Had that been what they were seeking, they would have been in Orthodox synagogues. They had come to worship because they wanted a connection to their people, to transcendence, to a collective Jewish memory that would give them cause for rejoicing and reason for weeping, and they wanted help in transmitting that to their children. While these laypeople were busy seeking a way to explain to their children why marrying another Jew matters, how a home rooted in Jewish ritual was enriching, and why Jewish literacy still mattered in a world in which there were no barriers to Jews’ participating in the broader culture, their religious leadership was speaking about whether or not the movement was halakhic or how one could speak of revelation in an era of biblical criticism.

Who really cared? Very few people, it turns out.

To the irrelevance of the central argument at the core of much Conservative discourse must be added its hypocrisy. These men and women of the pews were not talmudic scholars, but they were sufficiently educated and had enough common sense to know that if combustion on Shabbat was prohibited, then driving on Shabbat simply had to be a violation of Jewish law. So when Conservative Judaism declared, in its (in)famous 1950 “Responsum on the Sabbath” that it was permissible to drive to synagogue on Shabbat, Conservative Jews smelled a rat. Whatever Conservative Judaism was advocating, it was not Jewish “law.” They appreciated, perhaps, being told that they were not sinning when driving to the synagogue (not that “sinning” was a terribly central facet of their religious worldview), but they also knew that a game was being played.

Some rabbis called it like they saw it. Rabbi Emil Schorsch (father of Ismar Schorsch, who later served as chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary) asked, “Too many of our people do not want to observe the Sabbath, whatever excuse or reason you may give them. Why should we play ball with this insincerity?” But by and large, the Conservative movement succumbed to the pretense that Rabbi Schorsch the elder was too honest to sustain.

Slowly but surely, the rank and file understood that they were witness to what was more than a bit of a charade. Yes, a small intellectual elite subscribed to Conservative Judaism’s unique brand of halakhic life coupled, for example, with principled gender egalitarianism, but the vast majority of kids who came back from Camp Ramah or from the movement’s Israel programs seeking a halakhic community found themselves, in the space of a few short years, in the bosom of Orthodox synagogues (a significant and telling phenomenon, however statistically small, that flies entirely under the Pew radar). And those who remained in the movement, by and large, encountered a conversation that simply did not address their need to define their place in the cosmos.

So self-referential has the Conservative conversation become that the movement today continues to insist on the centrality of Jewish law, without so much as even trying to make a case for it. In its recent much-ballyhooed publication *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews*, a massive 981-page tome, Conservative Jews are exposed to discussions of kashrut and Shabbat but also

pornography, employing gays in synagogues, neutering animals, and biodiversity. The Table of Contents is both revealing and devastating; astonishingly, there is not a single chapter on *why* they should care about halakha in the first place.

Instead, the conversation that hasn’t worked for half a century is trotted out once again. In the volume’s Foreword, Chancellor Arnold Eisen reflects the historical bent of most of JTS’s chancellors and writes:

“Law and tradition” has long been the watchword of “Positive-Historical” or Conservative Judaism. That was particularly so in early decades when the movement’s major thinkers in Germany and America struggled to explain what was unique about their approach to Judaism . . . [Solomon] Schechter and [Zacharias] Frankel would have welcomed *The Observant Life*, I believe; I certainly do.

Eisen is one of America’s greatest Jewish scholars. Yet half a century after Conservative Judaism began its precipitous decline, his language with respect to the centrality of history as a central facet of Conservative Judaism is identical to what my grandfather was saying in the 1940s. Given all that has changed in the world, who is likely to read the 981 pages that follow?

Could matters really have ended otherwise? To be honest, I don’t know. But we also didn’t really try. Looming unasked in Conservative circles is the following question: Can one create a community committed to the rigors of Jewish traditional living without a literal (read Orthodox) notion of revelation at its core? Are the only choices that American Jews have Orthodoxy (modern, or less so), radicalized liberal Jewishness with its wholesale abandonment of tradition, or *aliyah* to Israel?

American Jews deserved more choices, and a Conservative Judaism with a different discourse at its core might have provided one. Conservative Judaism could have been the movement that made an argument for tradition and distinctiveness without a theological foundation that is for most modern Jews simply implausible; instead of theology, it could have spoken of traditional Judaism and its spiritual discipline as our unique answer to the human need for meaning.

Imagine that instead of discussing whether or not it was halakhic, Conservative Judaism had said to its adherents something like, “None of us come from nowhere. Not so very deep down, we know that we do not want to be part of an undifferentiated human mass, loving all of humanity equally (and therefore loving no one particularly intensely), abandoning the instinct that our people—which has been speaking in a differentiated voice for millennia—still has something to say to humanity at large.”

Imagine that instead of inventing arguments that somehow sought to maintain an effective claim for revelation even after the movement’s infatuation with biblical criticism (which, of course, undermined the most obvious argument for the authority of Jewish law), Conservative Jewish leaders had invoked an argument similar to that of the Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor, who reminds his readers:

What is self-defeating in modes of contemporary culture [is that they] *shut out* history and the bonds of solidarity . . . I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter . . . Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands



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of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order *matters* crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial.

That is the sort of argument that mainstream Conservative Judaism (which celebrated Abraham Joshua Heschel's poetic take on Jewish life but marginalized him from the halakhic-Jewish practice conversation) could have and should have invoked. Life is about asking important questions (think the Talmud), and yes, much of contemporary American culture is self-defeating. And meaningful life is about demands and duties. "That is why we are here," Conservative leaders could have said. "We need bonds of solidarity, duties of citizenship, and yes, the call of God. Otherwise, we are trivial."

The movement never wrote the way that Taylor writes, and it never taught its rabbis to think or to speak with that kind of deep existential and spiritual seriousness. It could have, though. It could have invoked Jewish intellectuals, like Michael Sandel, who wrote in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, that:

[W]e cannot regard ourselves as independent . . . without . . . understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are—as members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of this history, as sons and daughters of that revolution, as citizens of this republic . . .

For to have character is to know that I move in a history I neither summon nor command, which carries consequences nonetheless for my choices and conduct. It draws me closer to some and more distant from others; it makes some aims more appropriate, others less so.

Arguments such as those would have put the most human, most self-defining, most existentially significant questions of human life at the center of Conservative Jewish discourse, and the result might well have been a very different prognosis for the only movement that was primed to raise these questions. It is true that young Americans might still have opted for triviality; but they might also have returned to something less vacuous as they grew older and wiser.

The moral of the sad story of Conservative Judaism is this: Human beings do not run from demands that might root them in the cosmos. They seek significance, and for traditions that offer it, they will sacrifice a great deal. Orthodoxy offers that, and the results are clear. Liberal American Judaism does not, and it is paying the price.

Those who will live in the aftermath of Conservative Judaism's demise will live in an American Judaism diminished and robbed of an important voice. This is not the moment for gloating or for self-congratulation—even within Orthodoxy. This is the moment to begin to ask the question that the Pew study puts squarely in front of us: If Orthodoxy is intellectually untenable for many, and liberal Judaism is utterly incapable of transmitting content and substance, is there no option for Jewish continuity other than Israel? There must be. Those who care about the future of the Jewish people had better embark now on the search for what it might be.

Daniel Gordis is senior vice president, Koret Distinguished Fellow, and chair of the core curriculum at Shalem College. His new book, Menachem Begin: The Battle for Israel's Soul, will be published by Nextbook.

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Wisdom and Wars

BY HILLEL HALKIN

Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East

by Scott Anderson

Doubleday, 592 pp., \$28.95

My first copy of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, T.E. Lawrence's epic account of leading a Bedouin guerrilla force against the Turks in the First World War, was a stolen one. It was I who stole it. At the time—it was in 1973—my wife and I were living in a rented apartment in Haifa whose owner had left us a few furnishings that included a small bookcase. One book caught my eye immediately. A large, deluxe volume, it had a brown cloth binding with a stamped leather spine and heavy, brown-tinted pages whose signatures or “gatherings,” as they are called by printers, were uncut. Using a razor blade, I sliced my way carefully past the title page, a dedicatory poem, a lengthy table of contents, and a brief introduction, and came to Chapter I. Its first sentences were:

Some of the evil in my tale may have been inherent in the circumstances. For years we lived anyhow with one another in the naked desert, under the indifferent heaven. By day the hot sun fermented us; and we were dizzied by the beating wind. At night we were stained by dew, and shamed into pettiness by the innumerable silences of stars.

I thought, “Wow!” And when I had read to the end, I thought, “No one who hasn't cut its pages deserves to own a book like this.” And so when we moved out, I took with me the handsomely printed and illustrated 1935 American edition of Lawrence's book, which—published the year of his death—was a facsimile of the 1926 subscribers-only British edition, which was a revision of the first, eight-copy 1922 Oxford edition, which was partially rewritten from scratch after much of the original manuscript was lost by its author in a London train station in 1919.

There's more to the story. A few years later, I went on a long camel trip in Sinai, then still under Israeli control. A Bedouin handled the camels; our small group's guide was a young man who knew every twist and turn of the desert, each wadi and gulley, as an experienced cab driver knows the streets of his town. The wadis were the desert's streets, some the breadth of many boulevards, others as narrow as an alley in a casbah. One night before dawn I was wakened in my sleeping bag by the vast, deep silence all around me. I opened my eyes. Our cameleer was on his knees at prayer; our guide was staring thoughtfully at a sky wild with stars while waiting for coffee to boil over a twig fire. Without being asked, he rose

and brought me some. “Thank you,” I said, by which I meant “for all this.” Back in Israel, I gave him my copy of Lawrence's book in appreciation.

That expiated my sin, or so I thought. Yet I missed my Lawrence. God sent me an old college friend who was touring Israel. He stayed the night and left by his bed a tattered paperback of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

been a well-off landowner who scandalously left a fortune and a wife for their daughters' governess. Living under an assumed name to elude disgrace, the Lawrences, as they called themselves, had five sons. The second, born in Wales, was named Thomas Edward, or Ned.

An adventurous boy with a fondness for books,

If one were to read it as fiction, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* would be the greatest war novel in English literature.

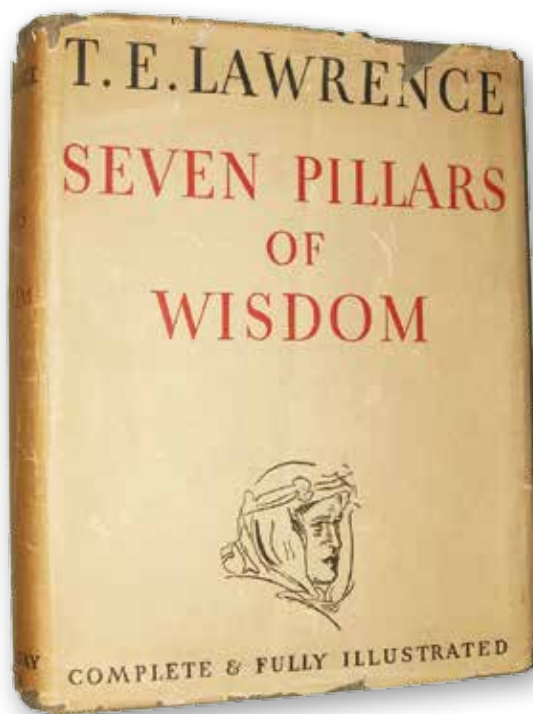
(we hadn't mentioned the book between us) that he had forgotten to pack. On my next round of army reserve duty, I took it along to read. It wasn't my deluxe facsimile volume, but I was wowed again.

What happened to that tattered paperback, I can't say. Perhaps I forgot it in my kitbag for another soldier to find, perhaps someone stole it from me. Life has its concatenations. One way or another, I was Lawrence-less again for many years. And then, not long ago, I walked into a bookshop in London and there it was: the same leather-spined Double-

pranks, ascetic tests of endurance, and romantic daydreams of heroic feats, Ned Lawrence attended high school and university in Oxford, where he read history and wrote a thesis on medieval fortifications that took him on a 2,400-mile bicycle trek through France. This led to a lengthy walking tour of crusader castles in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, all part of the Ottoman Empire; to a position as a technical assistant, and eventually a crew foreman, for several seasons of digging at a British archeological excavation at the northern Syrian site of Carchemish; to a job mapping southern Palestine and Turkish-controlled Sinai for the Palestine Exploration Fund, which was partly a front for British intelligence; to an appointment, when the war started, as a civilian cartographer with the British general staff in London; and to a second lieutenant's commission and transfer to British military intelligence in Cairo after Turkey joined the fighting several months later.

Here *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* begins. (The book's puzzling title, taken from the verse in Proverbs, “Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars,” was a hand-me-down from a planned earlier book, never written, about seven of the Levant's great cities.) After a lengthy survey of the pre-war Middle East and Arab world, the narrative tells of Lawrence's accompanying a British military mission to the Red Sea port of Jeddah in order to explore the possibility of an Arab revolt against the Turks under the sponsorship of Hussein, sharif of Mecca; of his successful wooing of Hussein's son Feisal to head the uprising with promises of post-war Arab independence; of his becoming Feisal's confidant and the coordinator of ties between the rebels and the British command in Cairo that funded and supplied them; of developing into a field commander himself, leading Bedouin raids on Turkish positions and on the crucial railroad line running through Syria to the Turkish garrison in Medina; of advancing with his men up the Red Sea coast, capturing its northernmost point of Aqaba, and moving on to what is now Jordan while a British army pushed from Sinai into western Palestine; of linking up with the latter in its final, autumn 1918 offensive that brought about a Turkish collapse; and of triumphantly entering Damascus shortly before the Turks surrendered, followed by their German allies.

This is, of course, a mere synopsis. What make Lawrence's book so wonderful are its extraordinary powers of observation, the magnificence of its



Seven Pillars of Wisdom by T.E. Lawrence, published by Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1935.

day, Doran & Company edition that I had stolen 40 years before. I bought it even though it wasn't cheap. How could I not have? That's the copy in which I've just finished reading *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* for the third time.

Lawrence, when the war broke out in the summer of 1914, was, outwardly, an unlikely figure to emerge as its most famed military hero. Twenty-six years old, uncommonly short and slightly if strongly built, he had no military training and was a loner by temperament. His background was déclassé Anglo-Irish aristocracy, his father having

prose, and its dark, brooding vision, already articulated in its opening pages, of the perversity of high ambition, whether this be the pursuit of glory on the battlefield or of distinction among men—a vision that carries the reader, like a riptide, counter to the military victory with which the story concludes. If one were to read it as fiction (and some biographers of Lawrence have argued for doing so, less in literary appreciation than in their eagerness to expose its alleged deceptions), *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* would be the greatest war novel in English literature.

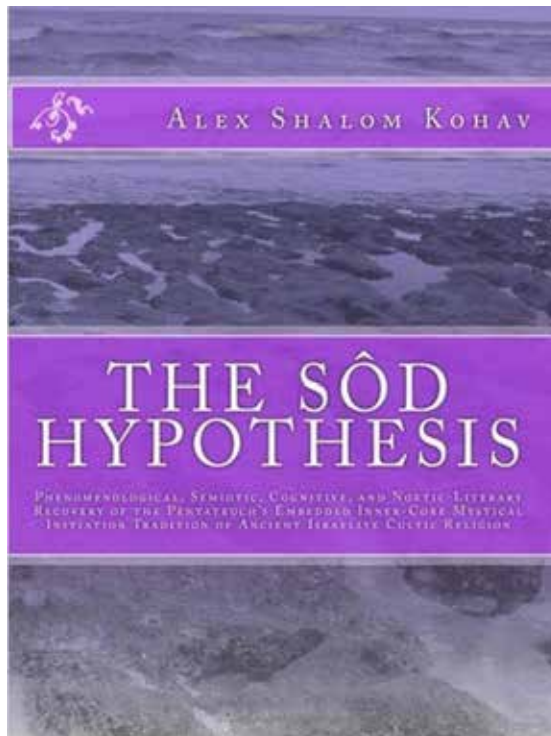
Its descriptions are stunning. Lawrence was a great admirer of Charles Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, for whose third edition he wrote an introduction, and it is hard to outdo Doughty in writing about the desert, but Lawrence did. Here is a sample, a scene that finds him ill with dysentery on a rest stop during a forced camel march:

The bed of the valley was of fine quartz gravel and white sand. Its glitter thrust itself between our eyelids; and the level of the ground seemed to dance as the wind moved the white tips of stubble grass to and fro. The camels loved this grass, which grew in tufts, about sixteen inches high, on slate-green stalks . . . At the moment I hated the beasts, for too much food made their breath stink; and they rumblingly belched up a new mouthful from their stomachs each time they had chewed and swallowed the last, till a green slaver flooded out between their loose lips over the side teeth, and dripped down their sagging chins . . . [O]n another day this halt would have been pleasant to me; for the hills were very strange and their colours vivid. The base had the warm grey of old stored sunlight; while about their crests ran narrow veins of granite-coloured stone, generally in pairs, following the contour of the skyline like the rusted metals of an abandoned scenic railway.

This scene takes place the morning after Lawrence has shot one of his Bedouin for killing a man from another tribe. Fearing a tribal blood feud, he is faced with:

[a] horror which would make civilized man shun justice like a plague if he had not the need to serve him as hangmen for wages . . . It must be a formal execution, and at last, desperately, I told Hamed [the murderer] that he must die for punishment, and laid the burden of his killing on myself. Perhaps they would count me not qualified for feud. At least no revenge could lie against my followers; for I was a stranger and kinless.

I made him enter a narrow gully of the spur, a dank twilight place overgrown with weeds . . . I stood in the entrance and gave him a few moments' delay which he spent crying on the ground. Then I made him rise and shot him through the chest. He fell down on the weeds shrieking, with the blood coming out in spurts over his clothes, and jerked about till he rolled nearly to where I was. I fired again, but was shaking so that I only broke his wrist. He went on calling out, less loudly, now lying on his back with his feet towards me, and I leant forward and shot him for the last time in the thick of his neck under the jaw.



The apparent absence of secrecy in Israelite religion in early antiquity, in contrast with the Greek mystery schools and the pervasive, structural secrecy of Egypt is the book's opening problem. The study posits that the First Temple priests crafted a "disaster-proof" transmission of their initiatory lore to future generations. This intentional act originating from *mysterium tremendum* encounters with a supernatural agent, YHWH, is shown to result in an intensional text of singular complexity (the Pentateuch plus the book of Joshua). The J and E strands, previously seen in scholarship as purely literary and/or semi-historical, are now seen as constituting priestly esoteric matter par excellence, while the traditional priestly sections, in contrast, as exoteric. Engaging (1) Husserl's noetic-noematic-hyletic phenomenological framework; (2) semiotic signifier-signified-referent aspects; (3) Roman Jakobson's factors/functions of literary texts; and (4) Habermas's "communicative actions," the study proposes (i) manifold discursive planes; (ii) multiple contexts, grounds, semantic fields; (iii) inferential "continuums," domains guiding textual data derivation and constraining data analysis; and (iv) methodology using interrogative "inferential coordinates" and a custom-developed "noetic-literary" method. An ongoing, "oscillating" narrative metalepsis is observed, a consequence of parallel narratives colliding and periodically warping the narrative integrity of one or the other channel. The emerging priestly esoteric system is akin to the "center," or "organizing principle," of biblical theology. The study's results are falsifiable, and their validity is attested.

ALEX SHALOM KOHAV THE SÔD HYPOTHESIS

Phenomenological, Semiotic, Cognitive, and Noetic-Literary Recovery of the Pentateuch's Embedded Inner-Core Mystical Initiation Tradition of Ancient Israelite Cultic Religion

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"I am unaware of scholars who actually deal with the question of esoteric knowledge and secret interpretations of biblical texts during Iron Age II, ca. 920-586 BCE.... Biblicists of my ken assume that even though not everybody knew everything, knowledge was open....Kohav is aware that scholars are unaware that a problem exists, that something interesting exists in the [Pentateuchal] text that has not yet been queried....Everything... has been filtered and fined through his sophisticated approach. Kohav reads, synthesizes, and develops complicated arguments logically to a conclusion, drawing together data and ideas from disparate sources and disciplines....In the end, Kohav owns all of his arguments."

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"What a ride! This document is, in and of itself, a phenomenon. Besides being a scholarly dissertation, it becomes, in a way, a manifestation of the Sôd. And the author...based on his view of the teachings of the Sôd, evaluates the course of Jewish spirituality and, for that matter, human spirituality, in a way that resonates with the Perennial Philosophy view that every genuine Tradition has its origin in an authentic encounter with Divinity....The [book] as written is brilliant.... [Kohav] writes with immense energy, and great theoretical sophistication....His claims are vast and sweeping, and...could truly revolutionize the understanding of the history of Jewish -- and not only Jewish mysticism, spirituality, and theology."

- **Sheldon ("Shaya") Isenberg, University of Florida (Emeritus)**

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This is the first time Lawrence has killed anyone at close range, and mixed with the horror of it is an unmistakable physical excitement. He does not comment on the incident again, but to his readers it is one of a series of revelations of his growing engulfment in the close, all-male, homoerotic world of the Bedouin raiding parties he rides with in Arab dress, now tender in their friendships, now pitiless in their bloodlusts and cruelty, especially to the defenseless and weak. Weakness—in character, in courage, in the capacity for prolonged hardship and privation demanded by desert life—is the Bedouin's idea of ultimate vice. Never arousing his pity, it always incites his contempt.

But the contempt that Lawrence comes to feel for himself in the desert is not because he is weak. On the contrary, he proves to be astonishingly strong, able to withstand hunger, thirst, fatigue, illness, and extremes of heat and cold better than most Bedouin. Rather, he is plagued by the consciousness of how his finely bred English soul thrills to the brutally elemental life he is living while he lives it as an imposter and a traitor, since his English values and loyalties are ineradicable and the men he leads do not know that all his promises are worthless and that they are simply being used by the British to help defeat the Turks—after which, in accordance with the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, England will carve up the Middle East together with France and rule it in Turkey's place.

Scott Anderson's newly published *Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East* deals at length with the imperialist intrigues that Lawrence was a guilt-ridden party to, a willing agent of British policies he opposed. Anderson, who views the Sykes-Picot Agreement as the root of all the Middle East's subsequent troubles, has sought to tell the story of the behind-the-scenes diplomatic maneuvering that went on during and after World War I by focusing on four young men who were involved in it and whose paths sometimes crossed. Lawrence, the only one of the four to have fought in the war, is the lead character. Cast in supporting roles are Aaron Aaronsohn, a Palestinian agronomist, botanist, and geographer who co-headed the NILI spy ring, a Palestine-based Jewish espionage operation that worked for the British; William Yale, a blue-blooded descendant of the founder of the university of that name, representative of the Standard Oil company in Jerusalem, U.S. intelligent agent, and advisor on the Middle East to the U.S. delegation at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference that settled the fate of the dismembered Ottoman Empire; and Kurt Prüfer (Anderson prefers the Anglicized spelling "Curt"), a German orientalist and wartime chief of Germany's intelligence bureau in Constantinople.

Feisal's revolt, though not militarily indispensable to the British victory, aided it by pinning down large Turkish forces that might otherwise have been transferred to western Palestine; it also won Feisal a seat at the Middle East deliberations of the Paris conference alongside the war's winning powers, delegations of former Ottoman minorities like the Armenians, Kurds, and Lebanese Christians, and representatives of the Zionist movement (the latter given an official status at the talks by the 1917 Balfour Declaration). As Feisal's trusted adviser, Lawrence, who already knew many of the British diplomats in attendance from his frequent wartime

visits to Cairo, helped formulate and present Arab demands while conveying back British positions and mediating between the two. Staunchly pro-Arab and anti-French, he was unsuccessful in his efforts to override Sykes-Picot, which gave France control of Syria and Lebanon. He was, however, a factor in England's eventual if tardy decision to create a semi-independent Iraq ruled by Feisal after the latter's expulsion by the French from Damascus; a semi-independent Transjordan with Feisal's brother Abdullah as its king; and a fully independent Arabian peninsula under Hussein (soon to be deposed by his rival, Abdul Aziz ibn Sa'ud.) A major player in the Middle East theater during the war, Lawrence continued to be one afterwards.



Welsh-born archeologist, author, and military leader Thomas E. Lawrence, "Lawrence of Arabia," ca. 1920. (© Hulton Archive/Getty Images.)



Arab rebels under Lawrence's leadership capture the port of Aqaba, July 6, 1917.

This can't be said of either Yale or Prüfer. While both were interestingly oddballish characters who serve Anderson's narrative purposes well and enable him to expound on German and American strategy in the Middle East, neither wielded much influence at high levels or had a significant impact on the war's course and aftermath. Prüfer lived long enough to become a Nazi diplomat; the most piquant disclosure in Anderson's book is of a romantic affair he had in Jerusalem, in 1914–1915, with Chaim Weizmann's sister Minna, whom he enlisted as a German intelligence agent. (Hushed up afterwards by Prüfer, Weizmann, and whoever else knew about it, the story is documented by Prüfer's diary and other sources.) Yale ended up a professor of history at the University of New Hampshire, an anti-Zionist, and something of an anti-Semite. He served as a Middle East specialist for the State Department's Office of Postwar Planning during World War II and as an assistant secretary to the United Nations' Council on Trusteeship right after it.

Aaronsohn was a different story. The NILI ring's contribution to England's Palestine campaign was substantial, and the contacts Aaronsohn made through it, combined with his geographical knowledge of the area, assured him an important place in the Zionist delegation to the Paris conference until, while it was still underway, he died in an airplane crash.

The NILI (run from the Jewish farming village of Zikhron Yaakov south of Haifa, with a second base in nearby Atlit) was a dramatic, if not melodramatic, affair. (Not for nothing was my book *A Strange Death*—part of which deals with the World War I period in Zikhron, where my wife and I have lived since leaving Haifa in 1973—luridly subtitled by its publishers *A Story Originating in Espionage, Betrayal, and Vengeance in a Village in Old Palestine*.) Aaronsohn and his younger sister Sarah, who came from a local family, were two of the ring's leaders; a third, Yosef Lishansky, was for a while Sarah's lover; the fourth, Avshalom Feinberg, was in love with Sarah, too, while engaged to her sister Rivka and was killed—some suspected Lishansky of killing him—before the ring became fully operational in early

1917. It was then that it began transmitting to the British command in Cairo large amounts of information on Turkish bases, installations, armaments, logistics, military concentrations, and troop movements, in addition to detailed descriptions of the

In itself, Zionism did not greatly interest him; Lawrence judged it not in its own terms but by its likely effects on British policy and Arab welfare.

physical terrain that the British army would have to cross in a Palestine offensive.

Commanded by General Edmund Allenby, this army, having advanced across Sinai, was stalled at the gates of Gaza, where it had twice hurled itself against the Turkish trenches and twice been beaten back. In its third attack, made in November 1917, it feinted yet another frontal assault while swinging its main body eastward to Beersheva, taking the Turks by surprise, forcing them to retreat from their Gaza positions under threat of encirclement, and opening the way for a speedy British conquest of Jaffa and Jerusalem. By then the NILI was gone, nearly all its members having been rounded up by the Turks in October. (Sarah killed herself after being tortured; Lishansky was caught following a long chase and hanged in Damascus.) Yet although Anderson, oddly, does not write about this, the British flanking movement was heavily based on NILI intelligence, and Aaronsohn, who was in Cairo until September, editing and interpreting the reports the spies sent and coordinating their activities with Allenby and his staff, had been pushing for it for months.

Aaronsohn and Lawrence met several times in Cairo in the course of 1917. They appear to have taken an instant dislike to each other. Aaronsohn is not mentioned in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Lawrence, however, appears more than once in Aaronsohn's diaries. In the longest of these entries, partly quoted from by Anderson, Aaronsohn wrote:

This morning I had a talk with Captain Lawrence. It was an interview without the least sign of friendliness. Lawrence has had too much success at too early an age. He has a very high opinion of himself. He lectured me on our colonies, on the spirit of [our] people, on the feelings of the Arabs, on why we would do well to be absorbed by them, etc. While listening to him I could almost imagine that I was attending the lecture of a Prussian scientific anti-Semite expressing himself in English . . . He is openly against us. He must be of missionary stock.

