

JEWISH REVIEW

OF BOOKS

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