Omitted by Anderson and indicated by the ellipsis were additional remarks concerning Aaronsohn's request to Lawrence that his Bedouin be prevented from raiding Jewish colonies in the Galilee across the Jordan. "Lawrence," Aaronsohn wrote, "will use the means at his disposal to conduct his own investigation of the state of mind of the Jews in the Galilee colonies. If they're pro-Arab [Revolt], their necks can be saved. If not, their throats will be cut. He's still at an age, the happy pup, at which one never doubts one's powers."

Twelve years older than Lawrence, and double his size and weight, Aaronsohn rarely doubted his own powers. Both men were headstrong, sure of their

opinions, convinced (no doubt rightly) that they were better versed than any British intelligence officer, and disdainful of whoever disagreed with them. Nor, though Aaronsohn had a low estimation of the Bedouin that Lawrence led, were the two of them in

disagreement about everything: Both were against a French presence in a post-war Middle East, and both wished the region to be under British hegemony. (Lawrence thought any future Arab state or states should have British dominion status.) Their visceral reaction toward each other can only be explained by fierce rivalry resulting from the similarities between them. Each was a maverick running a peripheral part of the British war machine not strictly under its control; each was jealous of his independence from



Stamp honoring Aaron Aaronsohn issued by the Israeli government in 1979.

Cairo while bidding for its attention and support and resenting competition; each considered his role to be of supreme value and belittled that of the other. They were more alike than they thought.

Moreover, Lawrence was by no means the anti-Zionist that Aaronsohn took him to be, although he may have given that impression in their encounters as a way of asserting his primacy. In itself, Zionism did not greatly interest him; he judged it not in its own terms but by its likely effects on British policy and Arab welfare; yet his estimate of these effects, while fluctuating over time, was not on the whole negative. His first recorded pronouncement on Zionist settlement, indeed, made in a letter written to his parents (and missing from Anderson's book) while on his 1909 walking tour of crusader castles, was highly positive. After describing the desolate look of the Palestinian landscape, he stated, "The sooner the Jews farm it all the better: their colonies are bright spots in a desert."

It was only after the war, however, that Lawrence,

as Feisal's diplomatic aide-de-camp, was forced to think seriously about Zionism. The position he took was moderately pro-Zionist. Feisal was under opposing pressures from Arab nationalists who wanted him to reject all Zionist claims and a British government struggling to reconcile the Balfour Declaration's clashing commitments to both a Jewish "national home" in Palestine and the safeguarding of Arab rights there. Already toward the war's end Feisal had met in Aqaba with Weizmann, then president of the British Zionist Organization—a meeting that, while yielding no concrete results, was by all accounts cordial. (Although Lawrence had left Aqaba the week before on a military mission, there is no reason to accept Anderson's interpretation of this as a snubbing of Weizmann on his part.) Now, at the Paris Conference, the British worked to produce a formal accord between them.

Lawrence was very much part of these negotiations, which led to a nine-point agreement that offered Zionist support for a French-free, pan-Arab state reigned over by Feisal, still installed at the time in Damascus, in return for Arab acceptance of a British-governed Palestine in which "all necessary measures" would be taken "to encourage and stimulate immigration of Jews on a large scale, and as quickly as possible to settle Jewish immigrants upon the land." Weizmann, who was by then president of the World Zionist Organization, couldn't have asked for more. The Balfour Declaration hadn't promised the Jews a sovereign state, and though this was the goal of most Zionists, it was a far-off one. Unimpeded Jewish immigration, which alone could lay the grounds for such a state, was Zionism's immediate need. Feisal would never have endorsed it had not Lawrence counseled him to.

The Weizmann-Feisal agreement was soon consigned to the scrapheap of history by inevitable Zionist-Palestinian Arab conflicts that one would have thought Lawrence would foresee. Perhaps he did and considered it best to ignore them; perhaps he didn't give much of a hoot what happened in Palestine as long as Feisal's ambitions were fulfilled. It was Feisal and his Bedouin that he cared about; the urban and rural Arab of the Fertile Crescent arching from the Mediterranean to Mesopotamia had never captured his imagination. His love was for the desert with its great emptiness that human passions could never stain and for its dwellers with their proud, harsh, world-renouncing code. This was, in its British version, his code too, as would be demonstrated in the years to come, in which he was to re-enlist as a private in the Royal Air Force and remain there as a lowly technician until close to his death in a motorcycle accident.

Yet it also may be that Lawrence, though he also wrote a memorandum for Feisal objecting to the more "radical Zionists" who thought the Arabs of Palestine should simply "clear out," had a certain sympathy for Zionism. Hardly a Christian by intellectual conviction, he had been raised by Bible-reading, Low Church parents, their piety spurred to penitent heights by their out-of-wedlock cohabitation, of the type that had produced many a Christian Zionist in England; his few known post-Paris utterances about Zionism—none cited in Anderson's book—are intriguing. In a letter, for example, to the Anglican bishop of Jerusalem, who had asked him to repudiate his dealings with Weizmann, he wrote: "Dr. Weizmann is a great man whose boots neither you nor I, my dear bishop are fit to black." And to William Yale he declared presciently,



Emir Feisal's delegation at Versailles, during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Left to right: Rustum Haidar, Nuri as-Said, Prince Feisal, Captain Pisani (behind Feisal), T. E. Lawrence, Feisal's slave, Captain Hassan Khadri.

without condemning such an eventuality, that the Jews of Palestine would have to establish and defend a state of their own by force of arms.

Contrarily, in a collection of essays about him published two years after his death, Lawrence's brother Arnold expressed the opinion, based on talks with him, that he "anticipated a long-protracted British administration of Palestine, ending in a comparatively amicable solution of the problem, in favor, I think, of a Jewish majority in the distant future." Though this and the letter to Yale (whose date I have been unable to determine) don't square with each other, both suggest that the idea of a Jewish Palestine did not distress Lawrence. And had he lived longer, he would not, I think, have agreed with Anderson about the effects of Sykes-Picot. No one despised Sykes-Picot more than he did, but he knew the Arabs of the Fertile Crescent well enough to grasp that their mutual rivalries and hatreds would sooner or later erupt chaotically in a pan-Arab state, too, if not in Feisal's lifetime, then certainly after it.

The poem at the front of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, dedicated to "S.A.," begins with the stanza:

I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into
my hands
and wrote my will across the sky in stars
To earn you Freedom, the seven pillared worthy
house,
that your eyes might still be shining for me
When we came.

It is generally agreed that S.A. was an Arab boy called Dahoum, befriended by Lawrence at Carchemish, whose real name may have been Salim Ahmed. Although the bond between the two was strong and lasted all the years of the dig (Dahoum died before Lawrence could see him again), it does not seem to have been overtly sexual. While Lawrence clearly had homosexual tendencies, his fear of sexual relations was great, and his assertion in later life that he had never freely engaged in any was probably true.

Other identities have also been suggested for S.A., including Sarah Aaronsohn—who, it is said, Lawrence might have met in Cairo in 1917. For its advocates, this improbable theory is strengthened by several testimonies, like the one given by the Australian writer Douglas Duff, of being told by Lawrence that Sarah was the poem's addressee. But Lawrence loved to pull legs, especially when it came to his own life, and he was undoubtedly doing so in this case. The "Lawrence of Arabia" legend that formed around him both repelled and delighted him (repelled because it delighted); one way of coping with it was by means of tall tales that heightened it further while mocking the credulity of those who believed in them. It was in large measure Lawrence's penchant for spinning often contradictory and obviously false yarns about himself that first led some historians to doubt the factuality of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

Nevertheless, subsequent research has shown that most of what is checkable in the book is reasonably accurate—and the most controversial of its episodes still under challenge hardly qualifies as a tall tale. The most painful thing that Lawrence ever wrote about himself, it was not, whether fully, partially, or not at all true, calculated to enhance his reputation or amuse.

This episode is related in a passage telling how, in late 1917, Lawrence was raped by Turkish soldiers after being arrested while reconnoitering in the town of Deraa, a strategic railroad junction near the present Syrian-Jordanian frontier. First, he writes, he was brought to the local governor, who tried to have sex with him; rebuffed, he turned Lawrence over to his men for a whipping. Following a description of the agony of this, the narrative continues:

At last when I was completely broken they seemed satisfied . . . I remembered the corporal kicking with his nailed boot to get me up; and this was true, for next day my right side was dark and lacerated, and a damaged rib made each breath stab me sharply. I remembered smiling idly at him, for a delicious warmth, probably sexual, was swelling through me; and

then that he flung up his arm and hacked with the full length of his whip into my groin. This doubled me half-over, screaming . . .

By the bruises they perhaps beat me further: but I next knew that I was being dragged about by two men, each disputing over a leg as though to split me apart: while a third man rode me astride.

Lawrence is then washed and bandaged by an Armenian medic and put in a room, from which he escapes by climbing through a window and hitchhiking a ride on the rump of a camel. "That night," the chapter ends, "the citadel of my integrity had been irrevocably lost."

Many objections have been raised to the veracity of this story. Lawrence, it is claimed, could not have been in Deraa at the time he said he was; had he been arrested there, he would have been recognized and treated differently as someone with a price on his head who was of inestimable value to Turkish intelligence; nor could he have escaped in the manner that he described with the wounds that he described; nor was there anything noticeably wrong with him when he rejoined his forces. Moreover, he afterwards wrote different versions of the story, told it differently to different people, and denied to some that it had ever happened.

The weight of the evidence, however, is that something did happen at Deraa by which Lawrence was tormented for the rest of his life, just as he was tormented by what he felt was his betrayal of the men he led—and if it was purely a figment of his imagination, this would only make *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* an even greater literary achievement. Indeed, if one were writing a novel about the loss of "the citadel" of a man's integrity—the double loss, once as a leader in battle and once as a remarkably alive but sexually repressed human being in an environment daily testing one's repressions—a culminating scene in which the hero catastrophically takes pleasure in his own violation would be a stroke of genius. And why not, when *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is a work of genius?

Lawrence, who knew ancient Greek, spent part of his last years translating *The Odyssey*. Yet *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, with its rotund catalogues of quarreling sheikhs and tribes and men gone to war for an ideal that unites them for the first time as a nation, is more like *The Iliad*. And the tormented Lawrence vainly seeking peace in the anonymity of the ranks makes one think of the wounded Eurypylus, who says to Patroclus:

For verily all they that aforetime were bravest lie among the ships, smitten by darts or wounded with spear-thrusts at the hands of the Trojans . . . But me do thou succor, and lead me to my black ship, and cut the arrow from my thigh, and wash the black blood from it with warm water, and sprinkle thereon kindly simples of healing power.

Unlike Eurypylus, Lawrence was never healed. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, his attempt to salve the wound, as Homer puts it, with "a bitter root that slayeth pain," is an *Iliad* for our age.

Hillel Halkin, who lives in Israel, is the author of six books (his latest, *Jabotinsky: A Life*, will be published by Yale University Press in spring 2014) and a noted essayist and translator.

Hollywood and the Nazis

BY STUART SCHOFFMAN

Hollywood and Hitler, 1933–1939

by Thomas Doherty

Columbia University Press, 448 pp., \$35

The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler

by Ben Urwand

Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 336 pp., \$26.95

“The apprehensiveness of American Jews has become one of the important influences in the social life of our time.” This unsettling observation comes from the opening paragraph of a strange little book written in 1936 by “The Editors of *Fortune*,” entitled *Jews in America*. *Fortune* was then in its early heyday, featuring the photography of Margaret Bourke-White and Walker Evans and the elegant prose of Archibald MacLeish. Its founder, Henry Luce, once remarked that it was, “easier to turn poets into business journalists than to turn bookkeepers into writers,” and his investment paid off: During his nine years at *Fortune*, MacLeish published four books of poetry, won a Pulitzer Prize, and wrote nearly a hundred articles, including the one on which *Jews in America* was based. The ascent of Mussolini and Hitler and the anguish of the Great Depression had given rise to homegrown fascism and anti-Semitism in the United States. Friends of the New Germany, a pro-Nazi forerunner of the German American Bund, launched its operations in 1933, as did the Silver Shirts, a domestic version of Hitler’s Brownshirts, founded by William Dudley Pelley, a Christian occultist and former Hollywood screenwriter. The phenomenon, wrote MacLeish, “is important to non-Jews as well as to Jews,” because a nation that, “permits a minority to live in fear of persecution is a nation which invites disaster.”

[A]ny man who loathes Fascism will fear anti-Semitism . . . He will be troubled by the fact that certain Jews carry their race like an Irishman’s fighting shillelagh while others resent, as though it were a deliberate insult, any reference to their blood, avoiding friends who speak of it, boycotting publications which publish it in print. He will wonder whether such an attitude is necessary.

In 1935, Sinclair Lewis had published his novel *It Can't Happen Here*, warning that “it”—fascism—indeed could. Now *Fortune*, wary that anti-Semitism might destabilize American society, was determined to prove that it was both unwarranted and toothless. The Klu Klux Klan and Henry Ford had flourished in the 1920s, wrote MacLeish, but those days were gone: “Geographically the concentration of the movement in Southern California, the established breeding ground of cranks and crankeries, serves to character-

ize it very well.” Also concentrated in Southern California, then as now, was the movie business. Two new books, by Thomas Doherty of Brandeis and Ben Urwand of Harvard, take strikingly different approaches to the story of how Hollywood moguls and producers, most of them Jewish, dealt with Nazi Germany

Fortune went on to marshal facts and figures to prove that Jews did not “dominate the American scene” nor were they “monopolizing economic opportunity.” With regard to the movies, however, anti-Semites might make “a persuasive case.” According to Appendix B of *Jews in America*, three of the eight

“The Jews do not come within a gunshot of running America.” This oddly phrased pronouncement was meant to assuage nervous Jews and Gentiles.

during the 1930s. Doherty offers a panoramic picture that includes the compromises made by studio bosses to safeguard their income in shaky times. Urwand’s book is a veritable “*Jaccuse*,” claiming that the moguls collaborated outright with the Nazis. Doherty’s book was quietly greeted with respectable notices; Urwand’s invited and garnered great publicity, and his argument was swiftly attacked by reviewers.

major film companies—Warner Brothers, Loew’s (which owned MGM), and Columbia—were fully “controlled” by Jews, and three were partly in Jewish hands. The latter category included United Artists, among whose principals was Charlie Chaplin, “claimed as a Jew by other Jews.” (Chaplin was not, in fact, Jewish, but refused, on principle, to deny it publicly.) Most importantly, of “eighty-five names engaged in production”—executives, producers, and associate producers—“fifty-three are Jews.”

Nonetheless, “the Jews do not come within a gunshot of running America,” and “their numbers are no longer rapidly increasing.” This oddly phrased pronouncement—alluding favorably to the immigration restrictions of the 1920s—was meant to assuage nervous Jews as well as Gentiles. But if Louis B. Mayer, Jack Warner, or Sam Goldwyn had read the book, they might have thought otherwise.

Thomas Doherty, a professor of film and American studies, is the author of a book on the Production Code Administration (PCA), which he calls

“Hollywood’s in-house moral police force.” The PCA, established in 1930 by the Hays Office, the industry’s trade association, was not seriously enforced until 1934, when Joseph Breen, a conservative Catholic layman, took charge. In addition to its stern moral guidelines regarding sex and profanity, the PCA also stipulated that, “The history, institutions, prominent people, and citizenry of all nations shall be represented fairly.” Doherty writes:

As interpreted by Breen and [Will] Hays, the vague injunction codified a see-no-evil, speak-no-evil, hear-no-evil policy toward any regime on the planet, especially if the nation in question offered a lucrative market for Hollywood imports . . . On the Hollywood screen, Germany was not to be slighted, the Nazis were not to be criticized, and Hitler was not to be mentioned.



A poster for one of the few American anti-Nazi films of the prewar years.

What was it really like in the 1930s? Before *Fortune* went to press in the winter of 1936, MacLeish sent his article to a number of Jewish notables, including his former Harvard Law professor Felix Frankfurter, and reported to Luce that all the Jews who read it felt, “the piece was valuable and should bring offense to no one.” One wonders. Consider this startling passage, early in the text:

The outstanding fact about the Jewish people is the fact that they have preserved, though scattered among the nations of the earth, their national identity. They are unique . . . not because they have bold noses—only a small percentage of Jews have the Jewish nose—but because they alone, of all peoples known to history, have retained in exile . . . their distinction from the peoples among whom they live. The Jew is everywhere and everywhere the Jew is strange.

His aim in the new book, Doherty says, is to “sharpen the focus on a blurry chapter in motion picture history—when Hollywood, in the grip of the Great Depression, first mediated Nazism as a business, an ideology, and, finally, a threat.” To do so, he has analyzed films of the period, trolled the “witty reportage” from *Variety*, the *Hollywood Reporter*, and other trade papers, and examined studio archives and the files of the Hays Office and PCA. “I wanted to recapture what was seen on screen at the time and to gauge how Americans, filmmakers and moviegoers alike, responded,” Doherty writes, “[t]hinking it best not to overlay what we know now onto what they knew then.”

Doherty’s book, with its plain-spoken title, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933–1939*, came out in early 2013, a few months before the publication of Urwand’s attention-grabbing *The Collaboration: Hollywood’s Pact with Hitler*. This enabled Urwand to mention it once, in an endnote (“a lively account, but one that is limited to reports that appeared in American trade papers”), and his publicists to dismiss it as flawed and superficial in a press release. Doherty struck back in *The Hollywood Reporter*:

I consider Urwand’s charges slanderous and ahistorical—slanderous because they smear an industry that struggled to alert America to the menace brewing in Germany and ahistorical because they read the past through the eyes of the present . . . “I never knock the other fellow’s merchandise,” says insurance agent Walter Neff in Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* . . . [yet] I am always leery of history that encourages the present to feel morally superior to the past.

The brouhaha has stirred considerable attention, including a carefully balanced account in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and a critique of Urwand’s “extreme conclusions” by *New Yorker* film critic David Denby, who expanded his assault in a blog entitled “How Could Harvard Have Published Ben Urwand’s *The Collaboration*?”

On the back flap of his book, Urwand is identified simply as “a Junior Fellow of the Society of Fellows at Harvard University.” Less understated, however, is his website, filled with laudatory press clips and TV interviews in which the author recounts the extraordinary revelations of the book that took him nine years to write, digging into German archives where no scholars of Hollywood had dug before. It also tells us that he was the lead singer and songwriter for a rock band in San Francisco.

The Collaboration, based on the author’s PhD thesis at UC Berkeley, is a pairing of scholarship and showmanship. In his prologue, Urwand trumpets his achievement:

This book reveals for the first time the complex web of interactions between the American studios and the German government in the 1930s. It unearths a series of secret documents . . . The studio heads, who were mostly immigrant Jews . . . followed the instructions of the German consul in Los Angeles . . . It is time to remove the layers that have hidden the collaboration for so long . . .

“Over the course of the investigation,” Urwand writes, “one word kept reappearing in both the

German and American records: ‘collaboration’ (*Zusammenarbeit*.)” The word does mean “collaboration”—but also “cooperation,” or, literally, working together. Only once does the English word appear in a primary source quoted by Urwand. Of the eight times it appears in German sources, five are from the same place, a report by one Dr. Martin Freudenthal, a “special agent” of the German Foreign Office who was sent to Hollywood in January 1932, before the Nazis took power. Freudenthal spent a year in Los Angeles, and when he got home he told his new Nazi bosses that Hollywood folks he met (at Universal, RKO, Fox, and United Artists) were prepared to work in *Zusammenarbeit* with German officials. “Every time that this collaboration was achieved,” Freudenthal said, “the parties found it to be both helpful and pleasant.”



Dr. Georg Gyssling, German consul, with Leni Riefenstahl, in Los Angeles in the late 1930s. (© Bettmann/Corbis.)

Is this as ominous as Urwand would have it, or a simple description of cooperation between friendly nations? After all, as he acknowledges, other countries, including Canada and China, had also sent representatives to Hollywood “to ensure that their cultures were portrayed accurately.” Doherty, with ironic flair, writes that, “censoring cinema was a multinational pastime”: “The British flinched at cruelty to animals, the French bristled at the slightest slight to Gallic honor,” and so on.

Freudenthal proposed that Germany attach a permanent representative to its consulate in California, to see to the “education and training” of the studios about German interests. He may have wanted that cozy job for himself, as Urwand plausibly surmises, but instead the Germans installed a Nazi diplomat named Dr. Georg Gyssling, who plays the heavy in Urwand’s drama. His principal weapon bore the sinister label “Article Fifteen,” a proviso enacted in 1932 by which Germany could boycott studios and producers who made films “detrimental to German prestige.”

Urwand’s investigation was sparked by “a brief comment that the screenwriter and novelist Budd Schulberg made very late in his life.” Schulberg was interviewed in a 2002 documentary about Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*, in which he claimed that Louis B. Mayer was in cahoots with Gyssling:

When they tried to make some, I think there was *Three Comrades*, there were some films that Louis B. Mayer of MGM would actually run those films with the Nazi German consul and was willing to take out the things that the consul, that the Nazis, objected to . . . I heard about the way that Louis Mayer would kowtow . . . he was definitely doing it. I think the consul even came to the studio and looked at his pictures and said yes, that’s all right, no take that out, it was unbelievable.

In an endnote, Urwand says he “attempted to contact” Schulberg in 2004 (he died in 2009). Had he succeeded, he might have asked him why he had never dropped this bombshell before. Schulberg is best known for his blistering 1941 Hollywood novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?* In another note, Urwand mentions that Schulberg told *Newsday* in 1987 that when the novel came out, “Louis B. Mayer told his father, B.P. Schulberg (a former executive at Paramount), ‘You know what we should do with him? We should deport him!’” As the film blogger known as “Self-Styled Siren” commented in her evisceration of Urwand’s book: “There may have been a certain amount of lingering pique on the part of Schulberg *films*.” It is reasonable to wonder whether Schulberg’s vague memory (“I think,” “I heard”), more than six decades later, was accurate. Nowhere in the book is there further evidence that Mayer and Gyssling met, on that occasion or ever.

The story in brief: Hollywood censor Joseph Breen had received three letters from Gyssling, expressing concern about MGM’s plan to film *Three Comrades*, a novel by Erich Maria Remarque, set in Germany after World War I. In May 1937, MGM sent a draft of the script to Breen, who, says Urwand, “could not find anything wrong with it,” apart from some “coarse language and drinking.” F. Scott Fitzgerald was brought in to do a rewrite, and his version “mounted a powerful attack on the rise of Nazism in Germany.” Producer Joseph Mankiewicz ordered further rewrites, in which “the jabs at the Nazis” remained. When Breen read the new script, says Urwand, “he panicked,” having received a “fourth warning” from Gyssling, and Breen wrote to Mayer, worrying that the film would lead to “enormous difficulty” in Europe. At this point, Urwand inserts the Schulberg recollection he had described in the prologue. Soon thereafter, he tells us, Breen was “in possession of a list of changes that needed to be made to the film.”

It is very unlikely that Breen came up with the list himself, for he had his own set of suggestions (relating to sex, foul language, etc.). In all likelihood this secret document, which contained ten unusual changes, was the list that Mayer compiled with Gyssling at the end of their screening of *Three Comrades*.

After the changes were made, Urwand writes, “*Three Comrades* neither attacked the Nazis nor mentioned the Jews. The picture had been completely sanitized”

and “Georg Gyssling was invited to preview it again.” Gyssling suggested a few small changes, and they were made. In short, declares Urwand, “the director did not have the final cut; the Nazis did.”

I rehearse this episode because it illustrates Urwand’s impulse to turn speculation (“in all likelihood”) into shocking revelation. Doherty devotes little attention to *Three Comrades*, basing his thin version on an article in *Time* magazine, which reported that Breen had ordered cuts to the film. Joseph Mankiewicz, the producer, said *Time*, had denied this and claimed that MGM had decided on its own “to delete all sequences which were extraneous to the love story of the film,” and that neither Breen nor Gyssling had any role in that decision. Doherty takes Mankiewicz at face value. Digging deeper than Doherty, Urwand unearths fascinating stuff. His research undercuts Mankiewicz’s credibility, even as his inflated rhetoric undermines his own.

In Doherty’s book, it was Breen and the Hays Office who were allergic to “politically sensitive pictures.” Sometimes they listened to Gyssling’s complaints and took them into account, and sometimes not. It was Breen, says Doherty, who in 1936 squashed MGM’s plan to film Sinclair Lewis’ *It Can’t Happen Here*. Urwand tells it differently. Breen and Hays, he says, batted the matter between them, while Louis B. Mayer held his ground. Then a Reform rabbi from Philadelphia named William H. Fineshriber wrote Will Hays that it was a bad idea: “The only wise method to pursue in these days of virulent anti-Semitism is to have no picture in which the Jewish Problem is ventilated.” Hays met with Mayer, who dropped the project.

Urwand allows that Mayer’s decision was “shrouded in mystery,” adding that “there is no evidence to suggest that Gyssling issued any complaint about *It Can’t Happen Here*.” But Urwand, his eye on the prize, won’t let it go at that:

Whether Gyssling was involved in the cancellation of *It Can’t Happen Here* will probably never be known. But even if Gyssling were not directly involved, his presence in Los Angeles undoubtedly affected MGM’s decision. Ever since 1933, he had been putting his energies into “educating and training” the Hollywood studios about German national feeling. He had created the system of collaboration that made his position on any potential anti-fascist film obvious . . . Gyssling did not need to open his mouth to have *It Can’t Happen Here* abandoned.

In response to his critics, Urwand has repeatedly insisted that he has stuck to the facts. “Any claims I make are based on archival materials,” he told the BBC. “Everything in my book is documented.” That claim, too, is debatable, not least because the references to primary sources are often cryptic. By omitting translated titles of German materials, Urwand thickens his atmosphere of “secret documents” and “hidden layers” of collaboration.

Doherty describes the industry’s response to early manifestations of Nazi terror as one of “befuddlement.” The studio heads kept betting on regime change: “Surely, the fever would eventually break.” Urwand, however, writes as if the moguls—mostly Jews!—were enablers of the Holocaust. In so doing, he is guilty of what the late literary scholar Michael

André Bernstein called “backshadowing”: “a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come*.” To put it more plainly, he’s a Monday-morning quarterback.

Notwithstanding the avalanche of reviews and polemics, both Doherty and Urwand’s books are worth reading. Doherty is the better writer, whereas Urwand provides narrative suspense: What conclusion will he jump to next? He is ever on the lookout for the “gotcha!” moment: One letter from a nameless German employee of Fox written in 1938 to a Nazi official was signed “Heil Hitler!” The three-week tour of Europe in the post-victory summer of 1945 organized by the U.S. Army for movie executives was capped by a six-hour cruise up the Rhine “in Hitler’s personal yacht.” This makes for a good sound bite, but what does it prove?

Doherty too tells his share of damning tales, but his book is more balanced. He spends a chapter on the extensive activism of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (HANL). Led by a pair of screenwriters, the urbane Donald Ogden Stewart and the famously witty (and half-Jewish) Dorothy Parker, HANL was part of the Popular Front, a broad coalition that included New Deal Democrats as well as communists. “[T]he motion picture industry,” Doherty writes, “was no worse than the rest of American culture in its failure of nerve and imagination, and often a good deal better in the exercise of both.” For Urwand, Hollywood is the place where, in 1939, MGM—at consul Gyssling’s request—hosted a studio tour for a delegation of Nazi newspaper editors. HANL protested the episode, earning the group its sole brief mention in Urwand’s book.

Doherty also dwells on a mediocre non-studio 1936 movie called *I Was a Captive of Nazi Germany*, based on a true story, “the only anti-Nazi feature film produced in America and granted a Code seal before 1939.” Its producer, Alfred T. Mannon, defied Georg Gyssling’s attempt to block the film in a letter to Breen that detailed Nazi abuses. For Urwand, it’s a curiosity, a bump in the conspiratorial narrative: He relegates it to a long endnote.

Urwand is more interested in a film that didn’t get made, called *The Mad Dog of Europe*. In Doherty’s version, the “long-gestating, never-realized scenario caught in a 1930s version of development hell”—industry jargon for endless rewrites—“illustrates the Hollywood aversion to anti-Nazi cinema in the 1930s.” This was also an independent production, first scheduled for 1933. Breen opposed it on political grounds, explaining that the Jewish producers of “an anti-Hitler picture” would be accused of “using the entertainment screen for their own personal propaganda purposes,” and the project “might result in a boomerang.” Urwand’s account features the elusive Gyssling (who may or may not have gotten involved at first: “the evidence is inconclusive—but he probably did”) along with the Anti-Defamation League, which actually echoed Breen’s concerns. “The decision not to make *The Mad Dog of Europe*,” Urwand declares, “was the most important moment in all of Hollywood’s dealings with Nazi Germany.” The studios now “had a perfect justification for not making movies about the Nazis. . . . [T]hey could now

mo•sa•ic
/mō zā’ ik/

1. of or pertaining to Moses or the laws, faith, institutions, and writings attributed to him.

2. an artwork made of small pieces of inlaid stone, tile, marble, glass, etc., forming a patterned whole.

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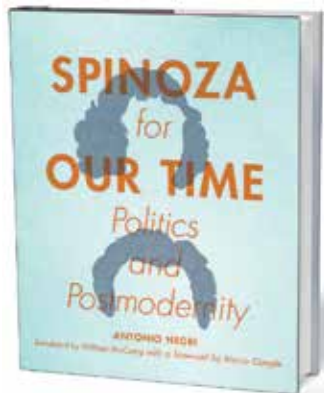
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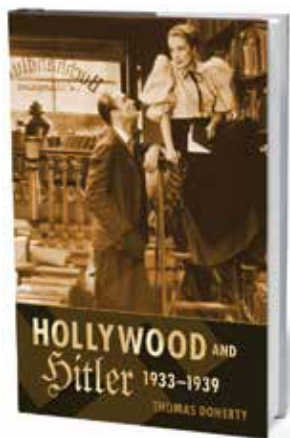
ANTONIO NEGRI

Translated by William McCuaig

With a foreword by Rocco Gangle

“There are very few authors who are able to supply the degree and force of insight that Antonio Negri does on the subject of contemporary continental political philosophy. Even among those living thinkers who are as important as Negri, no one is able to offer a substantive and creative account of the value of Spinoza for contemporary thought. It is precisely such an account that Negri here provides and in a way that makes original advances beyond even his more notable previous contributions.”

—Daniel Colucciello Barber, ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry



Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939

THOMAS DOHERTY

“A witty writer familiar with Hollywood history and manners, Doherty places the studios’ craven behavior within a general account of the political culture of the movies in the thirties and forties.”

—*The New Yorker*

“Wide-ranging and brightly written.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

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cite a more high-minded aim” than commercial interests. Urwand insists, implausibly in my view, that this was only an alibi: “There is no evidence, at this point or later on, that they were actually afraid of the potential anti-Semitic reaction.”

In 1940, MGM—“the studio most deeply immersed in trafficking with the Nazis during the 1930s,” as Doherty rightly notes—released *The Mortal Storm*, a melodrama that for Urwand “was without any doubt the first truly significant anti-Nazi film.” All references to Jews had been cut from the film, yet Breen and Gyssling had nothing to do with it. Why? The standard explanation, advanced by students of Jewish Hollywood for half a century, is Jewish anxiety. As Henry Popkin wrote in a seminal *Commentary* essay from 1952:

There has grown up an unwritten law that makes the Jew the little man who isn’t there. This law originates not in hate, but in a misguided benevolence—or fear; its name is “sha-sha.” At its most effective, the taboo banishes all Jewish characters, all Jewish names, the word “Jew” itself. If we pretend that the Jew does not exist, the reasoning goes, then he will not be noticed; the anti-Semite, unable to find his victim, will simply forget about him.

Thirty years ago, when I worked in Hollywood, the Jewish taboo had not yet expired. When I pitched scripts with Jewish content, I was rebuffed by studio executives with two blunt words: “too Jewish.” Urwand will have none of this:

Back in 1933, in an effort to hold onto the German market, Louis B. Mayer had agreed not to make *The Mad Dog of Europe* . . . From that moment onward, the various studio heads, in compliance with the wishes of Georg Gyssling, made sure neither to attack the Nazis nor to defend the Jews in their films . . . Their timidity, in other words, was not inherent; it derived from their years of collaboration with Nazi Germany.

For Urwand, it boils down to *Zusammenarbeit*, not anxiety: All else is commentary. Doherty, as quoted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, summarizes his own position: “Louis B. Mayer was a greedhead, but he is not the moral equivalent of Vidkun Quisling.”

One figure who plays a small supporting role in Urwand’s narrative is a former ADL official named Leon Lewis, who founded a committee of executives from major studios who met monthly “for the sole purpose of discussing Jewish matters.” What Urwand apparently didn’t know was that Lewis was also running a local network of anti-Nazi spies in Los Angeles funded by these very same studio bosses, as Laura Rosenzweig details elsewhere in this issue. (See “Hollywood’s Anti-Nazi Spies” on page 5.)

One can’t help wondering how Urwand’s book would have turned out had he known about this story. Would he have rebranded his book, or at least toned it down? He might as easily have argued that the moguls managed to have it both ways: Play ball with Hitler to save their shirts, go to anti-fascist cocktail parties, and pony up for a cloak-and-dagger adventure that suited their tempera-

ments even as it salved their Jewish conscience.

Doherty’s penultimate chapter, “The Only Studio with Any Guts,” is about the brothers Harry and Jack Warner, who “sold anti-Nazism as twentieth-century Americanism,” and in 1939 made *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, based on a true story about a domestic spy ring busted by the FBI. Urwand dismisses that same film as an “obvious B-picture.” His Jewish hero is not a mogul but a writer, the hugely prolific screenwriter and journalist Ben Hecht, who



Ben Hecht, in the early 1940s.

famously teamed up with Irgun militants who had come from Palestine to the States to raise money for a Jewish army and other purposes.

In his autobiography, *A Child of the Century*, Hecht wove a theatrical tale of his conversion to Jewish activism. Urwand describes Hecht’s impassioned campaign to “bring the genocide to national attention” by means of ferocious newspaper ads and a dramatic pageant of 1943 called *We Will Never Die*. Urwand mistakenly reports that the pageant featured “the then unknown Marlon Brando”; that came later, in 1946, when Brando played a young Holocaust survivor in Hecht’s *A Flag Is Born*, a Broadway play in support of a Jewish State. But Urwand chooses not to deal with Hecht’s postwar Zionist phase, when he raised money for the Irgun (while writing *Notorious* for Alfred Hitchcock).

He ends his discussion of Hecht in 1945: “At a time when most American Jews were afraid to rock the boat . . . Ben Hecht’s voice was the loudest, most courageous Jewish voice in America.” Reading Ben Urwand on Ben Hecht, one realizes how closely he identifies with him. The zenith of Hecht’s radicalization was the publication in 1961 of his book *Perfidy*, in which he accused Ben-Gurion’s Labor Zionists of collaboration with Hitler, and the Haganah of collaboration with the British. Urwand makes no mention of that heavily footnoted, widely discredited book, but nonetheless seems to be under its enduring spell. *The Collaboration* is his *Perfidy*.

Stuart Schoffman, a fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute, worked as a Hollywood screenwriter and taught film at the University of Southern California before moving to Jerusalem in 1988. His translations from Hebrew include books by A.B. Yehoshua, David Grossman, and Meir Shalev.

Riding Leviathan: A New Wave of Israeli Genre Fiction

BY MICHAEL WEINGRAD

Eshtonot (The Book of Disorder)

by Ofir Touché Gafla
Keter, 316 pp., 98 NIS

Etsba'ot shel pesantran (Piano Fingers)

by Yali Sobol
Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 224 pp., 92 NIS

The World of the End

by Ofir Touché Gafla
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Shedim be-rachov Agripas (Demons in Agripas Street)

by Hagai Dagan
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Alma

by Roni Eshkol
Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 463 pp., 96 NIS

Kesheha-meitim hazru (When the Dead Returned)

by Ilan Sheinfeld
Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 638 pp., 128 NIS

Arim shel mata (De Urbibus Inferis)

by Shimon Adaf
Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 333 pp., 94 NIS

Rabbinic conspiracies, Leviathan-riding heroines, a top-secret Israel Defense Forces demon-hunting unit, ghosts and amnesiacs, a gay messiah—all these can be found in the half-dozen books short-listed for this year's Geffen Prize for best Israeli fantasy or science fiction novel, awarded in late September by the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy.

It wasn't so long ago that one could justifiably lament that fantasy literature was a weak strain in Israel, science fiction only somewhat less marginal, and that Hebrew literary culture was generally suspicious of the fantastical and speculative. (Ironic, since Zionism's founder, Theodor Herzl, spun quite a yarn in his utopian novel *Altneuland*.) As novelist Hagar Yanai put it in a 2002 essay in *Ha'aretz*:

Faeries do not dance underneath our swaying palm trees, there are no fire-breathing dragons in the cave of Machpelah, and Harry Potter doesn't live in Kfar Saba. But why? Why couldn't Harry Potter have been written in Israel? Why is local fantasy literature so weak, so that it almost seems that a book like that couldn't be published in the state of the Jews?

Since Yanai wrote these words, there has been something of an efflorescence of fantasy literature in

the Hebrew language, and she herself is responsible for no small part of it. Her 2006 and 2008 novels, *Ha-livyatan mi-bavel* (The Leviathan of Babylon) and *Ha-mayim she-bein ha-olamot* (The Water Between the Worlds), comprise the first two installments of a promised fantasy trilogy (the conclusion

seems to have gotten stalled), the first such in Hebrew literature, involving a couple of Israeli teenagers who travel from Tel Aviv to a magical version of the Babylonian Empire. As I wrote in my 2010 essay "Why There Is No Jewish Narnia," those novels are not my cup of tea, but they were part of what I referred to at that time as "a very short shelf" of Israeli fantasy literature.

That shelf is no longer so short. The Geffen Prize is itself a gauge of the recent growth of fantastical writing in Israel. The prize was first awarded in 1999, but only for science fiction and fantasy novels translated into Hebrew and for short stories. Four years later, a prize category was created for original book-length works by Israeli authors and was awarded in alternating years until 2007, when Yanai's *Ha-livyatan mi-bavel* received the prize. Since then, the award for an original Hebrew book-length work has been given each year. (The genres of science fiction and fantasy are combined for purposes of the award, just as in the case of the better-known Hugo and Nebula awards.)



Ofir Touché Gafla. (Courtesy of Yanai Yechiel.)

The prizes are announced at ICon, an annual convention in Tel Aviv that draws around 3,000 aficionados of fantasy, science fiction, and role-playing games.

A look at the six novels nominated for this year's Geffen shows the current ferment and possibilities in the new Israeli science fiction and fantasy. These books reflect international trends in fantastic literature, especially the collapse of clear distinctions between fantasy, science fiction, and other genres.

(Gary K. Wolfe, in his superb collection of essays on fantastic literature in England and America, calls these "evaporating genres," and shows how the instability of these genres was built into their peculiar historical and commercial origins.) While some of these novels adhere to genre conventions, most draw

These books may not be Israeli Narnias, but they pound on the wardrobe, rattling the scrolls inside.

promiscuously and in highly self-aware fashion from fantasy, science fiction, horror, detective fiction, and other genres. They also reflect the influence of film as much as literature, whether high or low.

What is most striking in considering this year's crop of finalists, however, is how concerned they are with Judaism. Two of them, Ofir Touché Gafla's *Eshtonot* (The Book of Disorder) and Yali Sobol's *Etsba'ot shel pesantran* (Piano Fingers), are in different ways redolent of the Israeli scene, whether the actual Israel or a dystopian, near-future Israel, but do not deal with Judaism per se. Yet the other four, including this year's winner, all make aspects of Jewish belief central to their fantasies. These books both confirm and challenge my speculations from a few years ago, which gave rise to considerable discussion and debate, and in which I claimed that normative Jewish theology, in contrast to Christianity, was not well-suited for dramatization in fantasy literature, or at least not in classic high fantasy.

More importantly, these books show that this new wave of Israeli science fiction and fantasy not only reflects global currents and popular culture, but also grapples with issues of Jewish belief and identity that continue to trouble and inspire Israelis, both religious and secular. These may not be Israeli Narnias, but they pound on the wardrobe, rattling the scrolls inside.

The only writer among this year's finalists currently accessible in English is the wonderfully named Ofir Touché Gafla, whose delicious first novel, *The World of the End*, won the Geffen Prize in 2005 and was published this summer in an excellent English translation. *The World of the End* tells the story of Ben and Marian Mendelssohn, a married couple who seem to have the perfect relationship until Marian dies in a Ferris wheel accident. Although Ben works as an "epilogist," a ghostwriter who specializes in devising endings for books and screenplays, he finds himself unable to accept the ending of Marian's life and so follows her into the afterlife. In the course of Ben's journey—which could be described as Orpheus and Eurydice meets Alice in Wonderland, with Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* and Etgar Keret's "Kneller's Happy Campers" thrown in—he befriends a private investigator, visits a store where one can obtain videos of every moment of one's previous life, drops in on deceased Jewish relatives, and learns about the "charlatans" (temporary residents of the

afterlife, who will wake from their various comas and near-death states) and the “aliases” (denizens of the afterlife who never lived in the first place). The world beyond is filled with surprises, casting light and shadows not only upon Ben’s quest to locate his dead wife but upon what he thought he knew about their prior life together.

The book is a meditation on the deeply human need for, and defiance of, endings. Gafla probes the agonizing necessity, in grief over a beloved’s death or in the wake of a failed romance, of moving beyond the experience of finality in order to see life as continuing. He also shows, by contrast, that in love the dangerous temptation is to imagine that one has reached an ending and can live happily ever after, ignoring the ways in which all such endings are in some manner illusory. Gafla tells his story ingeniously, with a touch and timing as surely executed in the novel’s many moments of dark humor as in its moments of poignant heartache. The plot is at times overly intricate and defiantly improbable, with one too many secondary stories grafted onto the main trunk, but most every page is a dizzying delight. The novel should find as devoted a readership in America as it has in Israel.

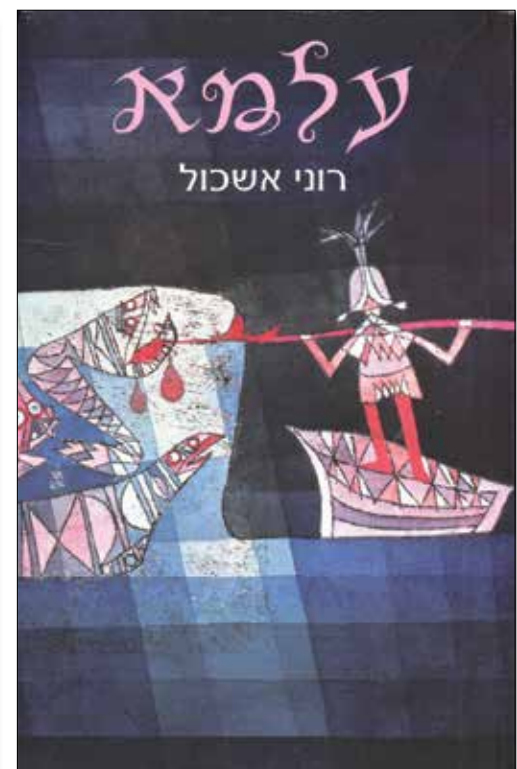
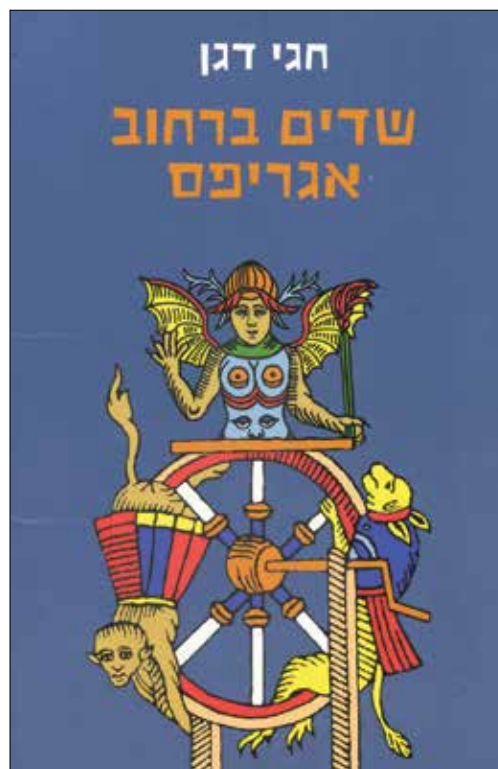
Gafla’s latest novel and Geffen award nominee, *Eshtonot* (The Book of Disorder), also shuttles back and forth between the world of the living and other, more ambiguous states of existence. Creepy and complex, it draws together a series of uncanny threads. A man wakes up by the side of a road. He can’t remember anything except for his name, and on the back of his head is a small protrusion that feels like a switch. Another man is a prisoner in a placid and pastoral landscape surrounded by a wall. He and his fellow inhabitants are all murderers. Every night in a Parisian café, the romantic overtures of a breathtakingly handsome man are rebuffed by a homely woman. A boy fills notebooks with obsessively detailed lists of tragedies and disasters. What unites these strands is the novel’s fascination with epistemology: how we know that we know something, especially how we know whether or not we are real. Touché Gafla teaches writing at the Sam Spiegel Film and Television School in Jerusalem, and the twists and turns of the book recall various movies from the last decade or so that play upon this kind of uncertainty—*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Inception*, *The Sixth Sense*, etc. *Eshtonot* is populated by a host of people severed from their memories, or from their pasts, or from the external world. While not as powerful as Gafla’s first novel, *Eshtonot* explores this panorama of dissociation with often spine-tingling results.

In contrast to the metaphysical chills provided by Gafla, Yali Sobol deals with political fears. If Israel ever becomes a fascist police state, don’t say that Sobol didn’t warn you. His slim dystopian novel, *Etsba’ot shel pesantran* (Piano Fingers), is set a few years from now in an Israel that has, in the wake of an elliptically described next war, implemented martial law and a tightening stranglehold on freedom of speech and expression. Like many a political fable about the danger of acquiescence to a repressive regime, the main character is an artist—here a classical concert pianist—who prefers to remain apolitical in an environment that will not allow such moral cowardice. (Sobol’s own musical background is rock—he was the lead singer of the band Monica Sex, which some American readers may recall for its infectious theme

song to the 1990s hit Israeli television show *Florentin*—and he is the son of the playwright Yehoshua Sobol.) Sobol’s fable is directed against the Israeli right: Those persecuted by the government thought police are leftist poets, post-Zionists, kibbutzniks, and the like. The novel will therefore not resonate much beyond *Ha’aretz* readers, but it is deftly written and a grim barometer of the anxieties of the Israeli left.

The winner of this year’s Geffen Prize is Hagai Dagan’s *Shedim be-rachov Agripas* (Demons in Agripas Street) about a group of paranormal inves-

theological and political, being made. The battle between the evil angels and the pagan gods is just one of several ways Dagan, in this novel, attacks traditional Judaism. Judaism, the novel argues, banished the life-affirming feminine and natural dimensions found in paganism and so became sterile and oppressive. Rabbi Eliezer, the apparent loser of the famous talmudic “oven of Akhnai” story, in which he appeals successfully to God to support his interpretation of the law but is overruled by the other rabbis on a technicality, was in Dagan’s novel actually a val-



Covers of *Shedim be-rachov Agripas*, left, by Hagai Dagan and *Alma* by Roni Eshkol. (Courtesy of Michael Weingrad and Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan.)

tigators who work loosely with the IDF to manage unruly demons, sort of like an Israeli *Ghostbusters* or *Men in Black*. The protagonist is Shabi, a sex-obsessed slob of a Jerusalem cab driver who is made a member of the group after he evinces a mysterious talent for handling these supernatural beings. Shabi soon discovers that a cosmic crisis is at hand: a plot by a powerful group of evil angels to unleash permanently upon the universe the dark and violent side of God, what the kabbalists called *Din* (Judgment) as opposed to *Chesed* (Mercy). To triumph, these angels need to execute a group of imprisoned pagan deities, especially the Egyptian Isis and the Roman Fortuna, and so Shabi and his colleagues—a feminist academic, an ex-yeshiva student, a renegade physicist, and a Muslim Sudanese woman—find themselves in a race against time to save the goddesses and avert the end of days.

For his material, Dagan draws from his own 2003 Hebrew compendium of Jewish myths and countertraditions, *Ha-mitologyah ha-yehudit* (Jewish Mythology), and even quotes from it in *Shedim be-rachov Agripas* (Demons in Agripas Street), where it is presented, amusingly, as a passage from a demonic text known as “the Bible of Hell.” Dagan has given his readers an Israeli version of the kind of novel that, like Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods*, brings mere mortals in proximity to powerful ancient deities. Dagan likes playing these encounters for laughs, with an emphasis on slapstick and sex jokes.

Yet for all the humor that Dagan attempts to instill in the novel, there are very serious assertions,

iant if unsuccessful hero trying to bring the Jewish and pagan deities together in a harmonious fusion. Eliezer wanted to unite the God of the Hebrews and the pagan goddesses in a sex-positive cult that would affirm femininity and the natural world rather than the stifling and patriarchal rigidity of Jewish law. One of his latter-day disciples expresses the need “to turn Judaism into something alive. Something connected to the world of those goddesses and gods who were here before God decided he wanted to rule alone.”

This is somewhat reminiscent of the Canaanite movement, a group of writers and artists who came onto the scene in the 1940s and argued that Israeli culture needed to shed its connections with Judaism and instead embrace a pre-biblical and pan-Middle Eastern culture of their imagination. Dagan’s closer ideological cousins, though, are the varieties of feminist spirituality that have, since the 1970s, attacked Judaism for supposedly inventing patriarchy and repressing the more feminine world of paganism—a view that often reprises Christianity’s early condemnation of Judaism as a dry and spirit-killing legalism, as well as its charge of deicide, in this case the elimination of goddesses rather than God.

Dagan’s religious critique is wedded to a palpable animus against ultra-Orthodox Jews and what many secular Israelis complain is the haredization of Jerusalem. The novel contains many venomous comments about *haredi* Jews (one of the characters asks semi-jokingly if they’re human), and, in case there were some ambiguity about Dagan’s feelings on the matter, he has the main evil angel disguise itself as

an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who heads a yeshiva across the Green Line in the Arab neighborhood of Silwan. Moreover, while all the Orthodox Jews in the novel are sinister—or demons in disguise—all the Arab characters are kindly and well-intentioned despite their oppression by Orthodox Jews. The novel implies that if Judaism would open itself up to the pagan and feminine as Rabbi Eliezer had wanted it to do 2,000 years ago, there would be peace between Jews and Arabs today.

As if in response to comments I made in my Jewish Narnia essay about rabbinic Judaism's deflation of the mythical element in Judaism, both Dagan's *Shedim ba-rachov Agripas* and Roni Eshkol's debut novel, *Alma*, feature warrior princesses riding on Leviathan, that primordial sea monster which God boasts of catching with a hook in the Book of Job, and which the rabbis of the Talmud claimed would provide a buffet dinner for the righteous in the world to come. While for Dagan this represents a hoped-for revenge of pagan, feminine myth against Judaism, Eshkol seeks a synthesis of Judaism and other thought systems, and her Leviathan is understood as part of a shattered unity that the characters in her quest fantasy seek to restore.

Alma is a young goatherd who lives in a squalid village in the land of Anlazya by the poisoned Northern Sea. When her curiosity leads her beyond the confines of her village, she encounters the Leviathan, whose frightening call wracks those who hear it with memories from their past. Alma discovers a map of the world on the skin shed from the Leviathan's eye and uses it in a desperate war against a tyrant who has turned the southern hemisphere of the world into a hellish wasteland and now has designs on the north. Of the novels reviewed here, *Alma* is on the one hand the most bound up with the familiar conventions of fantasy literature. We have a young outsider who goes on a journey to save the world from a powerful evil and a mostly medieval technological level leavened by elements that seem magical.

On the other hand, Eshkol's novel offers a unique and highly personal mythology, infused with Jewish elements both classical and modern. She gives her world a pungently ancient feel with Aramaic place names and Hebrew archaisms. The novel at times recalls Hasidic parables with their exiled kings and vanished princesses. There are festivals of remembrance that resemble the shofar service of the Jewish New Year. The Sauron of this world even bears the name of the devil in Jewish folklore, spelled backwards.

Modern Jewish experience is just as much an influence on the novel. The shattered south, with its tortured slave population and landscape of ash, filth, and skulls, is described in ways that go beyond Tolkien's Mordor into the territory of Auschwitz. A Zionist sensibility animates the characters who rebel against the ancient dispersion of their tribe and seek to recover their homeland. "I cannot judge the decision of my forefathers" to go into exile, says one of the characters. "It was their choice and I respect it.

But now the south is trampled while we enjoy the exile we took upon ourselves. As a son of the Wandering People I cannot return to the south," he declares, "yet I can at least cease wandering."

What most animates the novel is the theme of unity. The world of *Alma* is a sun-drenched world, which the protagonists seek to reunite. Alma and her companions are deeply concerned with the nature of unity, of God ("the One"), and the question of how there can be evil and strife, or desire, or sexual duality in a creation that is supposed to be whole. These explorations are syncretic: partly Jewish and partly inspired by eastern sources (the main fount of wisdom in the novel is a being named Satoria—satori is a Zen term for enlightenment). Eshkol fails to create compellingly vivid correlations to these explorations in her characters and narrative action; one feels that Alma and her companions

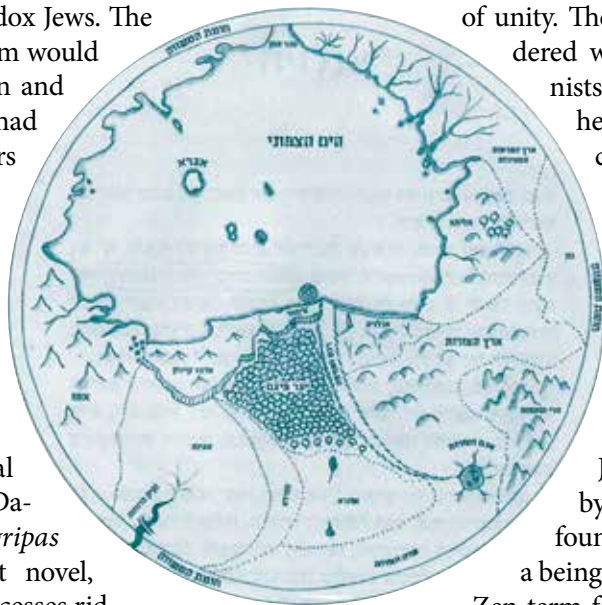
would be truer to their principles if they just sat on mountaintops and meditated instead of riding around doing things, and their quest feels accordingly arbitrary. Yet the broken world through which they move has genuine atmosphere.

In contrast to the fantastical realms of *Alma*, Ilan Sheinfeld's *Kesheha-meitim hazru* (When the

Dead Returned) is, for the most part, decidedly this-worldly. The first half of the novel is a sprawling family epic drawn from Sheinfeld's own family history, and reminiscent of the novels of Isaac Bashevis and Israel Joshua Singer. It begins in the Bessarabian shtetl of Novoselic in the years leading up to the Holocaust and moves from Eastern Europe to the jungles of the Amazon as members of the family immigrate to South America. Apart from a few brief magical realist touches there is nothing supernatural in the book's first half, although Sheinfeld's realistic recounting of the family's experience of the Holocaust—a universe of horror, a world of walking corpses—seems as much like science fiction or horror as any work of fantastical literature.

The theme of messianism is foreshadowed from the start. Early on, a mysterious stranger shows up in the village and gives one of the characters a Seder plate decorated with symbols of Shabbtai Zevi, while another character heads off to Palestine to purchase land in the Galilee near the reputed grave of Moses' daughter, who figures prominently in Sabbatean myth. The family patriarch, a furrier named Shlomo Feldman, is infused with messianic yearning, though a bitter foe of the Sabbatean sympathizers he runs across.

The second half of the book focuses on Salomon Feldman, the grandson of Shlomo and the son of Michael, Shlomo's son who is separated from the family early on when he is struck in the head and loses his memory, spending the war years in the home of a Christian farmer. After the war, Michael makes his way to South America and settles in Iquitos, a town in the Amazonian rainforest that is home to a large number of Jews who have intermarried for



Alma's map of the world.
(Courtesy of Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan.)



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Barash, Asher; Yitzhak Katz; Menashe Rabinovitz; Avraham Soskin (photog). Tel-Aviv: Grafika, 1925.
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generations with the local Indian population. (This may also seem somewhat fantastical but is the typically improbable reality of Jewish history.) Michael marries an Indian woman who claims to be partly of Jewish descent and who dies after giving birth to Salomon. Salomon grows up, attends university in Lima, becomes a historian, and wrestles with his homosexuality. Through his searches for the key to his own identity he makes his way to Israel.

In the final third of Sheinfeld's book, Salomon is revealed as the messiah, probably the first gay messiah in a novel since Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. When Salomon, as yet unaware of his redemptive powers, begins inadvertently to raise the dead, it is the occasion for macabre Jewish comedy, as the extended Feldman family descends upon the sleepy little town in Northern Israel in which Salomon resides. It turns out that having one's deceased aunts, uncles, and cousins resurrected also means the resurrection of family feuds and pettiness.

As more and more dead Jews are brought to life, Sheinfeld spins out a clever and audacious social comedy dealing with the Zionist project itself: how the State of Israel has, metaphorically speaking, accomplished the messianic feat of bringing wildly different Jews and Judaisms back to life under one national roof and is dealing with the consequences. Can medieval and modern Judaisms coexist? Who gets to decide, "Who is a Jew?" Are the formerly dead eligible for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return?

Ultimately, the novel is about Salomon's attempt to reconcile his sexual identity as a gay man with his religious and national identity as a Jew. Unfortunately, this is also where the novel fails, as Salomon circles around and around the same struggles to come out of the closet, never finding a resolution, but never advancing the novel either. Losing control of the satirical elements, the novel turns shrill and repetitive. The rabbis from the ancient Sanhedrin return to life and organize mass killings of gays, there is civil war in Israel, and Salomon is cruising in Tel Aviv bars and complaining about his family. It could be argued that Sheinfeld's novel does not really belong in the category of science fiction or fantasy. Not because there is little that is fantastical in the first two-thirds of the novel, and not because the supernatural elements in the novel are drawn directly from Jewish tradition (if given a gay, modern Israeli spin) and do not stand on their own imaginatively, but rather because the messianic fantasy here is mainly an allegory of the author's own search for identity, a family record, and a personal confession, rather than the construction of a counterreality that carries its own aesthetic weight.

Finally, we come to Shimon Adaf's *Arim shel mata* (De Urbibus Inferis). Poet, critic, editor, rock musician, novelist, Shimon Adaf has already gained considerable recognition for his brilliant writing, winning Israel's prestigious Sapir Prize for his last novel and various prizes for his collections of poetry. His current novel is part detective novel, part science fiction, part Bildungsroman, part philosophical reflection on language, and certainly the most challenging and unsummarizable of the books here at hand.

The novel deals with the siblings Tiveria and Akko Asido, who, like the Sderot-born Adaf, are of Moroccan background, and who spend their childhood in the shadow of their father, a recluse who hides in a shack researching Jewish mysticism. Tiveria (she and her brother are named after the Israeli cities of



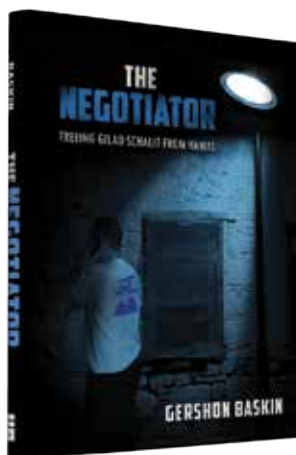
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Tiberias and Acre) eventually moves to Tel Aviv, studies classics, and becomes a poet, while Akko, a mathematical genius, heads to MIT and works on artificial intelligence. The third main character in the novel is the narrator, who encounters a mysterious symbol carved into the frame of a mirror in a Berlin club, which leads him to uncover a secret organization, hinted at in various rare editions of Jewish mystical texts. Like Dagan does in *Shedim ba-rachov Agripas*, Adaf also traces his underground organization to the esoteric teachings of a 2nd-century Jewish sage. In this case, it is Shimon ben Zoma, of whom the Talmud records that he went insane when he entered the divine garden which caused Rabbi Elisha ben Abuya to renounce Judaism and from which only Rabbi Akiva returned spiritually and physically unharmed.

Rich material—with arson and amnesia and angels, as well—yet this novel, while engrossing and beautifully written, isn't driven by a plot in any conventional sense. The narrator's investigations bring him into contact with the Asido siblings, but the characters remain mostly separate from one another, and the knowledge they acquire in the course of the novel does not ultimately change much in their lives. What unites and propels disparate strands of the novel is instead a concern with language itself. Adaf, through the different incarnations of language dealt with in the book—poetry, mathematics, scripture, computer code, gravestones, Moroccan dialect, tattoos, Christian iconography, instant messaging, music—gestures yearningly at the horizon of language, seeking, as does Jewish mysticism, to find words for what is beyond words. This might sound like a recipe for post-modern navel-gazing, but Adaf is so lyrically gifted and so humanly focused on the characters that the novel never threatens to become an academic exercise.

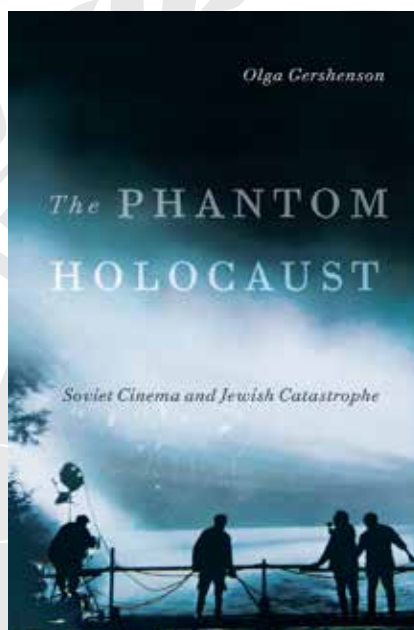
What for Adaf lies most achingly beyond his own ample poetic abilities is his bottomless grief over the death of his sister Aviva, which he has grappled with in earlier books. *Arim shel mata* is ultimately a work of mourning, in a sense akin to what Walter Benjamin, one of Adaf's tutelary spirits, meant by the German term for tragedy, *Trauerspiel*. "I will not finish, I think, the work of mourning," we read at the novel's end. "But perhaps with the conclusion of this book I will be able to stop writing it."

That Adaf has found science fiction and fantasy to be such responsive vehicles for his philosophical and personal searches (his previous novels are also major contributions to fantastical literature in Israel) is indication of the talent these genres are attracting in Israel and the attention Israeli contributions to these genres should and will merit, with the help of translators, in years to come.

Meanwhile, more and more classic and contemporary fantasy and science fiction is making its way into Hebrew. For instance, Adaf recently translated Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, an alternate history in which the Axis powers win the Second World War, while this year's Geffen award for best translation of a work of fantasy went to Tzafir Grossman's Hebrew rendering of *A Dance with Dragons*, the fifth novel in George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* series.

Michael Weingrad is the editor and translator of the forthcoming *Letters to America: Selected Poems of Reuven Ben-Yosef* (Syracuse University Press) and writes at investigationsandfantasies.com.

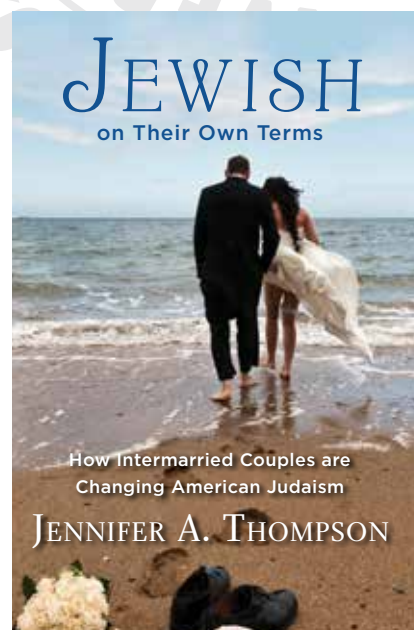
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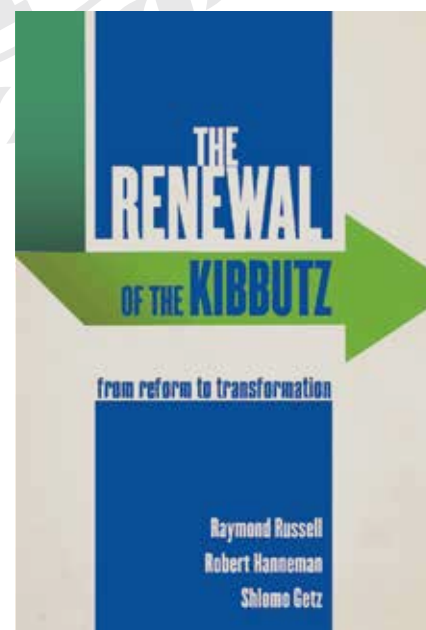
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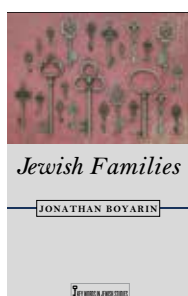


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Da Capo Press, 256 pp., \$25.99

Shortly before 9 a.m. on September 11, 2001, employees in the Network Operations Command Center of Cambridge-based Akamai Technologies noticed an unusual increase in Internet traffic. When they learned that it was due to reports of a small plane crashing into the World Trade Center, they were not unduly alarmed. Soon enough, however, it became clear that nothing about the incident was small. After the second plane hit, virtually everyone with an Internet connection was logging on to find out what was happening.

This put an enormous strain on the websites of many of Akamai's customers, including ABC.com, *The Washington Post*, and a slew of other news organs, as well as the websites of the Red Cross, the FBI, and American Airlines, which owned both the first plane to strike the towers, Flight 11, and Flight 77, which crashed into the Pentagon. As Molly Knight Raskin puts it in *No Better Time*, "the spike on 9/11 proved to be the Web equivalent of a 100-year flood." It was Akamai's job to help keep the companies that paid for its services afloat. Akamai's CEO and CFO were both in California and thus unreachable as the telephone networks failed, so Chief Operating Officer Paul Sagan took over. Remembering that day, he said, "There are these times in life, and 9/11 was one of them for me, when all the unimportant things disappear. I went into this zone, which some people may have interpreted as unfeeling, but for me, it was just about how do we get from A to B to C."

For Sagan, in addition to overseeing engineers working to give greater capacity to websites in the news, aid, and security sectors, getting from A to C included sending an email to the entire company telling them that Danny Lewin, the man whose MIT thesis work had given birth to Akamai and who had been the "heart and soul" of the company since its inception, had died aboard Flight 11. Raskin underscores the tragic irony well:

[I]n 1998, Lewin had called attention to the unpredictable nature of news, foreseeing a time when technology rooted in his algorithms would have the power to keep the Internet alive under an extraordinary crush of traffic. On September 11, 2001, the day of Lewin's death, the Internet faced its greatest test ever as news of the attacks made its way around the world. Everyone at Akamai faced a stark choice: pause and grieve or

press onward. The answer, Sagan said, was clear: "We had to do what Danny would do."

Akamai's former customer CNN was struggling to keep its website up that day, after dropping Akamai earlier in the year. No matter what it did, it couldn't maintain a site under the crush of traffic that was doubling every seven seconds. Around noon, CNN's teams realized they needed Akamai, and by 1:30 p.m. Akamai's network was serving the images on CNN.com, on top of delivering content for other major news sites.

Akamai had, indeed, managed to do what Danny Lewin would have done—but who was he? Drawing on interviews with his family, friends, and colleagues, Raskin answers this question with an engaging tale of a continent-straddling and

crazy energy of technology's boom years and for our lost innocence.

Born in a middle-class Denver suburb in 1970, Danny Lewin had it quite good. His professional and intensely intellectual parents raised him and his two younger brothers in a spacious home in a quiet neighborhood. Charles Lewin was the kind of father who pasted math puzzles on the backs of his sons' cereal boxes, and they were the kinds of boys who enjoyed solving them. In 1979, Charles brought home an Apple II, and Danny, who was just nine years old, taught himself to program it. But he wasn't a nerd. By eighth grade, he was a popular kid who "skied, flirted with girls, and excelled in both academics and athletics."

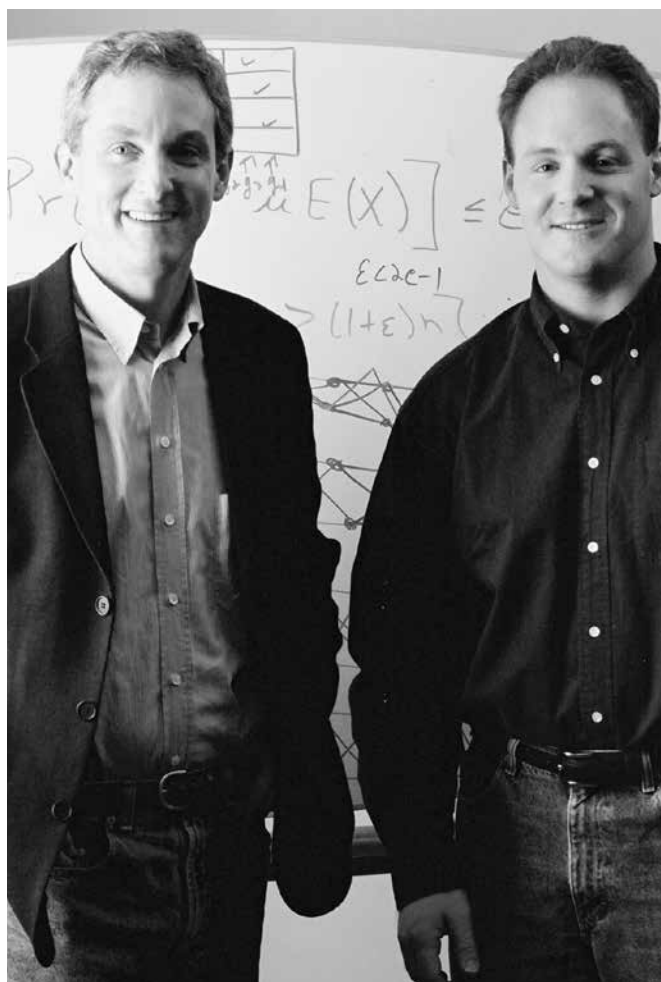
While Danny was having a good time, his father wasn't. Life in Colorado was just too comfortable, and he increasingly felt the tug of Zion—to which

he removed the whole family in 1984, with the children kicking and screaming. Charles, for his part, soon felt "a sense of purposefulness and fulfillment for our lives as Jews." But Danny, struggling with limited success to master Hebrew and adopt Israeli mannerisms, found himself at a loss. Cutting classes (but more than keeping up with his school assignments), he started training at Samson's Gym in Jerusalem, where he "worked out until he was blue in the face and his muscles failed, all while sweating and sputtering commands to push himself." By the time he was 16, he could bench-press more than 300 pounds.

Inspired by the tales he heard from commandos at Samson's, Lewin entered the Israeli army after high school determined to serve in a "good fighting unit," and, unusually for a recent immigrant, he made it into the legendary, ultra-elite Sayeret Matkal commando unit. After almost four years of grueling but rewarding service, the newly married Lewin requested leave to attend the Technion in Haifa. It was there that he came across a book on parallel algorithms, written by MIT professor Tom Leighton. Fascinated and inspired, Lewin was eager to meet Leighton. He applied to graduate school at MIT and was accepted.

In 1994, Lewin was back among the elite, one of a handful of students working in Leighton's theory group, the crème de la crème of MIT's prestigious Laboratory for Computer Science (LCS). The rest of the students were straight out of college and much younger, not married, as he was, with children. And none of them were able to explain, as he was, the kind of thing "that left everyone wide-eyed, like how much C4 you need to blow up a van (start with a lot, then scale back)." But he was used to being the odd man out.

Tim Berners-Lee, the British computer scientist



Tom Leighton and Lewin in front of one of the whiteboards they used to draft algorithms at MIT's Lab for Computer Science. (Courtesy of Chia Messina.)

action-packed but all-too-short life. Raskin's story of one man's stunning success also elicits a nostalgia for the excitement of those years—when the Internet was new, when one felt real satisfaction when the squawks and beeps of a dial-up modem finally yielded a connection, even if multitasking included clicking back to the browser between other jobs to see if the page one wanted had ever loaded—for the

who invented the World Wide Web and was now running the international group that created governing standards for the Internet, had his offices on the same floor as Leighton's theory group. Berners-Lee threw them a problem: "come up with a way, mathematically, to scale the Internet," that is, to solve the growing pains that were turning the World Wide Web into the World Wide Wait.

Lewin, who had hiked 75 miles in 25 hours to earn his Sayeret Matkal beret, was not one to back down from a challenge.

At first Lewin's team struggled to find a way to clear Internet bottlenecks, known as "hot spots," by improving caching technology. Ultimately, Lewin came up with a totally new caching technique: "consistent hashing." He "set out to develop a new set of algorithms that would claim something no other caching strategy could: fault-tolerance." Lewin quickly ran into roadblocks, however. His faculty advisor called the idea "insignificant," and he had doubts himself, once telling a research partner, "Consistent hashing is a pathetic idea, but it's my idea." He also said, "he'd will it into greatness if he had to." And that's exactly what he did.

First, he got a shot in the arm from Leighton, who thought the idea was a "gem."

Lewin had taken a succinct problem—one that was easy to state but seemingly impossible to solve—and created a solution so simple and elegant it was almost . . . obvious. "Mathematics has a lot of examples like this, where you could take a thousand people and they wouldn't be able to solve the problem, but they could all quickly agree when you show them the solution that it's easy," Leighton clarified.

Having Leighton on his side helped clear some hurdles, but not all. Lewin's application to present a paper on consistent hashing at an academic conference was rejected, with committee members saying, "they didn't think consistent hashing had any hope of being useful." And despite lining up a stellar team to enter the MIT \$50K Entrepreneurship Competition, Lewin and crew (which included Leighton) placed fifth, behind a non-profit Web service that matched would-be volunteers with service organizations and an online wedding gift registry.

But good news followed. Although they hadn't won the competition, they had learned what investors were looking for, and a pared-down team spent the summer of 1998 turning Danny's algorithms into a going concern. By Labor Day, they had a working prototype, a better business plan, and support of the business partners they'd need to put that plan into action. Lewin had a tough decision to make. Unlike Leighton and others on the team, he had no fallback plan, no other way of supporting his family if he gave up his stipend from MIT. But Lewin, who had hiked 75 miles in 25 hours to earn his Sayeret Matkal beret, was not one to back down from a challenge. Akamai Technologies (the name comes from a Hawaiian word that means smart or clever) was cofounded in September 1998 by Lewin; Leighton, on sabbatical from MIT; Jonathan Seelig, a student at MIT's Sloan School of Busi-

ness; and Randall Kaplan, a business wiz who at age 27 had reported directly to Eli Broad, then-CEO of SunAmerica.

While Akamai's first investors were family and friends, the team brought in angel investors who could offer not just cash, but valuable contacts. One of them was A&M Records' Gilbert Friesen,

a family friend of Marco Greenberg, Lewin's closest friend from Israel. Friesen had been with A&M Records from the beginning, making it a haven for top musicians. He didn't know much about math or computers, but he had an eye for talent. And Lewin, marker in hand at a whiteboard, explaining what Akamai could do, was a talent:

The more he talked and scrawled, the more animated he became, hopping around and grinning from ear to ear as his ideas came to life on its smooth, white surface. As if on cue,



CNN.com screen on September 11, 2001.

he would intermittently turn and look out on his audience, gauging their interest and level of understanding. Friends liken Lewin's theatrics at the whiteboard to a freight train gathering steam until that stopping point when nearly everyone in the room sat silently wondering what, exactly, had just hit them.

Friesen, who admits he had no idea what Akamai did, says he felt the "familiar sensation" he used to get from watching his biggest stars when they were still unknowns. He walked away having invested half a million dollars.

Akamai's team worked hard, linking up beta testers that included CNN, Disney, Yahoo, and Warner Brothers. Beta testers turned into paying customers, even as the sales team signed up more big names like the Discovery Channel and Infoseek, which became a paying customer 15 minutes after calling the firm when it needed help keeping its customers

ESPN.com and SportsLine USA online during the NCAA "March Madness" basketball tournament.

Despite its many wins, Akamai suffered setbacks, as when venture capital firm Venrock walked away from delivering \$4 million in first-round financing the night before the funds were supposed to be wired. The four hundred servers Akamai needed to start rolling out the network were put together with improperly placed screws that came loose in the real-world conditions of a data center. But Lewin imbued his team with an absolute refusal to give up, even if that meant installing a rack of servers using a spare tire repair kit or working punishing hours to deliver services that were sold before they were built.

In the age of irrational exuberance, enthusiasm for Akamai was rational. Tom Leighton had descended from his ivory tower, and Lewin had morphed into a businessman who could dazzle customers who had slammed the door on Akamai's sales force. Unlike many dot-coms, Akamai had a real product to sell, with real customers writing real checks, no Flooz.com this. And while it had the trappings of dot-com culture—free ice cream, frozen pizza, and soda in the kitchen; programmers taking naps in a hammock; games of miniature golf on a makeshift course between desks—Akamai was

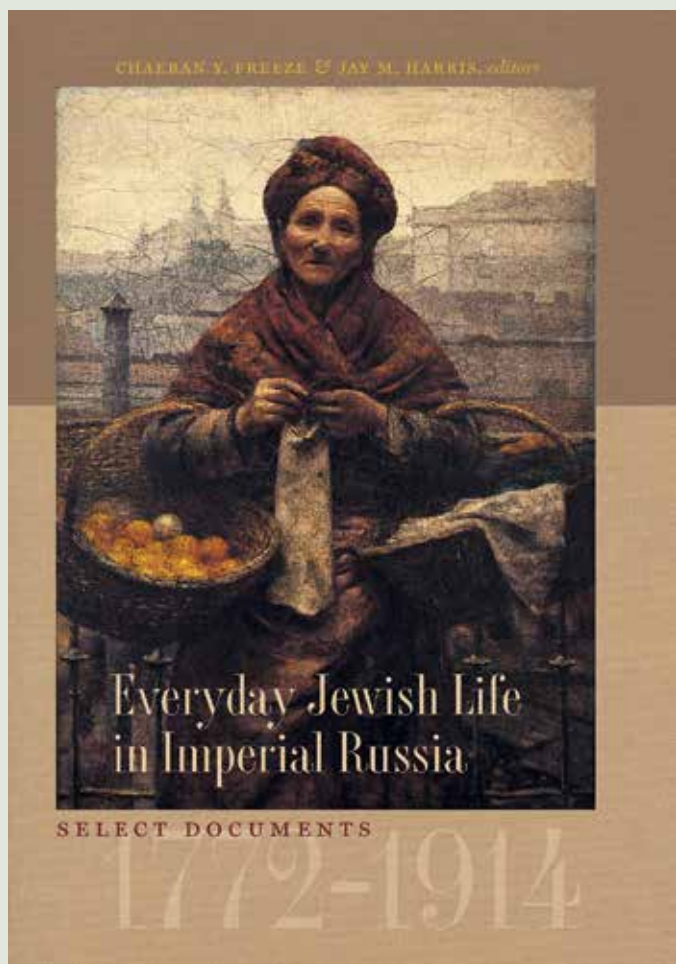
different in fundamental ways. Its newly minted millionaires (co-founder Randall Kaplan, who parted ways with the company at the end of 1999, sold his shares for \$633 million) for the most part eschewed extravagant purchases, and the company encouraged the students it hired to stay in school, with starting salaries of \$70,000 for programmers making student loans extraneous. The company's leaders shocked the bankers who managed its wildly successful IPO by declining to ring the opening bell at the NASDAQ on the day its stock listed, choosing instead to spend the day working in its Cambridge offices.

But even a company with a sales team that once signed up a hundred new customers in one hundred days didn't exist in a vacuum. In early 2000, along with the rest of the

NASDAQ, Akamai stock took a long plunge—from \$307 a share to \$7.60—as investors moved back to blue chip stocks. Did it really make sense, they wondered, that AOL, which told people they had mail, had a market capitalization of \$222 billion, \$100 billion more than the market caps of Ford Motor Company and McDonald's . . . combined? No matter how smart Akamai's leaders were or how hard they worked, there was simply no way to insulate the company from either the virtual freefall Internet stock prices were in or the steady loss of revenue as their dot-com customers went under.

On September 10, 2001, Lewin laid out a new vision for Akamai, presenting it to about a dozen employees in an eight-hour meeting. Then he sat down with Leighton for the "grim task of eliminating approximately 500 of the company's 1,500 employees" in what they both knew would be only the first round of cuts that would be needed

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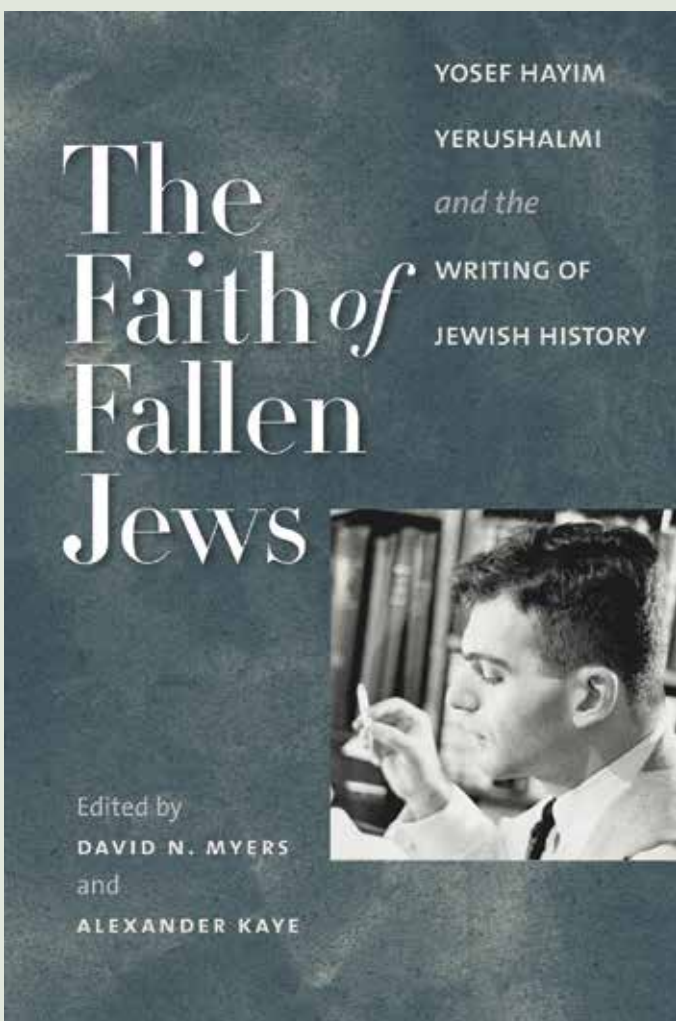
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to save the company from going under. The next morning he boarded American Airlines Flight 11 from Boston to Los Angeles.

Exactly what Danny Lewin did and what happened to him during the 47 minutes that elapsed between take-off and the collision of the Boeing 767 with the North Tower of the World Trade Center will never be known. But from the reports conveyed by the flight attendants we do know that the passenger in seat 9B—the seat assigned to Danny—was

The company Lewin built has held on, returning to profitability in 2004 and growing to 3,500 employees and a market cap, as of this writing, of \$9.3 billion.

stabbed to death by one of the terrorists. On the basis of this testimony, the 9/11 Commission determined that Satam al-Suqami “most likely killed Lewin by slashing him in the throat from behind as he attempted to stop the hijacking.” Like everyone else who knew him, Marco Greenberg is sure that Danny fought back. “Knowing his character and his training, we know that he got up and tried to do something, and I think he might have taken one of those thugs down with him.” Lewin was, as Greenberg aptly put it, “the first victim of the first war of the twenty-first century.”

In 2002, Akamai was delisted after its stock fell below the \$1 threshold and seemed on the verge of becoming yet another dot-com casualty. But Lewin’s elegantly simple algorithms are content-neutral, able to serve up whatever the Internet user requests—even as businesses went back to basics and CNN’s home page filled with celebrity and lifestyle “news.” The company Lewin built has held on, returning to profitability in 2004 and growing to 3,500 employees and a market cap, as of this writing, of \$9.3 billion. Today it is a leader not only in content delivery but also in cyber-security.

After Danny Lewin’s remains were identified in the wreckage of the World Trade Center, he was buried in Sharon Memorial Park outside of Boston, but his friends and relatives have honored his memory both in this country and in Israel. Marco Greenberg has, among other things, established “an annual writing award—on the topic of technology and cyber-terrorism—in Danny’s name at the U.S. Army War College.” Tom Leighton visited Israel in 2012, around the time that Akamai purchased the large Israeli company Cotendo, finally realizing “Lewin’s dream of a presence in Israel.” After Leighton delivered a lecture in Danny’s memory at the Computer Engineering Center of the Technion, Danny’s alma mater, one of the students asked how Akamai had managed to succeed in such tumultuous times. “Leighton barely hesitated: ‘One word, really,’ he said. ‘Danny.’”

Amy Newman Smith is the associate editor of the Jewish Review of Books.

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Kafka at Bedtime

BY REBECCA SCHUMAN

Philosophy and Kafka

edited by Brendan Moran and Carlo Salzani
Lexington Books, 300 pp., \$75

My First Kafka: Runaways, Rodents & Giant Bugs

retold by Matthue Roth, illustrated by Rohan Daniel Eason
One Peace Books, 32 pp., \$18.95

Franz Kafka's greatest paradox—and that is saying a lot—may be that such a singular writer, who spent so much of his time trapped inside of himself, has ended up so profoundly affecting so many generations of readers. This popularity has resulted in both a century-long torrent of critical literature and a fair number of adaptations and retellings.

Two recent offerings in these genres demonstrate how Kafka continues to captivate readers both in and out of academia—in the case of the second offering, way, way out. *Philosophy and Kafka* is a collection of essays, edited by Brendan Moran and Carlo Salzani, that view Kafka from a diverse array of philosophical viewpoints, from Socrates to French Theory, and (almost, but not quite) everything in between. *My First Kafka* is the quirky Hasidic writer and game designer Matthue Roth's attempt to bring Kafka to children without giving its young readers “unsettling dreams,” for which he enlists the ornate black-and-white illustrations of Rohan Daniel Eason. One of these volumes may change the course of Kafka studies forever, and the other will lull your children to sleep. But which is which?

Roth's child-friendly adaptation of Kafka's best-known story, *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*), has a daunting task: to make a 90-page anti-novella appropriate for story time in both length and content. Gregor's first agonizing attempt to get up, which in the original requires several pages of Kafka's endless sentences, is abridged thusly:

Gregor tried to leave his bed.
It was harder than he thought
to move all his small legs
at once.

If he moved one,
all the others
wanted to move as well.

Those familiar with the style and tone of Kafka's less-verbose sentences (e.g., “For we are like tree trunks in the snow,” or “*Denn wir sind wie Baumstämme im Schnee*”) will recognize that Roth has worked hard to make Kafka's famous longer sentences read like his shorter ones. To the tone, Roth has granted *The Metamorphosis* only the tiniest bit of extra gentleness—tiny, because something Kafka

readers often overlook is the rather unnerving gentle touch—or at any rate lack of *pathos*—of Kafka's German, in stark contrast to the gruesomeness of the story's content. In the original (my translation), even in the story's most violent scene, as Herr Samsa pelts his grown son with apples, Kafka writes with a surprisingly measured tone:

A weakly thrown apple grazed Gregor's back but skidded off harmlessly. But another one, thrown immediately thereafter, drove hard into Gregor's back. Gregor wanted to drag himself away, as if he could make this surprising and unbelievable pain disappear with a change of location; alas, he felt instead as if he were nailed to the floor, and lay stretched out in complete confusion of all his senses.

Roth's version removes all difficult clauses and longer words, but retains both the melancholy and the gently-narrated violence, made just slightly more gentle:

One hit his back
and fell off.

Another dove into
Gregor's back very hard.
The apple felt like it
had been nailed there.

Granted, this is still on the darker side of children's literature, and the stories that can be made even this child-appropriate are limited—rebranding Kafka's famous story about a torture machine as *In the “Tickle Colony,”* for instance, would be a stretch—but what Roth has done, with *The Metamorphosis* in particular, actually accomplishes quite a literary feat: It grants a startling primacy to Gregor's infantilization and helplessness, which are brought to life in Eason's whimsical, intricate illustrations. Yes, Kafka famously forbade the depiction of Gregor to his publisher Kurt Wolff. But if Wolff had offered Gregor as a series of interconnected, art deco zigzags and curlicues, with an antenna mustache and his insect legs poking into whimsically askew Oxford dress shoes, laces undone, Kafka might have changed his mind.

Further, Eason's forbidden illustrations completely dismiss the impulse to read *The Metamorphosis* as modern (or postmodern) metaphor, forcing children—and us—to view Gregor as literal and accept the consequences. (No one reads their children bedtime stories about “late capitalism” or the self-loathing inherent in the “becoming-animal”—or at any rate no one should.) Distilling Kafka down to his child-version—to his barest and gentlest essence—reminds us of the literary qualities that make him great, especially his macabre whimsy and his flair for the impossibly literal. These are also the qualities that make him the enduring subject of grown-up literary criticism.



Gregor Samsa. (Illustration by Rohan Daniel Eason, courtesy of One Peace Books.)

Indeed, grown-up academics Brendan Moran and Carlo Salzani write that the purpose of *Philosophy and Kafka* is to “indicate some ways in which Kafka's writings are a rich nexus for considering various conceptions of the relationship of literature and philosophy.” The result is more than a dozen chapters that cover a great deal of territory, from Socrates to the 20th-century political philosophers Hannah Arendt and Hans Kelsen, to a healthy representation of the French Theory that I keep hearing (and hoping) no longer dominates literary study.

Several of the readings are illuminating. Andrew Russ, for instance, argues that Kafka's work has a haunting ability to dramatize the absurdity of a philosophical outlook by taking it literally. The post-Kantian intellectual world, in which Kafka and all other 20th-century German-speaking intellectuals were participants, was plagued with dualism, the miserable effect of barricading those things we can know through empirical experience from the noumena we cannot: “God, world, soul, unity, freedom, purpose, etc.”

Also welcome is Kevin Sweeney's “You're nobody 'til somebody loves

you': Communication and the Social Destruction of Subjectivity in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*," which addresses an issue that even non-academic Kafka readers find paramount: *Is Gregor Samsa still human under there?* Sweeney gives us three competing definitions of "human": Social constructionists

Any reader not currently completing a dissertation on Deleuze is likely to find much of this volume as intelligible as Kafka's Explorer finds the writings of the Old Commandant.

say our peers define our humanity; the "Lockean-Cartesian" view requires both self-awareness and successful communicative ability; the behaviorist view classifies our *acts*, and thus us, as "human" or "animal." The brilliance of *The Metamorphosis*,



Window display in a Kafka bookshop in Prague's Lesser Quarter, September 1995. (© Barry Lewis/CORBIS.)

Sweeney argues, is its willful ambiguity in all three of these characterizations.

Equally fascinating are the two strongest political essays in the volume: Isak Winkel Holm's "The Calamity of the Rightless: Hannah Arendt and Franz Kafka on Monsters and Members" and Paul Alberts' "Knowing Life Before the Law: Kafka, Kelsen, Derrida." Holm is gripped by Arendt's description of *The Castle's* K. as a "despised pariah Jew," and this inspires him to view Kafka's rather unorthodox portrayal of his role as sometime manager of the Prague Asbestos Factory through Arendt's famous description of rightlessness (a combination of contingency, inhumanity, inequality, and speechlessness). Although Kafka's canon is viewed in some scholarship as eerily prophetic of the totalitarian horrors to come, Holm instead concentrates on Kafka's unsettling description of dehumanizing the factory's all-female workforce.

Whereas Arendt is a household name, Alberts introduces us to the world of the legal philosopher Hans Kelsen. Kelsen's fascinating account of the

law, which Alberts describes as "a given normative system empowered with its own logic and backed by believable threats of sanctions against contraveners," is revelatory about Kafka. For Kelsen's system depends upon a "Basic Norm" (*Grundnorm*), "a single deep underlying norm that operates as the

implicit ground or foundation for all other normative legal statements." And, further, this Basic Norm "cannot be articulated—for any articulation of a 'deepest principle' would itself require another deeper norm stating that it should be obeyed or considered binding." Like the Law of *The Trial*, its defining characteristic is that one can never have access to it.

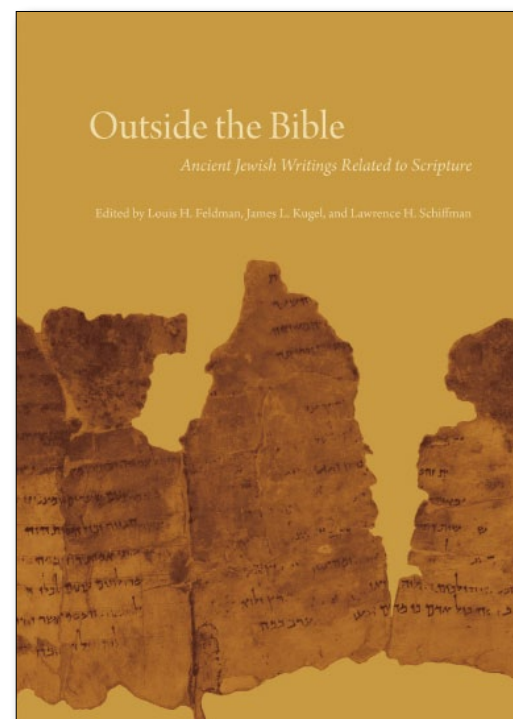
While *Philosophy and Kafka* contains many valuable insights, however, rather than offering the philosophical novelty Moran and Salzani promise, many of the contributions offer the same French Theory-influenced interpretation that has, if not dominated, at least populated literary studies since its ascent half a century ago. Any reader not currently completing a dissertation on Deleuze is likely to find much of this volume's contents about as intelligible as Kafka's Explorer finds the writings of the Penal Colony's Old Commandant: "a labyrinthine criss-cross of lines." Peter Schwenger, for example, relies on Emmanuel Levinas' treatise on darkness (which is "filled with the nothingness of everything") to elucidate, as it were, the relationship between Kafka's writing and his well-documented insomnia ("I spent half the night not sleeping and the other half awake," he once lamented). What results is about two pages of analysis of *The Castle* as an example of insomniac "circular thought," another half page working with an obscure Kafka fragment called "At Night," and eight pages volleying between Levinas, Maurice Blanchot, and other theorists whose parlance will alienate anyone outside the Theory club.

The illuminating moments of *Philosophy and Kafka* will reward curious fans of Kafka's work. However, its Frenchly frustrating passages remind me why so much academic literary discourse is destined to be not wholly unlike *The Trial's* Law, inaccessible to anyone not already in its official echelons. Given the choice between Moran and Salzani's anthology and Roth's children's introduction, even the most bookish non-specialists will probably choose the latter.

However, it is unfair to compare *Philosophy and Kafka* with *My First Kafka* in this way, as these are works in vastly different categories. One is a philosophically original exploration of often under-represented aspects of Kafka's oeuvre that may have a lasting impact on the genre—and the other is a book of critical essays.

Rebecca Schuman's work on Kafka and Wittgenstein has appeared in *Modern Austrian Literature* and *The German Quarterly*. She teaches literature at the Pierre Laclede Honors College of the University of Missouri-St. Louis and is a regular contributor to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Slate*.

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Forget Remembering

BY NADIA KALMAN

The Property

by Rutu Modan

Drawn & Quarterly, 232 pp., \$24.95

Carrot or knife? Anti-Semite or Jewish grandmother? Graveyard or lovers' lane? Rutu Modan's new graphic novel, *The Property*, is a tale of seemingly irreconcilable oppositions. As in her first graphic novel, *Exit Wounds*, Modan's theme is the uneasy coexistence of love and death.

At first, the story seems simple: A grandmother, Regina, and her adult granddaughter, Mica, travel from Israel to Poland to reclaim a family apartment. The book's structure seems to echo this apparent simplicity, with each of the seven chapters covering one day of the trip. However, Regina's motives in returning to Poland are far more complex than she has led Mica to believe.

One of the joys of this novel is the gradual and open-ended revelation of character. When we first meet Regina, she is insisting—to Mica's embarrassment—that she be allowed to take a giant water bottle past a security checkpoint at the airport. She continues far beyond the point by which most people would have given up—insisting on questionable “rights” (to drink her water, to block the line), questioning airport regulations (“Were they handed down to Moses at Mount Sinai?”), offering the security guard a sip, and playing the trump card of guilt: “I’m an old woman! Do you want me to get dehydrated?”

“A piece of work,” I wrote in the margins, and a breakfast scene in the third chapter seems to validate that impression. Regina insists she was unable to sleep the night before, because Mica stayed out all night. “You were fast asleep when I came in . . .” Mica points out, and Regina has a ready answer: “I hold everything in. From the outside you can’t tell how hard it is for me.”

Regina is probably exaggerating about the sleep. But, as one realizes over the course of the book, she is telling the truth about herself. She left Poland as a young woman in 1939, fleeing personal difficulties; her parents, sister, and brothers stayed. Regina “lost everything,” as Mica later realizes; and most of the time, she tries not to let these losses show.

More minor characters are equally nuanced. Avram, a cantor with designs on Regina's property, spends much of the novel lurking and lying. Yet, as we discover, he has his reasons, which stem from love as well as greed. In one of the final scenes, in an attempt to convince Mica of his latest lie, he begins singing the Jewish funeral prayer for victims of the Holocaust. It is a sublime moment, his song swelling and filling the page. (The moment is soon interrupted by the appearance of an outraged Regina, who begins hitting him, and then by a bystander, who accuses Regina of anti-Semitism.)

This is not to say that, as we get to know the characters, we discover that they are all good at heart. Our sympathies wax and wane; our judgments waver. Towards the book's end we see a sympathetic Polish character, who helped Regina's family during the war, make an offhandedly anti-Semitic remark. Modan's

Modan's characters are as self-contradictory as real people.

characters are as self-contradictory as real people.

The story is full of miscommunications, machinations, shifting allegiances, and dissonant truths. Characters want to control others' perceptions, but don't realize their own perceptions may be distorted. “You shouldn't have let a stranger see me like this,” Regina tells Mica, after Mica's new Polish boyfriend has nursed Regina through a difficult night; but is the man who fed her soup really a stranger?

Illustrations depict emotions that go unnoticed and actions at odds with characters' words. Regina, whaling away at Avram in the climactic scene, shouts pieties about mother-love. Sometimes, illustrations play with readers' expectations, as in a silent fight sequence during which an accountant, having learned that Mica is Israeli, threatens her with a lunchtime carrot. “Martial arts are my life,” he explains afterward, grateful for the impromptu Krav Maga demonstration.

Modan makes full use of the graphic medium. Backgrounds appear and disappear, depending upon how much the characters are noticing. During a moment of deep recognition, the faces of two lovers fill their frames: All they see is one another. Sometimes, by simply following a minor character past the ending of a scene (a switch in perspectives that is much easier to accomplish here than in traditional novels), the novel shows the disparity between public words and private thoughts. Textual elements become part of the story: A speech bubble spills over with words as an overwhelmed Mica spills over with tears; comic-book exclamations (“SLAM,” “BANG BANG”) underline a scene's emotional violence.

A graphic novel about the Holocaust almost inevitably invites comparisons to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and *Maus II*. The *Maus* books famously allegorize humans as animals; but, in all other ways, the images provide straightforward illustrations of a Holocaust testimonial. Image and text work together to convince readers of the truth of horrifying events, even as the substitution of animals for humans provides a slight distancing effect. In Modan's novel, text and illustrations disagree almost as often as the characters.

Perhaps that is because the focus of *The Property* is not on the Holocaust, but on how, even after such knowledge, we live now. The



Illustration by Rutu Modan. (Courtesy of Drawn & Quarterly.)



Illustration by Rutu Modan. (Courtesy of Drawn & Quarterly.)

novel depicts our modern, calloused world, in which a stranger on an airplane requests a seatmate's dinner roll and Holocaust testimony in almost the same breath, in which a tour of concentration camps is a common rite of passage for Jewish teenagers, in which re-enactments of round-ups are a part of Warsaw street culture. Alongside all this busy remembrance, there is a strain of Jewish thought, memorably depicted in Philip Roth's *The Counterlife*, that contrasts the "graveyards" of Europe with Israel's "theater of Jewish life." Gratitude for Israel and immersion in the Jewish present and future are meant to eclipse memories of the traumatic past: "FORGET REMEMBERING!" Characteristically, Roth portrayed the extreme version of this perspective via an attempted airplane hijacking by a New Jersey kid named Jimmy, who probably could have used a girlfriend.

In *The Property*, the character of Regina embodies the dueling impulses to remember and to forget. Some writing about post-war Israel described the conflicting perspectives of European refugees, who found it a matter of deepest urgency to remember the Shoah, and "sabaras," who believed themselves to be living in the bright Jewish future. One of this novel's major themes is the inadequacy of such simple oppositions: Regina, who arrived just before the war began, is refugee and sabra both, and neither.

It is deeply discomfiting to live with that kind of

place" for lovers to meet. No place, and perhaps no person, either, can be just one thing—or, for that matter, another.

On her last night in Warsaw, Regina says, "It still hurts as much. But now it's mixed up with other things." Mica listens from within a yellow pillar of hallway light, which partially illuminates the murky room. It is worth it, this novel suggests, to find out about those other things, and there is a measure of relief in accepting complex and contradictory truths.

The novel closes with Regina and Mica on a homebound flight. They complain about the airplane rolls, then eat them anyway. Regina suggests Sweden as a rendezvous point for Mica and her Polish beau. (A holiday fling, or something deeper?) She knows that country well, having traveled through it when escaping Poland. As a young woman, Regina feared Sweden's sunless winters. Now, she tells Mica what her husband told her in 1939: "They say Sweden in the summertime is the most beautiful place in the world." It gives away nothing to say that this is where this marvelous book ends: on a wordless, lush summer landscape of flowers and greenery, with vast, bare, icy mountains in the background.

Nadia Kalman is the author of The Cosmopolitans, a novel about Russian Jews in the Connecticut suburbs.

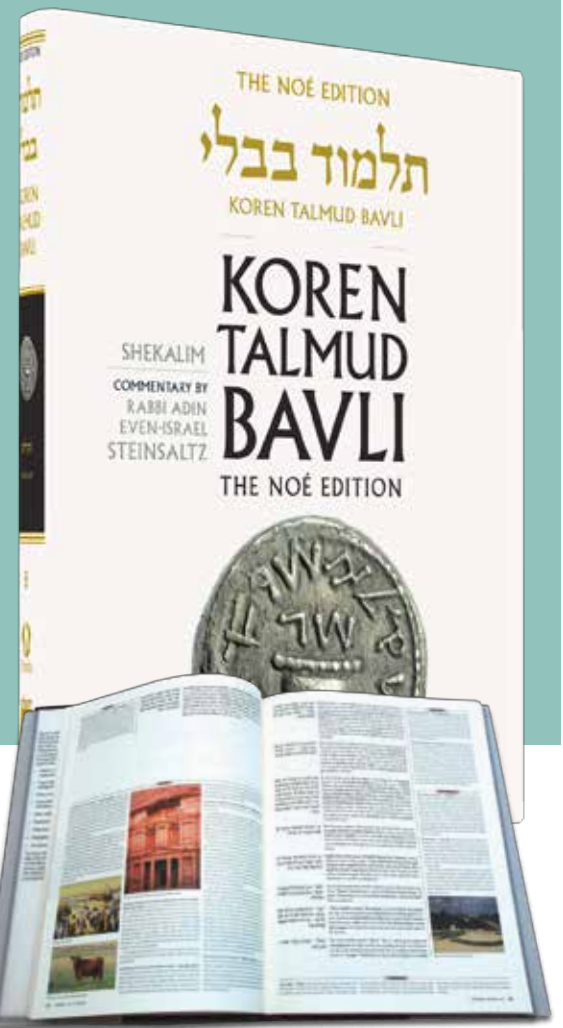
ambivalence, and Regina has spent most of her life trying to bury the past. In the first chapter, she scornfully rejects the idea of a "roots journey": "I couldn't care less about Warsaw. It's one big cemetery." And yet, there she is, on a plane to Poland, talking with obvious pride (and some exaggeration) about her distinguished European ancestors. She tries to live according to rigid rules about whom to trust (not Poles), but finds trustworthy and deceitful people everywhere. Modan explores Regina's journey towards some kind of reconciliation with admirable empathy, reserve, and humility.

This novel departs from easy oppositions, recognizing their coexistence, if not in logic, then in life. Israel is the place where Regina and Mica live, and the place where Mica's father, Regina's son, has recently died: a theater of life and a graveyard. Poland is the place where Regina's family was murdered and where she first fell in love. A graveyard can also be "a wonderful

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The Devil You Know

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

Die Sprache der Judenfeindschaft im 21. Jahrhundert (The Language of Hostility Toward Jews in the 21st Century)

by Monika Schwarz-Friesel and Jehuda Reinharz
De Gruyter, 444 pp., \$112

Resurgent Antisemitism: Global Perspectives

edited by Alvin H. Rosenfeld
Indiana University Press, 576 pp., \$35

The Devil That Never Dies: The Rise and Threat of Global Antisemitism

by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen
Little, Brown and Company, 496 pp., \$30

Anti-Semitism had to go underground in many of its previous haunts after 1945, but it never disappeared, and in recent years has been on the upswing. It's hard to tell how much of a menace it now constitutes because so much of it remains submerged and so much of it is disguised. From the vantage point of the United States, where anti-Semitism is but a weak force, the danger may not appear very great at all—especially now that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has vanished from the international scene and his successor is tweeting Rosh Hashanah greetings to the Jewish people. It would be a mistake, however, to make light of the very substantial evidence that anti-Semitism is on the rise. We need to know who our enemies are and to think about how to deal with them.

Anti-Semitism manifests itself in words and deeds. Some of the words come unsolicited from the mouths and pens of Jew-haters, and others appear on questionnaires designed to elicit and sort the expression of sentiments people may otherwise have kept to themselves or shared only with their like-minded friends. Actions range from violent attacks on individuals to political scheming against the Jewish people. Analysts of contemporary anti-Semitism monitor and examine some or all of these things and situate them against the backdrop of history in an effort to assess the dimensions of the problems we now face.

Monika Schwarz-Friesel and Jehuda Reinharz's new book on the language of "Judenfeindschaft" (hostility toward Jews) in the 21st century has a restricted focus, but it pursues a broad program. This unusual collaborative venture on the part of a German linguist and a modern Jewish historian (who was formerly the president of Brandeis University) is based mainly on the minute and meticulous study of around 14,000 emails, letters, and faxes sent to the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Israeli embassy in Germany between 2002 and 2012. Schwarz-Friesel and Reinharz painstakingly analyze some very discomfiting reading material in search of an up-to-date and "comprehensive understand-

ing of the culturally, socially, cognitively and emotionally charged phenomenon of hostility toward Jews" in the land where anti-Semitism not so long ago reached its apogee.

While some of the messages and missives under investigation were anonymously dispatched, most were not. The proportions varied, interestingly enough, in accordance with the political orienta-

tions of their authors. Signatures were missing from almost 43 percent of the correspondence emanating from right-wing extremists, a clear sign that their authors were aware that their views and opinions exceeded acceptable limits.

They do indeed go pretty far. I'll reproduce just one of them, to give you the bad flavor: "Are you human beings at all? You often enough display the social habits of animals, rats or microbes!" One doesn't need to be a distinguished social scientist or historian to catch the drift of this kind of talk. But it's more the exception than the rule. Only four percent of the messages came from what Schwarz-Friesel and Reinharz characterize as the extreme right and, for that matter, only three percent from the extreme left. The majority—65 percent—came from the political middle, and it is with the analysis and interpretation of these emails and letters that our authors are primarily concerned.

How much anti-Semitism is reflected in the words of today's ordinary Germans (to borrow an

old coinage of Daniel Goldhagen, to whose newest book I will soon turn), or at least those who have strong enough feelings about matters Jewish to write to their country's Jewish leaders or Israel's representatives? Leaving aside the relatively small number of communications that were philo-Semitic or supportive of Israel, the answer is quite a lot. Most of it revolves around Israel. Indeed, "there is hardly a

It would be a mistake to make light of the very substantial evidence that anti-Semitism is on the rise.

piece of writing in the whole corpus of texts that does not make mention of Israel"—usually in order to defame or delegitimize it. And in most of these texts, the anti-Israel arguments served to discredit all Jews. Not everything written against Israel ought to be stamped as anti-Semitism, Schwarz-Friesel and Reinharz hasten to acknowledge. They carefully draw the line between "criticism of Israel (as a legitimate expression of one's opinion) and anti-Israelism (as a current variant of hostility toward Jews)."

An email like this one, our authors tell us, composed by a married couple in Bad Driburg in 2007 and sent to the Israeli embassy, is well within bounds:

This morning my wife and I heard on WDR 5 about the use of four million cluster bombs in the course of the Lebanese War on the part of your country during the past year. It is clear that still more people are going to be injured by them and for an unlimited



French Muslims and Leftists demonstrate at the Place de la République, Paris, 2000. Cries of "Death to the Jews" were heard in a European capital for the first time since the Nazi period.

period of time. We are astounded and alienated by the fact that Israel did not place the drop coordinates at the disposal of the minesweepers that were in operation there. We earnestly beseech you, Mr. Ambassador, to use your influence to have your government make the data public.

This complaint is fact-oriented, couched in rational language, temperate, and, for all its criticism, devoid of any explicit or implicit anti-Jewish or anti-Israel bias. But compare it to this one from two years later:

Are Jews really human beings? In the light of the crimes in Gaza and Lebanon, one can answer this question with a clear no. Perhaps we should once in a while apply the Jewish books to you. For one knows indeed what is written there—racist garbage, which makes you the filthiest racists. Forward march to the gas chamber! Heil Zion!

Here, the anti-Semitism lies on the surface, and there is no room for debate. But is that also the case with this one, from the same year?

To unload bombs with this kind of explosive power on a thickly settled city has absolutely nothing to do with legitimate defense. This is a conscious effort to cause civilian casualties. This State of Israel is a SCANDAL to the entire CIVILIZED world and for all those who still have the tiniest spark of decency. AND I AM NOT AN ANTISEMITE!

What vitiates this person's emphatic disavowal of anti-Semitism, according to Schwarz-Friesel and Reinharz, is the way that he transforms Israel's supposedly intentional misdeeds into evidence of its criminal abnormality, thereby engaging in a "derealization" of the country. This derealization, or prejudiced and twisted misperception of reality, is one of the many telltale signs of "antisemitic anti-Israelism" (which include the identification of Israel with apartheid South Africa, the demonization of Israel, the use of pejorative and dehumanizing language, the comparison of Israel's government to the Nazi regime, and more). Often enough, the denial of anti-Semitism is itself an indication of its presence. "The utterance *I am not an antisemite* (in diverse variants) is by far the most commonly verbalized form of the strategy of avoidance in the texts sent to the Central Council of Jews and the Israeli embassy. More than 53% of the writers from the middle have recourse to it."

The postwar taboo against anti-Semitism is still strong enough in Germany to require such precautions, even on the part of people who pile anti-Semitic clichés and arguments one on top of another in their denunciations of Israel. They want to avoid political incorrectness, even at the price of self-deception. What is, in the end, most disconcerting about Schwarz-Friesel and Reinharz's analysis is their demonstration of the underlying kinship between the self-confessed anti-Semites on the extremes and the ostensible anti-anti-Semites of the middle. As they note in their book's final sentences, despite all of their ideological, political, and social differences, most of the authors of the texts they have investigated

speak the same anti-Semitic language and resort to largely similar rhetorical strategies.

Schwarz-Friesel and Reinharz embed their examination of recent expressions of anti-Semitism in Germany within a concise but wide-ranging survey of the history of European anti-Semitism and the anti-Jewish language it has generated over the centuries. They devote only a few pages, however, to a comparison of the German scene with other parts of the contemporary world. This is the concern of *Resurgent Antisemitism: Global Perspectives*, a collection of essays edited by Alvin H. Rosenfeld, a veteran student of the Holocaust and its literature. While this book's scope is far broader than Schwarz-Friesel and Reinharz's, its fundamental concerns are the same: the linkage between the old anti-Semitism and the new, the seepage of anti-Semitism into the European mainstream, and the intertwinement between anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism.

As Rosenfeld himself notes, every chapter in the book demonstrates that "we are once again witnessing a resurgence of hostility to Jews and, especially, to the Jewish state." While the volume documents increases in anti-Semitic violence in various countries, it focuses primarily on the way in which old canards are being revived in new circumstances and with new twists. This is happening, clearly, all across Europe, and most menacingly, in the Middle East. What is especially troubling in the book's accounts of the situation in individual European countries is

the way in which anti-Semitism, or at least the tolerance of anti-Semitism, constitutes more than a fringe phenomenon.

In Great Britain, there are "boycott campaigns against Israeli Jews in which respectable academics distribute material by neo-Nazis" and "there are cover stories in the Left-Liberal press that feature antisemitic images worthy of fascist propaganda in the 1930s." Spain's most influential and respected newspaper published a cartoon that "exemplifies how critique of Israel embraces, without any inhibition or intellectual contradiction, the stereotypes that once were the exclusive components of classic antisemitism: Jews are rich, manipulative, mean-spirited, vindictive, greedy, and, in the end, inhuman and diabolic." In Norway, "many attitudes that can properly be termed antisemitic have become publicly acceptable, as open antisemitic rhetoric has been smuggled back into mainstream political debates." Similar things are taking place in France, Hungary, and other countries. Further aggravating the situation, the anti-Semitism of Muslim immigrants "has become one of the major factors in a number of Western European countries in the twenty-first century. It has added weight to antisemitism from the far Right, the Left, and mainstream society."

It is in the Middle East itself, however, that anti-Semitism is most unbridled, and it is there that it protrudes most shockingly not only in the mainstream, but in leading governing circles. As James K. Choksy, a professor of Iranian studies at

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Indiana University, notes in his essay on “Antisemitism’s Permutations in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” in the aftermath of his departure from office “Ahmadinejad is unlikely to be a long-term foe to Jewish communities in Iran, Israel, and elsewhere”—but that hardly matters. The real threat emanates from “the *mollahs* or Shi’ite clergymen” who are “central in the Iranian sociopolitical fabric.”

Some Germans want to avoid political incorrectness, even at the price of self-deception.

Unlike elected politicians, the ayatollahs and their supreme leader—who wields overall ultimate say over Iran’s government—are not transient. Many of them, especially politically active ayatollahs, routinely manipulate religious beliefs, historical traditions, and societal mores to propagate hatred for Jews and Judaism. More than any other group in Iranian society, those *mollahs* remain the main source of antisemitism in Iranian society. As a result, the rise and persistence of antisemitism in modern Iran is a very real danger to Jews, to the State of Israel, and to humanity’s ideals and values.

Determining the real magnitude of the threat posed to the Jews by the worldwide developments documented in the volume he edited is not a task that Alvin Rosenfeld sets for himself. “How aggressive this new antisemitism is likely to get and, ultimately, how destructive it will be if it proceeds unchecked,” he writes, “are open questions.” Nor does Rosenfeld seek to provide a unified and comprehensive explanation for the latest phase of anti-Semitism, as Daniel Goldhagen attempts to do in *The Devil That Never Dies: The Rise and Threat of Global Antisemitism*.

Best known for his highly controversial 1996 volume *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, Goldhagen has two additional books dealing with anti-Semitism and the Holocaust to his credit—and if one were to judge solely by what is included in the rather sparse footnotes in his *The Devil That Never Dies*, they are among the very few volumes on these subjects ever to appear. The prolific Israeli historian Robert Wistrich, for instance, who has written a great deal on the connection between anti-Semitism in Europe and the contemporary Islamic world (including an illuminating chapter in *Resurgent Antisemitism*), appears in Goldhagen’s footnotes not as the author of a 1,200-page tome entitled *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad*, but only in connection with a companion volume to a television series on anti-Semitism. Yet the fact that Goldhagen pays little heed to Wistrich or any of his other academic predecessors in the study of contemporary anti-Semitism is not likely to concern anyone other than professors and shouldn’t prevent us from considering what he himself has to say on this subject.

Goldhagen believes that we have in recent years entered the third era of anti-Semitism. The earlier Christian and racist eras have been succeeded (but not completely superseded) by one of global anti-

Semitism. The “powerful subterranean prejudice” against the Jews that persisted in the West throughout the period of “the post-World War II illusion” is once more out in the open, where it has fed upon the anti-Semitism emanating from Muslim countries and spread virtually everywhere to constitute an unprecedentedly worldwide and insidiously pervasive threat.

Global anti-Semitism “is grounded in the same foundational antisemitic paradigm as medieval and modern antisemitism.” This paradigm, according to Goldhagen, “constructs Jews in their *essence* as being: different from non-Jews, noxious, malevolent, powerful (or potentially powerful), and dangerous.” The new anti-Semites see this essence as consisting of what Goldhagen himself deems “Jewness,” some-

anti-Semites around the world continually refer to the demonology of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in order to explain Israel’s successes. Having grasped the vast danger posed by Israel and the Jews, global anti-Semitism has arrived at the logical conclusion: “it is right, and it is necessary, to *destroy* Israel and, in some of this discourse’s central variants or streams, to *destroy* its Jews.”

Anti-Israel at its “core,” global anti-Semitism, according to Goldhagen, is not so much an outgrowth of hostility toward the Jewish state as it is a force that has seized upon its existence as an excuse for the venting of long-standing prejudices. It is not that Israel produces anti-Semitism, but “it is antisemitism that produces anti-Israelism.” But these two forces are, in Goldhagen’s eyes, virtually the same thing. Unlike Schwarz-Friesel and Reinharz, he offers no example of an anti-Israel position that could be considered to be free of anti-Semitism. In noting, however, that “hostility toward Israel, and the criticism of Israel, is not a result, certainly not merely or over-



A caretaker inspects the damage in a Jewish cemetery in London, June 2005. (Photo by Graeme Robertson/Getty Images.)

thing that is not necessarily or even usually connected, as it was in the past, with the Jews’ “religious or other ideas” or their biology but is tied up with their ethnicity and their politics.

Thus the source of the Jews’ perniciousness today, whatever various other things different antisemites also consider it to be, is the Jews’ political identity, which means their allegiance to Jewness’ political goals, which is overwhelmingly defined by the repository of Jews’ politics and greatest political capacity as much as it is the repository of much of Jewish life: Israel.

Goldhagen surveys the enormous “litany of accusations against Israel [and] its Jews,” focusing primarily on the ways in which global anti-Semitism portrays Israelis “as the predators who crush the Palestinians” and who “may have even more territorial aspirations of domination and destruction.” He reviews, among other things, the ways in which

whelmily a result, of Israel’s policies or actions or even of principled concern for the Palestinians,” he seems to recognize at least the slim possibility that such a thing might exist.

On one occasion, he goes a bit further. “Until roughly 1967,” he writes, “in the Islamic and Arab public discourses a distinction existed between Israel the country and its policies, and Jews as people or adherents of the Jewish religion.” It is only in more recent decades that political and religious leaders have obliterated this distinction and turned the Middle Eastern conflict into one between Muslims and Jews. This is not quite in tune, however, with Goldhagen’s overall argument, that “[e]ver since Israel’s founding in 1948 many Arab and Islamic countries were openly antisemitic and dedicated to Israel’s destruction.”

In any case, Goldhagen is certainly correct to claim that, “Arab and Islamic governments originated the new international antisemitic alliance and have been its driving spirit.” Still, for all the

importance that he attributes to the machinations of these governments, he places greater emphasis on what has happened elsewhere:

Antisemitism's resurgence in Europe has been crucial for global antisemitism's character, spread, and efficacy. If the Europeans had continued to toe the post-Holocaust line that this prejudice must not see the light of day, not return to the public sphere, if the European taboo on its expression had not been eroded and eventually all but overthrown, then the Arab and Islamic discursive and institutional onslaught against Jews and Israel would have remained a parochial matter, important and threatening but parochial, maintaining itself as another developing world gripe against the developed world.

Goldhagen demonstrates in considerable detail that anti-Semitism is rampant not only in Europe, where relatively small numbers of Jews now reside, but in other parts of the world, where there are practically no Jews. "The percentage of antisemitic people in South Korea, as indicated by their stated *unfavorable view* of Jews, is forty-one. In Japan it is forty-four. In China it is an astonishing 55 percent—almost 750 million people!" Goldhagen acknowledges that this is a very low-intensity anti-Semitism, but finds it worrisome nonetheless. Even if their anti-Semitism remains mild, it will influence their "current and future encounters with Jews, whether in the flesh, in reaction to news about Jews or Israel, or in supporting or opposing policies that could affect Jews in or outside of Israel."

If there is a bright spot on Goldhagen's horizon, it is the United States. Compared to Europe, it is in many respects "a virtual paradise" for Jews. The "foundational antisemitic paradigm" still has some kind of a grip on tens of millions of Americans, but anti-Semitism has been in decline in this country for four decades:

If we additionally evaluate the comparative antisemitic figures in the context of American society where, compared to European countries and Europe as a whole, the American Jewish community is larger, enormously more visible, enormously more publicly identified as Jews, and enormously more openly self-assertive, then the American numbers look very good.

This is due in part to America's heritage of tolerance for immigrants and minorities, in part to its legal separation between church and state, and in part to the way in which anti-Semitism "took a public and social nosedive" in the aftermath of World War II. The schools figure into the equation as well. "Education, which in the United States decidedly teaches people anti-prejudicial views and integrates them much more broadly into society's public discourse, profoundly lessens antisemitism." As a result, college graduates are only half as anti-Semitic as Americans with a high school education or less.

There is still cause for concern, however, in the United States, above all the rise and new respectability of "antisemitic expression in the guise of anti-Israel agitation." And like secular institutions of learning everywhere, which are a "significant in-

stitutional pillar of global antisemitism," American universities have become "enormously hostile to Israel and its Jews and, if only by seemingly natural extension, to Jews more generally." This disparagement of American universities, only a few pages before the end of his book, is admittedly hard to reconcile with Goldhagen's earlier emphasis on their

conclude that he is right—what are we supposed to do about it?

A hundred years ago, those who sounded the alarm about anti-Semitism usually proffered solutions—either ameliorative or, we might say, escapist. They sought to combat anti-Semitism through legal action and education, or by dodging it, by

A hundred years ago, those who sounded the alarm about anti-Semitism usually proffered solutions—either ameliorative or, we might say, escapist.

salutary influence. One might perhaps write it off as an overheated response to the regnant trends in Middle East studies and to the rather questionable survey of American Jewish students to which he alludes. Or one might consider it prescient, in the light of such worrying signs as the just-published issue of the American Association of University Professors' *Journal of Academic Freedom*, in which six out of seven invited contributors came out in favor of an academic boycott of Israel. In any event, the situation in the United States is, in the end, the least of Goldhagen's worries.

What really frightens Goldhagen is what is going on in the rest of the world. And, indeed, the situation is not pretty, as all of the books examined here make clear. But are things really as dire as he thinks they are? Is eliminationist (another of his older coinages) discourse directed against the Jews going to produce, as he evidently fears, eliminationist policy? I cannot pretend to know. But if we

migrating to Zion. In an age of anti-Semitic anti-Israelism, the latter solution is no longer available. Can we still employ the former? Goldhagen himself offers little reason to hope that it will prove efficacious in uprooting or weakening the "foundational antisemitic paradigm" that remains "deeply and broadly entrenched in European culture" and has become thoroughly pervasive in the Muslim world. He concludes his book with a short exhortation. "People of good conscience unite: Combat the devil that never dies, he who is named anti-Semitism." But he leaves us hoping, more than anything else, that the United States will continue to be the rock on which Israel, in the broadest sense of the term, can rely.

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

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Commentary

Bambi's Jewish Roots

BY PAUL REITTER

On January 20, 1909, the Bar Kochba Association in Prague launched an ambitious program of “festive evenings.” The organizers hoped for an immediate impact, so they invited Martin Buber, whose cultural Zionism had been generating a great deal of excitement among Central European Jewish intellectuals.

Buber's emphasis on education and inner self-development, together with his call for the recovery of subterranean Jewish forces and sensibilities, and his promise that this would equip Western Jews to have a key part in a larger, cosmopolitan project of rebirth, all resonated powerfully with Bar Kochba's leadership. Indeed, in addition to paying tribute to Buber again and again, they kept inviting him back. It was as their guest that Buber delivered the addresses in his celebrated volume *Three Speeches on Judaism*. And it was enthusiasm like theirs that eventually led Gershom Scholem, who went through his own adolescent infatuation with Buber, to remark on the excesses of “Buberty.”

Landing Buber was a coup, but Leo Hermann, the man in charge of setting up the festive evening, hadn't done as well with his other invitations. Or so it must have seemed. Hermann wanted to pair Buber with someone who would broaden the appeal of the event. His first choice, the novelist Arthur Schnitzler, had turned him down. His second choice, the poet Richard Beer-Hofmann, did too. So Hermann went with Plan C—Felix Salten, who was a friend of both writers. Like Schnitzler and Beer-Hofmann, Salten had been a member of the Young Vienna circle of writers in the 1890s. Unlike them, however, he hadn't produced any major works, let alone ones that engaged with Jewish themes, as, for example, Schnitzler's great novel *The Road into the Open* (*Der Weg ins Freie*) did. At the time, Salten was mostly known for his wide-ranging activities as a newspaper critic, as a cultivator of connections to the Habsburg family (the great satirist Karl Kraus once described him as a “court journalist”), and for being the author of the pornographic fictional memoir *Josefine Mutzenbacher*. Published anonymously but immediately attributed to Salten, the book relates, in vivid detail, the story of a prostitute who has “experienced everything a woman can experience in bed, on tables, chairs, and benches,” etc., and who claims to “regret none of it.”

Hermann, of course, turned to Salten for other reasons. At 39, Salten was as fit—he was a devoted hiker and cyclist—and as lively as ever, and he could be a charismatic, even beguiling presence. Rilke, who wasn't quick to praise, effused over the charm and energy of Salten's conversation. After attending one of Salten's lectures, Kafka noted that “the pleasure” of the female auditors had been palpable. Salten was, moreover, intriguing as a Zionist. Of the Young Vienna authors, he alone mobilized his pen in support of Theodor Herzl's Zionist newspaper *The World* (*Die Welt*): During its first year, Salten had a regular column. Inspired by Herzl's message of self-

acceptance (or really, of self-improvement through self-acceptance), Salten became an effective critic of the attempt to hide or disown one's Jewish heritage. He was also concerned about the menace of anti-

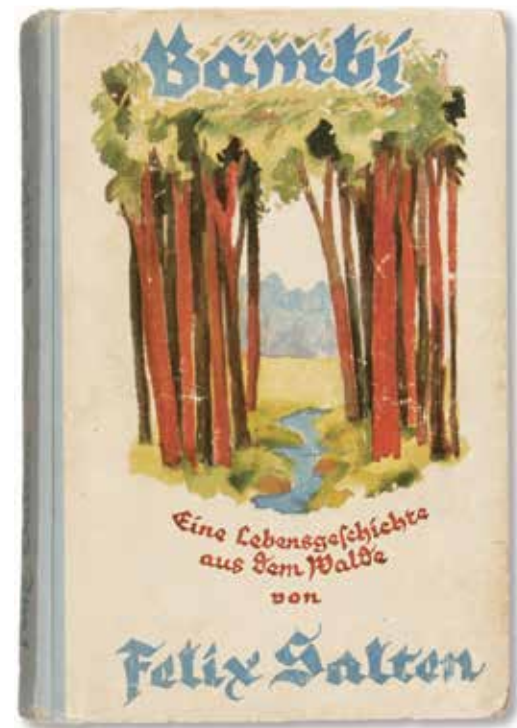
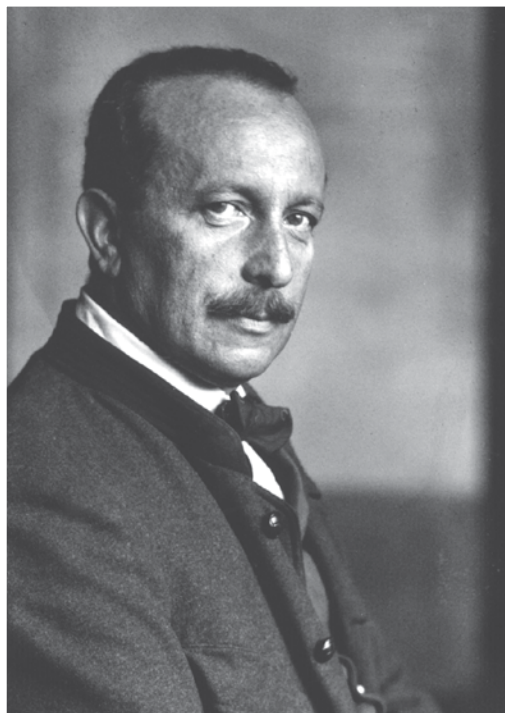
of the event suggest that Buber's lecture didn't, in fact, go over as well. As one participant wrote, “the evening was successful . . . mostly because Salten gave a brilliant performance.”

As the applause for Salten thundered on, Buber was left wondering how, under such circumstances, he would manage to connect with the public.

Semitism. Salten grew up poor and feeling unprotected, and in his column he addressed the vulnerability of Eastern European Jews living in destitution, as well as the anti-Jewish utterances of demagogues such as Karl Lueger and Georg von Schönerer.

But, above all, it was culture that interested Salten. His most substantial, most searching essay for *The World* underlines the importance of the theater for Jewry's self-awareness. His profile of Herzl, composed

The years before the First World War mark the highpoint of Salten's career as a Zionist speaker. He was invited back by Bar Kochba's leaders, and when, in 1911, he made another appearance in the festive evening series, he shone just as brightly as he had the first time. But even after Zionist lecturing was mostly behind him, Salten continued to write as a Zionist. In 1924, for example, he travelled to Palestine and published a largely admiring



Felix Salten in Vienna, ca. 1910. (Photo by Ferdinand Schmutzer.) First edition of Bambi: Eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde, published by Berlin Im Verlag Ullstein, 1923. (Courtesy of Eric Chaim Kline Bookseller.)

just after Herzl's death in 1904, treats the project of political Zionism as the culmination of Herzl's efforts as a playwright, rather than as a departure from them—as the “fifth act” that Herzl had plotted for the drama of his own life. Having consulted with Buber, Salten brought together his various interests and tendencies as a Zionist commentator in the speech he gave on January 20. The combination proved to be a winning one: Both the Zionists and the non-Zionists in attendance responded with clamorous approval. As the applause for Salten thundered on, Buber, who had worried that following him would be hard, was left wondering how, under such circumstances, he would manage to “connect with the public.” Reviews

book about what he saw there. This was soon after Salten had produced the work that would win him international fame: *Bambi*.

Bambi first appeared in serialized form in Vienna's stately paper of record, the *Neue Freie Presse*. The book version appeared in 1923, and by then the story had established itself as one that appealed to adults and children alike. The American edition was so hotly anticipated that the fledgling Book of the Month Club ordered 50,000 copies before it had even appeared. Translated into English by Whitaker Chambers, of all people, and published in the United States in 1928, the novel was both a critical and commercial success.

One American reviewer deemed it to be as “profoundly pertinent to the modern experience as *The Magic Mountain*,” and it impressed more than a few influential readers. Among these was the producer and director Sidney Franklin, who bought the film rights to *Bambi* in 1933—for \$1,000. His plan was to adapt the book to the screen as a live nature film, but he couldn’t figure out how to make it work. Eventually, he sold the rights to Walt Disney, who, with his visceral dislike of hunting, had been genuinely moved by Salten’s novel.

Of course, that didn’t stop Disney from transforming the story *Bambi* tells. Captiousness, melancholy, and a sentimental streak count among the prominent characteristics of Salten’s animals. The animals in the Disney film, which premiered in 1942, are altogether more frolicsome, brash, and affable.

The plucky rabbit Thumper, for example, is Disney’s creation, not Salten’s. In the film, more than in the book, the forest, while no Eden, has an initial tranquility that is shattered by the cruelty of man. Indeed, some viewers regarded the film as registering the trauma of the attack on Pearl Harbor and the loss of America’s innocence. Salten, nevertheless, liked the film, though he always described it as “Disney’s *Bambi*.” What distressed him were the terms of his contract. In 1941, Salten, whose works had long been banned in Germany, complained, “I have been delivered over to Disney with my hands and feet fettered and a gag in my mouth.” Salten’s heirs would fare no better. In 1996, a senior district judge in California wrote that, “*Bambi* learned very early in life that the meadow . . . was full of potential dangers everywhere he turned. Unfortunately, *Bambi*’s creator, Mr. Salten, could not know of the equally dangerous conditions lurking in the world of copyright protection.”

Despite the fact that Salten’s *Bambi* appeared just before his book about Palestine, critics have hardly ever discussed *Bambi* in the context of his Zionism. They have spent more energy tracking the affinities between *Bambi* and *Josefine Mutzenbacher* (beginning with the mockers who ridiculed the sensual moments in the former book as the work of a “deer sodomite”). Which isn’t to suggest that critics have spent that much energy on Salten. He is a little like Max Brod: principally known now for the people he knew. Because of his role in important literary networks, as well as his enormous output, his name comes up a lot, but even his own literary friends—Schnitzler and Hugo von Hofmannsthal—had their doubts about the seriousness of his efforts.

If the scholarly discussion of Salten’s works were larger, it is likely that we would have detailed interpretations of Salten’s animal stories as allegories of the Jewish experience. For they do lend themselves to such readings, even if Salten didn’t play as much or as artfully as Kafka did with the longstanding associations in German culture between Jews and

certain animals (mice, monkeys). Consider *The Hound of Florence*, another work by Salten that has had an afterlife in American popular culture: It was—and was formally credited as being—the inspiration for Disney’s *The Shaggy Dog* film fran-



Hebrew poster advertising the movie *Bambi*, ca. 1960s.

chise. This semi-autobiographical novel tells the story of an artist who must spend every other day in aristocratic society as a dog. A central theme of the novel (and needless to say entirely lost in the Disney films) is the outsider as abject insider.

Much more central in the animal stories, however, is the theme of persecution. It was Karl Kraus who first linked this to Salten’s Jewish background, though not in the way you might expect, especially given that Kraus was writing just after the Nazi Party had achieved mainstream success. Writing about a *Bambi* spin-off in 1930, Kraus claimed to detect the sound of Jewish dialect—or “*jüdeln*”—in the speech of Salten’s hares. Salten was a hunter (a humane one, he always insisted), and, as it happened, he had just published a piece about his love of hunting. Kraus joked that Salten’s hares had adopted a Yiddishy tone of voice in order to blend in with a special type of enemy—the Jewish hunter. The hares were “perhaps using mimicry as a defense against persecution.” When Salten died in 1945, an American critic found a more straightforward connection between the plight of some animal characters and that of the Jews. In his obituary for Salten, the critic, having noted Salten’s “Zionist sentiments,” maintained that the fox in *Bambi* not only comes across as the rapacious “Hitler of the forest,” but also has a mentality of hatred and rage that bears similarities with Goebbels’ anti-Semitism.

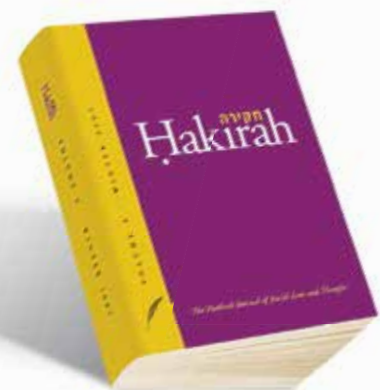
It was not until a decade ago, however, that an actual reading of the “Zionist overtones” in *Bambi* was proposed. In an essay published in 2003, Iris Bruce argues broadly that the novel evokes the “experience of exclusion and discrimination.” But she also pays close attention to its language. Salten’s suggestive phrase for butterflies is “wandering flowers,” and *Bambi* describes them elsewhere as “beautiful losers” who have to keep moving, “because the best spots have already been taken.” Bruce stresses, as well, that the culture of the deer develops around the fact of their victimization: They tell their children tales that “are always full of horror and misery.”

Likening *Bambi* to Kafka’s talking-ape story “A Report to an Academy,” Bruce claims that Salten’s work, too, is a critique of assimilation. One of the deer uses the loaded verb *verfolgen* to ask whether humans and deer might get along: “Will they ever stop persecuting us?” When another deer answers that “reconciliation” with humans will eventually come about, Old Netla, a third deer with vastly more experience of the world, will have none of it. Indeed, her response foreshadows a line from Salten’s Zionist book *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde* (loosely translated, new people on ancient ground), which expresses impatience with the enduring “dream of full integration.” Old Netla seethes that humans, “have given us no peace and have murdered us for as long as we’ve existed.”

Not many of the deer in *Bambi* persist in believing that living harmoniously among humans is possible. Of the deer that do, two, Bruce points out, wind up being killed by hunters. One of those deer, *Bambi*’s cousin Gobo, spends time in captivity, and when he returns to the forest boasting of how well he was treated, *Bambi* is taken aback by how “strange and blind” Gobo has become. Furthermore, where Gobo is proud of the band that humans have placed around his neck (which should have made him off-limits to hunters), the wise “Royal Leader” (*first*) of the deer regards it as a sign of degradation and Gobo as “an unfortunate child.” That Gobo’s faith in humankind leads to his death reinforces the Royal Leader’s assessment. The label “Royal Leader,” on the other hand, reinforces the old deer’s status as a Herzl figure, since at the time Herzl was often given regal titles by Zionist writers. As Bruce puts it, “The old Prince of the Forest, then, can be said to represent Herzl.”

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That formulation may be a bit much. As we shall see, Salten's Zionist background isn't the only key to understanding what *Bambi* is really about, as Bruce herself allows. But, in the end, Bruce's essay provides enough support to make its conclusion seem plausible: "*Bambi* has Zionist overtones because the critique of assimilation and the longing for a new Herzl figure are prominent themes." We could, however, cite quite a bit of additional evidence to underpin this claim, especially the part about the critique of assimilation. For example, Bruce might have mentioned the memorable scene when one of the hunters' dogs chases down the fox, which has been shot. Even the fox's prey stick up for him, accusing the dog of a self-betrayal that can't be compared to the fox's natural cruelty. Also worth noting the scene when The Royal Leader, who turns out to be Bambi's father, takes Bambi to see a slain poacher. As the two of them stand over the dead body, the Leader encourages Bambi to draw the lesson that he shouldn't see himself as inferior to his oppressors.

"If you want, it is no fairy tale." Thus reads the epigraph that introduces *Old-New Land* (*Altneuland*), Herzl's utopian novel of a Jews' state. Salten might have used the line "it is no fairy tale, despite what you want" at the beginning of *Bambi*. Like a lot of other early Zionists, Salten wanted to see Jews settle in Palestine, but he couldn't imagine leaving Europe himself. Part of the reason was the

landscape. Salten regarded himself as a true lover of Austria's forests who was well acquainted with, and could even find beauty in, their darker sides. With *Bambi*, Salten wanted to disabuse members of the then-popular "back to nature movement" of idealizations that evidently annoyed him. Most nature enthusiasts were, according to him, "familiar only with the lifeless forest, with the forest without animals." These "friends of nature" were in truth "strangers to nature" and especially to its harshness.

Bambi sets the record straight by emphasizing the inevitability of violence and privation in its sylvan setting. Even without the hunters, the woods would be a dangerous, difficult place for most animals. Their homeland could never be a land of milk and honey. Yet precisely because of the omnipresence of danger in *Bambi*, the importance of a safe space, a major theme in the Zionist literature of the period, is foregrounded everywhere. Indeed, the Royal Leader never seems more like a metaphor for a Zionist savior than when he leads Bambi to that rarest of things in the forest: a secure mini-territory where Bambi, whom hunters have injured, can at last rest and regenerate properly.

Piling up examples like these has its merits, but it isn't the only way to understand *Bambi*. Salten's Zionism consisted of more than a broad critique of assimilationism and his veneration of Herzl. Salten had other Zionist concerns, too, and taking them into account as we read *Bambi* helps to make sense

of some of the book's more enigmatic and resonant moments. I am thinking, above all, of Bambi's encounters with the elk. It turns out that Bambi's father isn't the only royalty in the forest. All the male deer enjoy the status of "princes" (*prinzen*). But the elk, Bambi's towering "relatives," are referred to as "kings." Even more than his father does, these majestic animals intimidate Bambi. Around them he feels not simply small, but also diminished. Confronted with their looming regality, Bambi becomes ashamed of the diffidence and anxiety of his own community. Bambi's response is to try to think of himself as their equal, and to attempt to connect with them. But he is too awed by the elk to reach either goal. He winds up seeing himself as "nothing" in comparison. And he is unable to bring himself to strike up a conversation with one of them, which further undermines his sense of self and which, from the perspective of the elk, is too bad. As Bambi chides himself, the elk casually wonders why deer and elk speak to each other so rarely. Bambi, for instance, appears to be such a "charming fellow."

This drawn-out communicative failure has its counterpart—and complement—in Bambi's experience of the elk's mating calls, which the novel presents as a kind of aesthetic experience, or rather, as *the* kind that Salten the cultural Zionist wanted to see. Like Buber and others, Salten thought that Western Jewry had fallen into an unfortunate cycle. Deracination had made real creativity hard to come by, and real creativity in the aesthetic sphere was both a primary end itself and the way to greater self-consciousness and spiritual renewal. Where Buber believed that Western Jews could find crucial knowledge and inspiration in the mystical folk culture of Eastern Jewry, Salten envisioned a progression that would take Jews from the "tear-filled" Zionist dramas of the present to liberating artistic expressions of "Ur-power" rooted in the "consciousness" of the "free person," and to "mother sounds" as primordial as those "in the books of Job and Solomon." In the meantime, though, Salten thought that you could find a taste of the elemental in Jewish culture in the "raging" work of Heinrich Eisenbach, an actor whose physical comedy included a popular imitation of ape movements.

Suggestively enough, Salten employed the key terms from his cultural Zionist writings to evoke the sounds with which the elk, those undaunted kings of the forest, call for renewal. As Bambi listens to the "elemental tones" of "a noble, unsettled blood, raging with Ur-power in its longing, anger, and pride," he is transfixed. Regular conversation with the elk may not work quite yet, but their song affects him profoundly. Bambi can think of nothing else until it stops, and it makes him afraid, in part, perhaps, because of the stirring it induces in the deepest part of his being. Yet as Bambi takes in his relatives' expressions of Ur-power, he feels something else, too: "pride." In the end, *Bambi* may be Austrian schmaltz—this no doubt facilitated its assimilation into American kitsch—but it is a book with complicated roots, which go back to and beyond Bar Kochba's first festive evening.

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Kashrut and Kugel: Franz Rosenzweig's "The Builders"

BY LAWRENCE KAPLAN

In 1966, *Commentary Magazine* sponsored a symposium, "The Condition of Jewish Belief," consisting of statements of Jewish faith by 38 American rabbis and thinkers. In his introduction, Milton Himmelfarb wrote that "15 to 17, mostly youngish," of the 27 non-Orthodox rabbis who participated in the symposium were "disciples of Franz Rosenzweig." Thus, Himmelfarb dramatically concluded, "The single greatest influence on the religious thought of North American Jewry . . . is a German Jew—a layman, not a rabbi—who died before Hitler took power and who came to Judaism from the very portals of the Church," which, as a young man, Rosenzweig had famously considered joining. Upon rereading the *Commentary* symposium two things become clear. First, the non-Orthodox rabbis in question were searching for a meaningful non-Orthodox conception of revealed law; second, they found it, not in Rosenzweig's profound but difficult, almost hermetic, magnum opus, *The Star of Redemption*, but rather in his short essay "The Builders" (*Die Bauleute*).

"The Builders" was written in 1923, two years after the publication of *The Star*, as an open letter addressed to Martin Buber. In it Rosenzweig responded to his friend, erstwhile mentor, and future collaborator Buber's essay "*Herut: On Youth and Religion*." The epigram of Buber's essay was from a famous Mishnah in *Pirke Avot* (Chapters of the Fathers): "God's writing engraved on the tablets"—read not *harut* (engraved) but *herut* (freedom). As Buber wrote to Rosenzweig in the exchange of letters that followed "The Builders," "I do not believe that revelation is ever a formulation of law. It is only through man in his self-contradiction that revelation becomes legislation." It was to this problem, whether and in what way one might be bound by Jewish law, that Rosenzweig addressed himself.

Perhaps the key passage was Rosenzweig's passionate affirmation concerning the entire realm of Jewish practice:

Whatever can and must be done is not yet deed, whatever can and must be commanded is not yet commandment. Law [*Gesetz*] must again become commandment [*Gebot*], which seeks to be transformed into deed at the very moment it is heard.

That is, for Rosenzweig, the individual in performing a particular law *may* come via that performance to hear God's commanding voice, to sense His commanding Presence—though one can never tell in advance whether this might or might not happen. But the possibility always exists that the law, the dry, objective statute on the books, the "do-able" to use Rosenzweig's term, can become "deed," personal commandment, by be-

coming transparent, as it were, and serve as a bridge between man and God. For Buber, in contrast, one should fulfill a particular commandment only if one is convinced *beforehand* that the law is addressed to him: "I may not just accept the 'statutes and judgments,' but must ask of each one, and ask again and again: Has that been said to me, rightly to me?" As Rosenzweig saw, such an approach would preclude any real sense of Jewish law. It was of no help in answering the crucial question: "What shall we do?"

Yet, despite the importance and influence of "The Builders," in the great proliferation of new editions, translations, and studies of Rosenzweig in recent decades, the essay has been rather neglected. There has, first of all, been no new Eng-

lish translation of "The Builders," despite the fact that Nahum Glatzer's translation suffers from imprecisions and, even more troubling, perplexing abridgements of Rosenzweig's text.

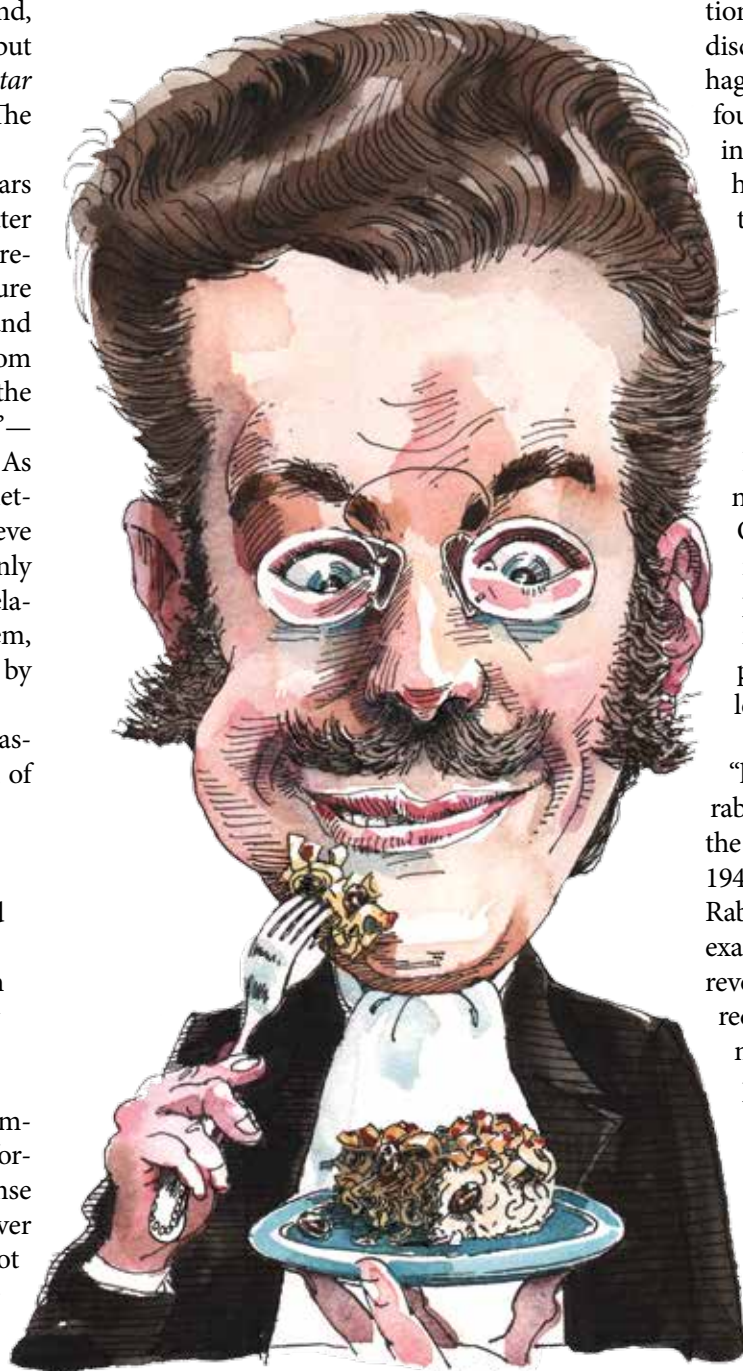
The time has come, then, to reread Rosenzweig's classic essay. As earlier scholars have done, I too will focus on Rosenzweig's discussion of the path through the realm of practice, of the "do-able," leading up to that climactic moment when law becomes commandment.

However, I believe we are now better positioned to appreciate some of the essay's boldest and most incisive theses thanks to recent scholarship on minhag (custom) and its place in Jewish life in the modern and medieval periods. Therefore, while the approach of most earlier commentators has been to focus on the relationship between law and revelation in "The Builders," I will focus on Rosenzweig's discussion of the relationship between law and minhag. This will serve to illustrate what I have always found to be the remarkable nature of Rosenzweig's intuitions and perhaps even bring us to the very heart of his view regarding law, revelation, and the individual's relationship to God.

Two of the most influential essays in modern Jewish studies written in the past 20 years are Haym Soloveitchik's "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy" and Menachem Friedman's "The Lost Kiddush Cup: Changes in Ashkenazic Haredi Culture." Both Soloveitchik and Friedman analyze the transformation of contemporary Orthodoxy from a community in which practice is learned through imitation of one's parents and peers (what Soloveitchik calls a "mimetic community") to a text-based community, where practice is primarily determined by canonical legal texts.

Here Friedman's by now famous example of the "lost" kiddush cup of the great early-20th-century rabbinic leader Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, known as the Hafetz Hayim, is particularly apposite. In the 1940s, the eminent Israeli *haredi* rabbinic authority Rabbi Abraham Karelitz, known as the Hazon Ish, re-examined the relevant legal texts and arrived at the revolutionary conclusion that the amount of wine required in order to properly fulfill the commandment of "saying kiddush" was much greater than previously thought. This meant that most standard kiddush cups could not be used. What is striking is that this theoretical legal conclusion, which, in truth, had already been suggested by some earlier authorities, was adopted *in practice* by the *haredi* community, and even by some in the modern Orthodox community, in direct contradiction to the customary practice.

The story goes that the grandchildren of the Hafetz Hayim, the author of the authoritative



Franz Rosenzweig. (Illustration by Mark Anderson.)

Mishmah Berurah and generally considered to be the greatest *posek* (halakhic decisor) of the early 20th century, refused to make kiddush over their own grandfather's kiddush cup, because it wasn't large enough to meet the standards of the Hazon Ish.

The question raised by both Soloveitchik and Friedman is how to account for such transformations. Both begin with the work of the great historian Jacob Katz, who often distinguished between pre-modern traditional Jewish societies and Orthodoxy in the modern era. Traditional societies, Katz argued, took their values and conduct as a given and acted unself-consciously, unaware that life could be lived differently. The modern era, with its massive challenges to tradition, led to the transformation of such traditional Jewish societies into Orthodox ones. In modern Orthodox societies, religion is less the product of social custom than of conscious reflective behavior, and, indeed, ideological systems are constructed to defend the rightness and necessity of that behavior. This was the first step away from the mimetic community based on social and communal custom. It is striking how much of Katz's analysis was anticipated by Rosenzweig. Rosenzweig does not use the term "traditional society," but writes of those "living without question," and again of "a Jewish consciousness that does not question and is not questioned," as opposed to the Western Orthodoxy of Samson R. Hirsch and Isaac Breuer, which, precisely under the pressures of questioning, constructed impressive, but, in Rosenzweig's view, narrow, rigid, and unlovely ideological defenses of the authority of the Law.

If Soloveitchik and Friedman concur on the reason for the first step away from the mimetic community, they differ with respect to the second step, the move to a text-based community. Friedman sees the main catalyst as being the proliferation of *yeshivas*, advanced academies for talmudic study, which, in their modern form, are deliberately isolated from and independent of surrounding communities. Soloveitchik, more convincingly to my mind, considers the main catalyst to be the acculturation of the Eastern European Orthodox community in Israel and particularly North America, where observant Jews, while remaining strictly observant—indeed, often becoming more observant than their parents—have nonetheless absorbed the rhythms, values, and lifestyle of middle-class culture. Judaism has thus ceased being a total culture, and has instead become an enclave. That is—this is *my* example—from a cultural standpoint, contemporary Orthodox Jews are suburbanites or Manhattanites, who are also *shomer mitzvot*, observers of the commandments. By contrast—to return to Soloveitchik—what a mimetic society hands down from one generation to the next is a total culture. Once this was lost, Jewish law and practice could no longer be entrusted to communally based modes of transmission; they had to be anchored more securely and exclusively in textual tradition.

The congruence of Soloveitchik's analysis with Rosenzweig's discussion is remarkable, though Rosenzweig, of course, aimed to prescribe as well as describe. In seeking the path through the "doable," the totality of Jewish practice, leading to the deed, Rosenzweig attacked the modern differentiation made by Western European Orthodoxy of his day between the inner realm of Judaism, ruled by

law, and the outer, "non-Jewish" realm, which is the sphere of the permissible. Rather, he argued, the border should be erased, and the outer sphere of the permissible should be Judaized by being governed by *minhag* and the underlying intent of the law. "For those who eat Jewish dishes," he wrote, "all the traditional customs of the menu as handed down from mother to daughter must be as irreplaceable as the separation of meat and milk."

To be sure, there is a fundamental difference between the contrast drawn by Rosenzweig and that drawn by Soloveitchik and Friedman. For Soloveitchik and Friedman, the contrast is between a mi-

The traditional dishes handed down from mother to daughter—*minhag*—should be as irreplaceable as the legal requirement of separation of meat and milk—*halakha*.

metic society based on customary practice and one based on texts. For Rosenzweig it is between law and *minhag*. But the connection between the two sets of contrasting terms should also be clear. In a traditional, mimetic society, practice is handed down as a whole from one generation to the next, and the distinction between law (biblical and rabbinic) and *minhag* is glossed over. In a text-based society, the differences between the legal status of the practices prescribed and analyzed in those texts and *minhag* come to the fore. We might say that Rosenzweig's goal was, in Soloveitchik's terms, to reverse the process that had led to rupture and reconstruct this lost mimetic community.

Rosenzweig, however, wished to go further. He aspired not only to resurrect Jewish custom and break down the barriers between the inner and outer realms, but to replace what he deemed to be the traditional, somewhat dismissive attitude toward *minhagim* ("it's only a *minhag*") with one that would give them the *same status* as law. Only in this way could the outer realm be truly Judaized. To repeat: The traditional dishes handed down from mother to daughter—*minhag*—should be as irreplaceable as the legal requirement of separation of meat and milk—*halakha*. To paraphrase: Kugel is as important as *kashrut*.

This equation of *kashrut* and *kugel* may seem to be—perhaps is—shocking, at least from an Orthodox point of view. What has emerged, however, from recent Jewish scholarship, particularly that of the late Professor Yisrael Ta-Shma, is that Rosenzweig's attitude toward *minhag*, though he didn't know it, had a kind of precedent in the religious life of pre-modern Ashkenazic Jewry. First, just as for Rosenzweig the function of *minhag* was to ensure "that not one sphere of life is free from the Law," so too the function of *minhag* for pre-modern Ashkenazic Jewry was, to quote Ta-Shma, "to guide the individual in all the details and forms of his every day activities." Even more important, for traditional, pre-modern Ashkenazic Jewry, *minhag*—grounded as it was in the practice of the sacred community—was accorded the same status as law, in a manner similar to Rosenzweig. Indeed, at times it was accorded a superior status. For law, based on argument and analysis, could always be challenged, whereas the customary practices of one's ancestors were inviolable.

What is the basis of this unexpected similarity be-

tween Franz Rosenzweig and the authorities of medieval Ashkenaz? I would suggest that it is grounded in the religious significance—in the case of Rosenzweig the metaphysical significance—that both attributed to the sheer fact of Jewish peoplehood. For Ashkenazic Jewry, the community is, by definition, a holy community. Consequently, its customs—even when they are not mandated by authoritative legal texts, indeed even when they are in tension with these texts—have overriding significance. For Rosenzweig, to quote Leo Strauss, "the truly central thought of Judaism is Israel's chosenness," and so for him as well it is not surprising that this chosen community's cus-

toms, as well as its fundamental laws, provide access to God's commanding voice.

To carry this analogy further, Ta-Shma has noted how the Spanish Kabbalists, under the influence of Ashkenazic Jewry, offered esoteric mystical explanations not only of biblical and rabbinic laws, but of *minhagim*. Similarly, in theological discussions of ritual, Rosenzweig treated law and custom as a package deal. Thus, in describing the cyclical rhythms of the Jewish year in Book III of *The Star of Redemption*, he tended not to distinguish between custom and law. For example, in his description of Sukkot he sets the post-talmudic holiday of Simchat Torah and the very late custom of reading the book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) on the festival alongside his discussion of such fundamental biblical commandments as sitting in a *succah* and taking the four species.

There are also important differences between the medieval Ashkenazic view of *minhag* and Rosenzweig's, and these differences also shine light on Rosenzweig's basic theological position. To anticipate: For Rosenzweig *minhag* is entirely positive, and this in two senses. First, the actual *minhagim* to which Rosenzweig refers are almost entirely positive in nature, consisting mostly of actions and rites to be performed; and second, and even more importantly, the religious meaning of *minhag* is entirely positive for Rosenzweig. By contrast, for medieval Ashkenazic Jewry *minhag* primarily consists of prescriptions and injunctions. Moreover, even when the *minhag* takes the positive form of performing a certain rite, it may carry negative significance.

Let us look at Rosenzweig's examples of *minhag* and at the relationship of each *minhag* to its corresponding law. We have already seen the example of *kashrut* and *kugel*. Another example, from a little later in the essay: The legal exclusion of the woman from the congregation is counterbalanced by her customary primary rank in the home, as evidenced by the *minhag* of her husband singing "Eishet Hayil" (A Woman of Valor) to her every Friday night. A final example: The prohibition of images, of the plastic representation of God, is counterbalanced by the poetic descriptions of God as found in countless religious songs and liturgical poems, the customary recitation of which are nonbinding.

As noted earlier, what is especially significant is that precisely these *minhagim*—the traditional dishes, the singing of "Eishet Hayil," the recitation of religious songs and liturgical poems—endow the laws

themselves—the separation of meat and milk, the exclusion of the woman from a minyan, the prohibition of images, all of which have a negative form—with positive significance. Rosenzweig even sees the exclusion of the woman from a minyan positively, as flowing from the “the masculine military-public nature of the community” (this phrase, perhaps not surprisingly, is missing from the English translation!)—complemented by the feminine character of the home as evidenced by the singing of “Eishet Hayil.” (The tendency to think of minhag as female and halakha as male is interesting but hardly unique to Rosenzweig.) Finally, the prohibition of images testifies to the uniqueness of the incomparable God, that same hidden God whose praises have been sung by generations of Jews.

For medieval Ashkenazic Jews, by contrast, the vast realm of minhag in areas of everyday life, such as forbidden foods, sexual laws, and laws of mourning, took the form of additional stringencies, as has been documented by Ta-Shma and others. Indeed, even positive *minhagim* took on a negative significance. Thus, a story is told about how once an individual, while leading the service in a pre-modern Ashkenazic community, recited one liturgical poem at a particular point in the service though it was the practice of that particular community to recite a different poem at that point. He died within 30 days. The moral of this and other similar stories of medieval Ashkenaz is clear: Don't tamper with *minhagim*.

I have argued that Rosenzweig and medieval Ashkenazic Jewry both valued minhag so highly because of the extraordinary emphasis they both put on Jewish peoplehood. Why did they differ? Why did medieval Ashkenazic Jews regard minhag primarily as a source of negative prohibition whereas Rosenzweig ascribed to it an almost purely positive significance?

The world for the medieval Ashkenazic Jew was a very dangerous place teeming with evil, sin, demons, witches, black magic, *malakhei havalah* (destructive angels), sickness, death, and religious persecution. Maleficent forces lurked around every corner. Many *minhagim* thus had prophylactic functions, serving to ward off these dangerous and unpredictable forces. Indeed, God Himself appeared to medieval Ashkenazic Jews as a fearsome, inscrutable Deity. Witness the popularity of that strange text, the ethical will (*tzavaah*) of R. Yehudah he-Hasid with its many stringent injunctions: A man must not marry a woman who has the same name as his mother and, by the same token, a woman must not marry a man who has the same name as her father; one cannot build a new house made of stone in order to dwell in it, but can only buy one. Even if none of these actions were halakhically prohibited, they were, as subsequent rabbinic scholars argued, intrinsically unlucky or dangerous. In a worst-case scenario someone might end up dead—for, literally, God knows what reason—and “*hamira sakanta mei-issura*,” a dangerous act is more to be avoided than a prohibited one. Better safe than sorry.

For Rosenzweig this dangerous, unpredictable world has dropped away. One keeps the *minhagim* to the extent of one's ability, as one keeps the laws to the extent of one's ability, because in doing so the “do-able” might become deed. That is, the moment might come when in performing those *minhagim* and laws, Law (*Gesetz*) will become commandment

(*Gebot*), and one will, through them, hear God's commanding voice and sense His commanding Presence. Moreover, this God is, in Rosenzweig's view, *not* fearsome, but rather—and here I am drawing upon the *The Star of Redemption*—the loving God of the Song of Songs. Evil, suffering, and the fear of God are virtually absent from *The Star*

Since for Rosenzweig there is no fear of God, all of Jewish practice expresses the love of God.

of *Redemption*. In this regard, Rosenzweig's discussion of sin is particularly revealing. When the soul confesses its sin before God, at that *very moment* of confession it experiences itself as beloved:

It cleanses itself of sin in the presence of His love. At the very moment that shame withdraws from it and it surrenders itself in free confession directed toward the present, it is certain of God's love.

Contrast this with the harsh penitential rites—lashes, bathing in ice, extended periods of fasting, and so on—that were first set forth by the Ashkenazic pietists, and common among all sectors of Ashkenazic Jewry into the modern period.

We are now in a position to understand the crucial and revealing difference between Rosenzweig's view of minhag and that of his medieval Ashkenazic predecessors. Nahmanides in his famous Bible commentary, commenting on the verse “Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy,” states that the negative commandments correspond to and express the fear of God, while the positive commandments correspond to and express the love of God. For medieval Ashkenazic Jews the fear of God overwhelmed, though never entirely displaced, the love of God; whereas for Rosenzweig, as Jerome Gellman has recently noted, “there is no *mysterium tremendum*.” Since for Rosenzweig there is no fear of God, all of Jewish practice—the positive commandments, the negative commandments, the *minhagim*—expresses, at least potentially, the love of God.

Writing in 1960, the distinguished Israeli philosopher Hugo Bergmann remarked that:

Without wishing to diminish the importance of Rosenzweig's great theological work, *The Star of Redemption*, we can say that *The Builders* is Rosenzweig's most actual contribution to the burning questions of our Jewish lives.

This may well be true, and we are now in a position to fully appreciate the meaning of the essay's title, which (like Buber's “*Herut*”) can be understood only through the rabbinic epigraph that immediately follows it:

And all your children shall be learned of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children. Read not “children” (*banayikh*), but “builders” (*bonayikh*).

As Rosenzweig famously states at the essay's end:

[T]his is just the very basis of our communal and individual life: the feeling of being our fathers' children, our grandchildren's ancestors. Therefore we may rightly expect to find ourselves again, at some time, somehow, in our fathers' every word and deed; and also that our own words and deeds will have some meaning for our grandchildren. For as we are, as Scripture puts it, “children” [*banayikh*]; we are also, as tradition reads it, “Builders” [*bonayikh*].

I can think of no better description of what it means to be a mimetic community.

And yet in light of the processes leading to the breakdown of the mimetic community, processes that Rosenzweig described and analyzed with such prescient insight, can one accept his assumption that it is possible to reverse those processes and reconstruct that lost mimetic community? Can the transformation of Judaism from a culture to an enclave be reversed? To revert, for the last time, to the traditional dishes handed down from mother to daughter: In an era when even the most Orthodox Jews are eating kosher—nay, glatt kosher—Chinese, Thai, Italian, and French cuisine, is it possible to imagine that one's bubbe's kugel will ever again be as irreplaceable as kashrut?

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JEWISH REVIEW OF BOOKS

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Shaul Stampfer asks (and answers) *Are We All Khazars Now?*

Jewish Culture.

Cover to Cover.

Scenes of Jewish Life in Imperial Russia

BY CHAERAN Y. FREEZE AND JAY M. HARRIS

What was Jewish life like in Russia in the years before the revolution? It certainly did not take place in an unchanging shtetl, as historians of the period have repeatedly reminded anyone who was listening. But even those who know a great deal about the enormous economic, social, religious, and political changes Russian Jewry was then undergoing may not have much of a feel for what this meant in the everyday lives of Russian Jews. With the publication of a new anthology, ChaeRan Y. Freeze and Jay M. Harris have opened many long-shuttered windows onto the vanished courtyards of a world in transition. What they display to us are not trends and movements but individuals facing and coping with a variety of new problems as the ground shifts beneath them.

In the first of three excerpts from *Everyday Jewish Life in Imperial Russia* (Brandeis University Press), an abundantly annotated 600-page sourcebook, we hear Ita Kalish's reminiscences about the way in which her Uncle Bunem spied on a prospective groom at the behest of her father, the Hasidic Rebbe of Vurke. What kind of medicine was the young man really taking while staying at a luxurious kosher pension?

In the second excerpt, Avraam Uri Kovner (himself somewhat infamous for having been convicted of embezzlement and corresponding with Dostoevsky from jail) describes his brother's success in one of the first government-run Russian Jewish schools with a modern curriculum. When he delivered a fine speech in Russian, the district supervisor at first couldn't believe that a Jewish boy could do such a thing and then smothered him in kisses.

The last excerpt documents a husband's bitter struggle to prevent his wife from becoming a dentist. In her quest for "development and self-reliance," the woman seeks her government's help—and obtains it. Here, as elsewhere, the reader is struck by the pervasive presence of the state in the lives of Jews in the decades that preceded the Russian Revolution.

The Vurke Hasidic Court in Otwock: The Memoirs of Ita Kalish

I recall my mother mostly as a sick, weak woman, lying for hours on the couch in our long, dark dining room—and in later years—in the long hammock at the villa of my grandfather, Rabbi Simhah Bunem of Vurke [Warka, in Polish] in Otwock, of blessed memory. She was sick for many years; she always had a special nurse and frequently traveled to spas abroad. She was often sarcastic and critical of people, ready with a caustic phrase for anyone whom she did not like, but redeemed by a genuine sense of humor and innate wit. She was especially disparaging in her accounts of Galician Jews, whom she encountered at Austrian spas. "The Jews over there," she would say, "consider themselves to be real 'Austrians'; they speak 'datsch,' their men shorten their coats, and their women wear wigs instead of traditional Jewish bonnets." My mother's nurse Freydl, who happened to come from Galicia, once created a major stir in our house. This happened on Yom Kippur eve, right after "Kol Nidrei," when my father, together with his eldest son, brothers, relatives, disciples, and old Vurke Hasidim—all wrapped in their *tallis* adorned with silver crowns—returned home from the great synagogue. They came to rest after Kol Nidrei and to prepare for the long Yom Kippur night and discovered Freydl washing herself with soap in the kitchen. I remember my mother's scathing remark at this desecration of the holiday: "What do you expect from a *Galitsianer*?" The day after Yom Kippur, Freydl packed up her belongings and left our house.

The one who remained to take care of my mother was her older and beloved sister, "Feygele the Pious" as she was known in her hometown of Koziencie. Every year Aunt Feygele used to fill the cellar of our house with bottles of raspberry juice for the sick and

poor people. Raspberry juice was considered a sure way to induce sweating, which was thought to be an effective remedy against all kinds of colds. In the wintertime, any poor resident of Koziencie could receive a bottle of raspberry juice from Feygele. Aunt Feygele was very modest and humble. With a gentle smile on her pale lips, she was always ready to forgive the world any wrongdoings, even those committed against her own person. For thirty years—ever since the day of her wedding—Aunt Feygele lived together with her husband's parents, and her old mother-in-law, not Feygele



Ita Kalish as a young woman.

herself, was in charge of the house. Yet during all those years, no one heard the two women raise their voices at each other. Aunt Feygele would often leave her husband and children in Koziencie and spend weeks sitting at the bedside of my sick mother, smiling good-naturedly and telling her all kinds of stories.

The town of Maciejowice, where we lived for a few years, consisted of a circular marketplace, a few narrow streets, and a big road leading to the surrounding gentile villages. It had a synagogue, a mikvah, two trustees, a Jewish mailman, a Jewish population with enough men for a few minyanim, and a river,

the Dzika. The town's women told each other with fear that the Dzika demanded an annual sacrifice; each year someone would drown there. My mother, a daughter of a wealthy family from a big city, always felt antipathy toward the *shtetl*, which only increased after her own daughter nearly became another victim of the Dzika. This happened on a hot summer evening, when my mother took me along to the river. Children of every age were having a wonderful time, bathing and splashing in the water. Every moment, my mother would remind me that I should hold on to her. I have no idea what happened later: all I remember is opening my eyes and finding myself lying on the grassy riverbank surrounded by all the women and children of the *shtetl*, with my terrified mother and a Polish doctor next to me. We never went swimming in the Dzika again.

Mother came from a wealthy hasidic family in the Polish-German border town of Będzin [Bendin, in Yiddish]—the "Bendiner Orbachs," as one used to call the family in that border region. I first saw my grandparents from Będzin when they were already elderly and nothing remained of their former wealth. Grandmother's pride and sagacious silence, and Grandfather's humor and wit—his grandchildren enjoyed immensely. I remember him once on a summer Sabbath morning, strolling around the yard in front of our great synagogue during the intermission between the Shacharis and Mussaf prayers. He beckoned to me and, smiling broadly behind his large gold-rimmed spectacles, reached into the pocket of his long coat. "So what would you like?" he asked me innocently. "Ten *groszy* or a *złoty*?" I remained standing, frightened and cried out: "But it's *Shabbes*!" I immediately realized that Grandfather was only joking and both of us, the eighty-year-old man and his little granddaughter, burst out laughing, pleased with each other's great sense of humor.

My aged, medium-built, and corpulent grandfather, Pinkas Orbach, white as a dove—a whiteness accentuated by his satin caftan and large black velvet hat—was grateful to God all his life for the great

privilege of marrying off his daughter to a member of the celebrated Vurke court. He was proud of his youngest daughter, my mother Beyele, the oldest daughter-in-law at the Vurke court, and even more proud of his Vurke grandchildren, as children in our family are called to this day. In addition to Grandfather Pinkhas and Aunt Feygele, another member of my mother's large family, her only brother, known as Bunem Sosnovtser, would often come to visit us, staying for weeks at a time. Uncle Bunem's big black eyes were always smiling, sometimes sarcastically and sometimes humorously. He was very handsome: tall and slender, distinguished by his elastic, almost dance-like walk. As the only son in a household with six daughters, he was very spoiled from his earliest childhood, and his whole life; even after he had several children of his own, he paid little attention to the mundane necessities of life. He spent most of his time in various hasidic practices at the house of his brother-in-law, the rebbe, and had the reputation of a genteel young man—very popular and beloved among the Hasidim.

The chief breadwinner in Uncle Bunem's family was his wife, Miriam. Aunt Miriam required neither a bank nor bank clerks to conduct complex commercial and financial transactions. Her hometown of Sosnowiec had a large number of thriving money exchange offices, and she was able to make the most difficult and confusing exchange calculations in her head, without pen and paper. She was very clever, energetic, and renowned as a *laytische yidene* [a resourceful Jewish woman]. Once, at my father's request, Aunt Miriam went with my youngest sister, who was then suffering from a childhood disease, to a professor in Berlin. When they returned, the entire family surrounded Aunt Miriam, waiting impatiently to hear what the professor had said. Aunt Miriam stood in the middle of the room, smiling playfully, and said, "The professor, you say? He said it's nothing. It's something for a rebbe to deal with." In later years, when my father was already the rebbe, Uncle Bunem performed various important duties at our court, including the "investigation" of the marital matches offered to my father for his younger daughters. My father was very proud of his children, and in response to offers of matches with Poland's great hasidic courts or business magnates, once remarked: "Whatever match I pick for my daughter, I will always lose." Uncle Bunem, his devoted "secret messenger," would bring a lot of news about the candidate to become the rebbe's son-in-law. Once it actually happened that Uncle Bunem failed miserably in his task. Here is how it happened. An almost certain candidate to become the son-in-law at the Otwock court, a young man of about sixteen to seventeen years of age and closely related to a famous rebbe in Poland, came to recuperate at one of the large, expensive *pensions* in Otwock following a severe cold. My father, always concerned about the health of his children, immediately ordered Uncle Bunem to go to that *pension* as a "visitor" in order to find out directly whether the potential groom's stay there was indeed for nothing more than ordinary recuperation after an ordinary cold. With great effort and with the help of various stratagems, my Uncle Bunem succeeded in moving next door to the young man. After several days of enjoying the great culinary art of the famous *pension* of that time, he discovered several little bottles of medicine prescribed by a great Warsaw doctor on the potential groom's night table. Before my father had enough

time to make up his mind concerning this serious matter, the boy's father became aware of the whole "espionage racket" and, feeling terribly insulted, refused to discuss further the match with the "Vurke granddaughter."

Avraam Uri Kovner: The Vil'na Rabbinical School

How and why our family came to be in Vil'na again, I do not remember—I only know that Grandmother sold her "estate." However, nurturing a special passion for land, for "one's own" little corner, she bought some kind of shack in the forest (not far from Vil'na) and moved there. But it had no space for our family. Nor do I remember how I, a nine-year-old boy, suddenly turned out to be a student in the first class of the Vil'na Rabbinical School. Whether they required some kind of examination to enter this school and



Pages from a certificate issued by the rabbinical seminary to a 20-year-old from Antokol, Vilna, ca. 1869. (Courtesy of YIVO.)

whether I took this examination are things of which I have no distinct recollection. I only know that one nasty day I found myself among little children, students of the first class in a large, bright room on the second bench.

However, a few words need to be said about this school. When it was established, it was meant to cultivate educated state rabbis and teachers for urban Jewish schools. The curriculum at the rabbinical school was eight years (like our gymnasiums), except for Latin (which apparently was not obligatory then—even at the gymnasiums under the Ministry of Education). However, German and Hebrew, study of the Bible, and some knowledge of the Talmud

were obligatory, along with the fundamental principles of the Jewish faith according to *Hayei Adam* [The life of man] and the *Shulhan Arukh* [The prepared table], which concisely and systematically laid out the foundations of the law of Moses. The head of the school was the director, a Christian; the assistant inspector and all the teachers of general subjects were also Russian and enjoyed the rights of state service. Only the inspector and the teachers of Jewish subjects were Jewish; the inspector, moreover, was not invested with any power and [had been] appointed only for honorific reasons from [among] the prominent Vil'na Jews. Instruction, except for special Jewish subjects, was in Russian.

The school, which occupied a large stone building, had a dormitory that housed a certain number of the most gifted students at public (that is, Jewish) expense. Among them was my older brother, subsequently well known in the medical world as the author of an extensive historical work. How my brother ended up there, I do not know—all the more so since the rabbinical school was considered a hotbed of freethinking and atheism among Orthodox Jews (which my parents were), and none of them sent their children there. My parents' motive for sending their own firstborn to this impious institution was undoubtedly the fact that rabbinical school students were exempted from military conscription (something that not only Jews deemed terrible—given the brutal conditions of the Nikolaevan era). Their sons, however, given that they knew neither the Russian language nor the Russian way of life, considered [attending] this school to be the greatest misfortune. A considerable incentive for my parents must have been the desire to be rid of an extra mouth to feed, all the more so since, as a special exception for the first class, my brother was admitted at public expense.

In terms of the Jewish subjects, I was better prepared than the others. But back then, Russian was completely alien to me, and hence I had absolutely no understanding of the lessons in general subjects. Soon, however, I began to make notable progress and would have fully mastered Russian had a severe illness not befallen me. I was a day student. Every day at 4:00 to 5:00 in the morning, I set out for school with my brother, who helped me prepare the homework; during these excursions in the winter, dressed extremely lightly, I caught a severe cold and came down with a fever. I stayed home in bed in dire circumstances for more than three months, all this time remaining nearly unconscious. When I finally recovered, thanks to a strong body, and showed up at school, the teachers did not recognize me and asked: who is this? After the illness, I did not remain for long at the school. My parents apparently took my illness as a punishment from above for attending the impious institution, so they withdrew me and planted me in front of the Talmud. "It is enough," said Father, "that one son of mine is an atheist; woe unto us if another (that is, I) becomes a goy ([which, according to him, meant] an apostate from the Jewish faith)."

The relationship of my parents to their oldest son was strange. Living in the dormitory at the rabbinical school, he rarely visited the parental home, and my parents never visited him at the rabbinical school. When my brother did appear at home for the big Jewish holidays, he felt like a stranger, remaining constantly reticent and sullen. My parents,

considering him lost for the Jewish religion, were indeed ashamed of him. They tolerated him like an unavoidable evil: they never greeted him, caressed him, especially Mother, despite the fact that he was an extremely talented and hardworking student, quiet and modest, and most important—he did not cost them anything.

I will also recount an episode from my brother's life that characterized my parents' treatment of him at the time. Brother was in the sixth class when the school celebrated the first decade of its establishment [in 1847]. Apart from the educational authorities and the district superintendent, Adjutant General Nazimov (the former general governor of Vil'na) was present at the celebrations. Three of the best pupils of the school were to deliver a speech in Russian on this occasion. It fell to my brother's lot to deliver a speech in Russian. General Nazimov, having heard the speech, at first did not believe that a Jewish boy had spoken, but when the supervisor of the district confirmed this, the governor general beckoned for my brother to come to him, smothered him with kisses before the whole audience, hoped that he would perfect his learning, and wished him every success in life. News about this spread to all the Jews of Vil'na, and many came to congratulate our parents with an unprecedented celebration of their son. But as simple, religious Jews (who are not at all flattered by distinction), they naively declared that if their son had achieved such a triumph in the Talmud, they would have considered themselves far happier.

Having spent "a week short of a year" at the rabbinical school, I understandably did not come away with anything essential—neither an elementary concept of life and non-Jewish interests, nor even [the ability] to read Russian properly. The sole, powerful impression that I took away from the school during my short stay was the public birching of a third class student, a lanky fellow of sixteen or seventeen years of age.

The Impact of Women's Higher Education on Marriage

"Petition of Chaim Davidovich Grinshtein (Son of an Odessa Merchant) to His Imperial Majesty's Chancellery for the Receipt of Petitions (Received on 1 December 1899)"

GREAT MONARCH! MOST GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN! I take the liberty to fall at Your Majesty's feet with this humble petition. I have been married to Revekka L'vovna Grinshtein for eleven years and have had two children with her—a daughter Raia (seven years old) and a boy Mikhail (three years old). Until the past year, our lives passed by happily and quietly, without storms and agitation; however, at the beginning of last year, my wife took it into her head, for no reason at all, to go off to a course in [dental] medicine and, in order to attain this, registered with the medical inspector, Dr. Korsh, in Odessa, who permitted her to practice with a dentist in the town of Korabel'nikov. All of my

protests and appeals to Dr. Korsh not to permit my wife to practice without my consent were futile and had no effect. In the end, my wife left me and our minor children to the will of fate and devoted everything to the goal of studying dentistry. [This was] not due to necessity because I, thank God, am a man of means; I have provided and continue to provide for my family with abundance.

As a result of the illegal permission, my wife practices dentistry, and with each passing day I am ruined, as my business fares badly; I have lost my head and the small children suffer worse than orphans, being left without the tenderness and care of their natural mother. The heart of any person with the slightest feeling would shudder involuntarily at the sight of my unfortunate position, living with my little orphans, who are susceptible every minute to dangers such as colds, illnesses, or injury without the care of their natural mother. The tears of the unhappy children calling in vain for their mother are endless; the sight of their tears and bitterness rends my heart. It is sad that in this case, as explained above, my wife's study of dentistry is not caused by any necessity and appears only to be the fruit of caprice.

Falling at your feet and appealing to the ineffable mercy of Your Imperial Majesty, I beg you, All Merciful Sovereign, to look mercifully on my unhappy children, who are perishing without [their] mother, and save them with your kind word: forbid my wife from engaging in the study of dentistry so that she returns to the bosom of the family, to the joy and happiness of our little children.

"Petition of Revekka Grinshtein to His Imperial Majesty's Chancellery for the Receipt of Petitions (17 November 1901)"

Most Gracious Sovereign! Most August Monarch! Among the multitude of people who are shielded by the scepter of the Great Russian Monarch, seeking and appealing for salvation at the foot of the Throne, I turn my eyes to You, who serves as the source of good for all His loyal subjects.

In 1889, at the age of eighteen, I was married to the Odessa townsman [Chaim] Nukhim Abramov Grinshtein with whom I soon had two children. After the passage of a few years, however, I had time to be convinced that my family life had turned out in the saddest way. Apart from the differ-

ences in personalities, I was especially oppressed by the disagreement in our moral worldviews, which became manifest with respect to the meaning of the family, the mother's role in it, and concern about the upbringing of the children. My striving for development and self-reliance met with desperate opposition from my husband, and I decided to study dentistry to satisfy my thirst for knowledge so far as possible and to support myself and the children with a source of livelihood, being compelled to separate from him. Now I have successfully completed my studies at the local dental school and must take the examination at one of the Russian universities. However, I have been deprived of the possibility of achieving this because my husband, who at first agreed to provide me with his written permission after long entreaties, now abruptly refuses to give me the requisite separate passport, which is necessary for this purpose. This refusal, which obstructs the path to the most cherished dream of my life and has already absorbed a lot of my labor, will leave me completely horrified.

But boundless despair inspires in me the audacity to entrust my fate to the powerful hands of the Father of the Russian lands. In addition, I am submitting four certified copies of certificates of marriage, [my] trustworthiness, completion of dental school, and the agreement of my husband about the continuation of my education. I fall down at the feet of Your Imperial Highness with [this] supplication: make me happy by your gracious command to issue me a passport from the Odessa townspeople board. I am not attempting to dissolve our marriage but strive only for the possibility of living on my own labor and dedicating myself to the proper upbringing of our children.

This petition was written according to the petitioner's words by the townsman of Bender, Moishe Modko Surlev Finkel'feld.

ChaeRan Y. Freeze is a professor in the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University. She is the author of several books, including Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia (Brandeis University Press). Jay M. Harris is the Harry Austryn Wolfson Professor of Jewish Studies and dean of undergraduate education at Harvard University. He is the editor of Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence (Harvard University Press).



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Salsa and Sociology

BY ABRAHAM SOCHER

When I was a child, eight or nine maybe, I evolved a theory about different kinds of Jews, based, more or less, on the hot sauce we kept on our table. The brand of salsa my mother always bought featured a picture of a thermometer on the side. The mercury in this particular thermometer rose from Mild to Medium to Hot, and it occurred to me, for I thought as a child, that the three basic kinds of Jews—or more precisely synagogues to which the Jews I knew belonged—could be placed on a similar continuum. Reform Jews were Mild, Conservative Jews were Medium, and Orthodox Jews were Hot.

If pressed to say what exactly I thought what was being measured that was supposed to be analogous to the heat of chili peppers, I guess that I would have said something about the amount of “Jewish stuff” one did or was required to do. If pressed further, I probably would have put my family somewhere between Medium and Hot. The theory was descriptive, not prescriptive; I had, as far as I can remember, no desire to be the religious equivalent of tongue-scaldingly habanero-hot.

Around this time, my mother drove us across the Bay Bridge to participate in a rally for Soviet Jews at Emanu-El, the big, old Reform Temple in San Francisco, which was founded in 1850. By American Jewish standards it’s practically a medieval cathedral. Certainly that’s what it felt like to me. You could fit half a dozen of our little East Bay *shuls* inside it, and the pillars stretching up to a magnificently vaulted ceiling seemed as tall to me as the redwoods of Tilden Park, if not the cedars of Lebanon. This, together with other experiences, spurred me to add a corollary to my theory: The wealth of synagogues was inversely proportional to their religious “heat.”

My childish religious heat map fit the folk taxonomy implicit in the everyday speech of American Jews pretty well. Thus, when I heard someone describing themselves or others as “very Reform,” it never meant that prophetic ideals of justice were discussed at the dinner table, or that the works of Abraham Geiger were on the bookshelf. It meant that they did not lead markedly Jewish lives. There is even a whole class of predictable Jewish jokes based on this: “How Reform are they? So Reform that . . .”

At some point, however, I put away my childish theories. I met learned and serious liberal Jews on the one hand and prayed in imposing, wealthy Orthodox synagogues on the other. Moreover, when I later studied the ideological origins of the different movements, I came to understand that there was no single scale on which they all could be ranged. The architects of the Reform movement did not regard themselves as “Very Mild” on some halakhic heat scale; the Conservative movement did not concede that they were any less devout in their commitment to Jewish law, properly—that is historically—understood, than the Orthodox, not to speak of Reconstructionism and the many varieties of Jewish secularism,

including classical Zionism. (I knew a woman in Los Angeles who dropped a guy because he confused Jewish Bundists with Buddhists at the Shabbos table.)

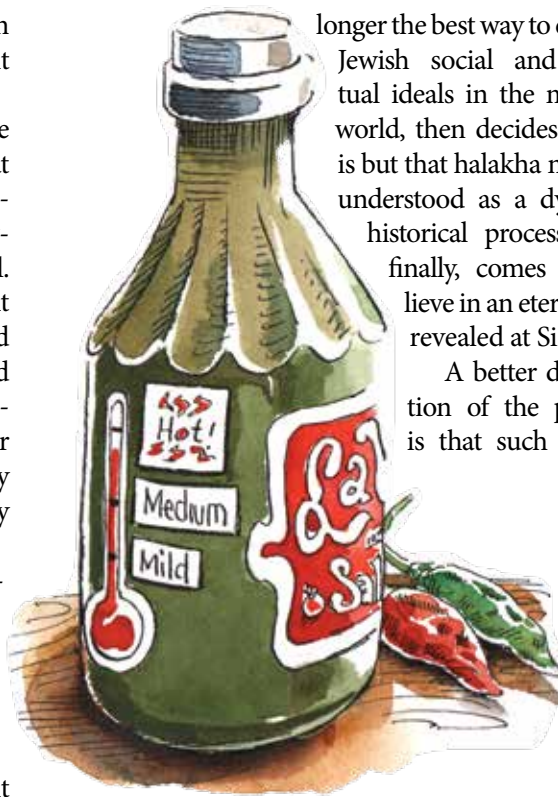
And yet. In some respects, the salsa sociology explained parts of my particular American Jewish experi-

I don't recall a desire to be the religious equivalent of tongue-scaldingly Habanero-hot.

ence better than the ideological self-understandings of the movements. For instance, I’ve known many *baalei teshuvah*, who have “returned” to traditional religious practice, sometimes moving from Reform through Conservative Judaism before arriving at Orthodoxy. Rarely, even among intellectuals, is such a move best characterized as one in which the *baal teshuvah*

first thinks that halakha is no longer the best way to express Jewish social and spiritual ideals in the modern world, then decides that it is but that halakha must be understood as a dynamic historical process, and, finally, comes to believe in an eternal law revealed at Sinai.

A better description of the process is that such people



increasingly wanted their everyday lives to be determined by their Judaism, and they found this in Orthodox communities of one kind or another. I think this is also true of the many people I’ve known who grew up in the Conservative movement (Solomon Schechter schools, Camp Ramah etc.) and now find themselves identifying as Orthodox. The great sociologist Émile Durkheim spoke of “social facts,” beliefs, norms, and practices with the power to structure individual lives. One way to describe what the *baal teshuvah* is looking for is a way to make his or her Judaism into a real, brute social fact.

I was talking about this with a prominent American-Israeli journalist the other day, who said “Sure, if you want to be totally Jewish, you’ve got three choices: You can become a Reform or Conservative *rabbi*, you can become Orthodox—or you can make

aliyah.” One could object that one can also become a professor of Jewish studies, but that’s not really a counter-example. The best counter-example comes from the world of independent *minyanim*, in which many participants live intensely Jewish lives of ritual, study, and prayer while retaining a non-Orthodox approach to belief and practice. Whether the *minyanim*, and allied institutions such as *Mechon Hadar* and *Limmud*, can alter the social dynamics of American Jewry remains to be seen.

Two realizations dawned on me in reading the Pew Research Center’s recent report, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans.” The first was just how small a Jewish bubble I have been living in. While I’ve been praying in Orthodox *shuls* with *baalei teshuvah* and Ramah campers, the American Jewish world has been swiftly moving in the opposite direction. As the report states:

Within all three denominational movements, most of the switching is in the direction of less-traditional Judaism . . . one-quarter of people who were raised Orthodox have since become Conservative or Reform Jews, and 28% of those raised Reform have left the ranks of Jews by religion entirely.

One feels the sheer gravitational force of American Jewish life in such sentences. By contrast, the move in the other direction begins to look insignificant, a counter-cultural trickle.

My other realization was, of course, that my childish theory was closer to the truth than my later, sophisticated adult view of American Jewish life. The religious ideologies that I had taken so seriously look epiphenomenal, like froth on the waves. Take, for instance, the following question posed by the Pew researchers: “How important is religion in your life?” Eighty-three percent of Orthodox Jews answered very important, less than half of Conservative Jews (43 percent) agreed, and only 16 percent of Reform Jews responded that religion was very important to them. Of Jews with no denominational affiliation the number was 8 percent.

Since the Pew researchers were certainly not defining the religion in question as Orthodoxy, it is hard not to conclude that some like it Hot and we call those Jews Orthodox, and some like it Mild, and we call those Jews Reform. Conservative Jews, as Daniel Gordis argues in these pages, find themselves in the rapidly shrinking middle. As for the Jews of “no religion,” as Don Seeman shows, these would appear to be not Jewish secularists (as the Pew researchers sometimes sort of imply) but mostly Jews “looking for the exit door.” Upon reflection, I find the implications of the hot sauce model of American Judaism chilling.

Abraham Socher is the editor of the Jewish Review of Books.

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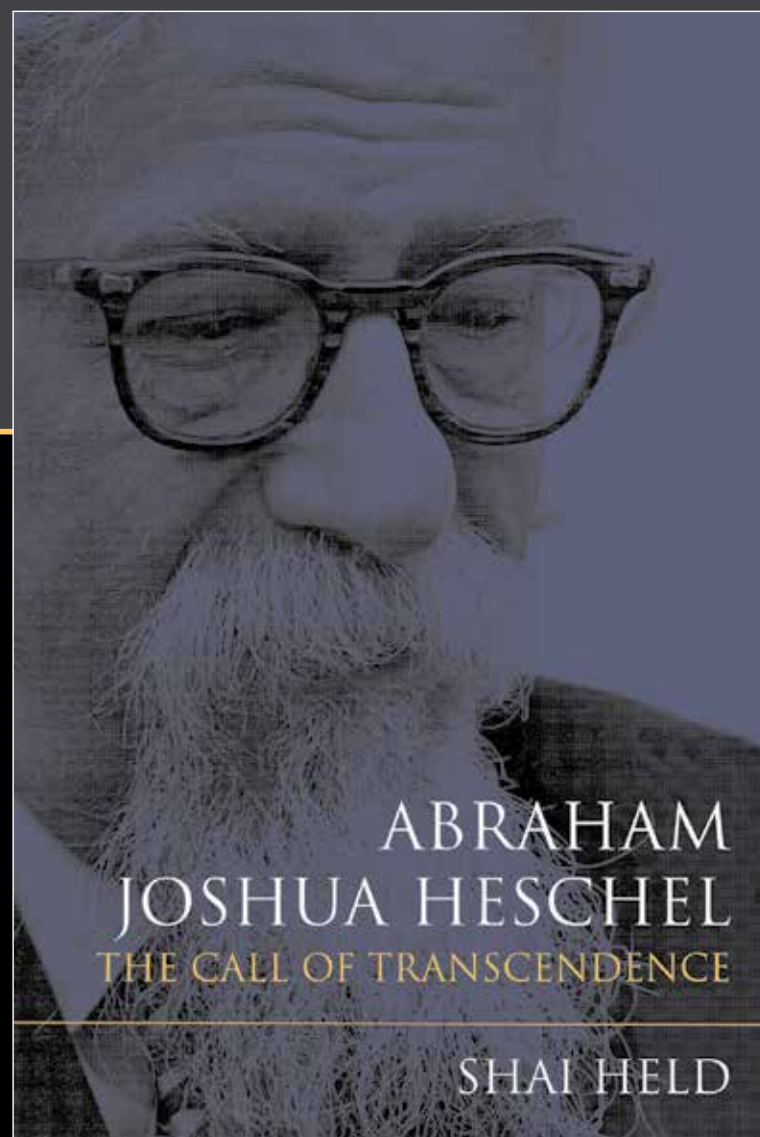
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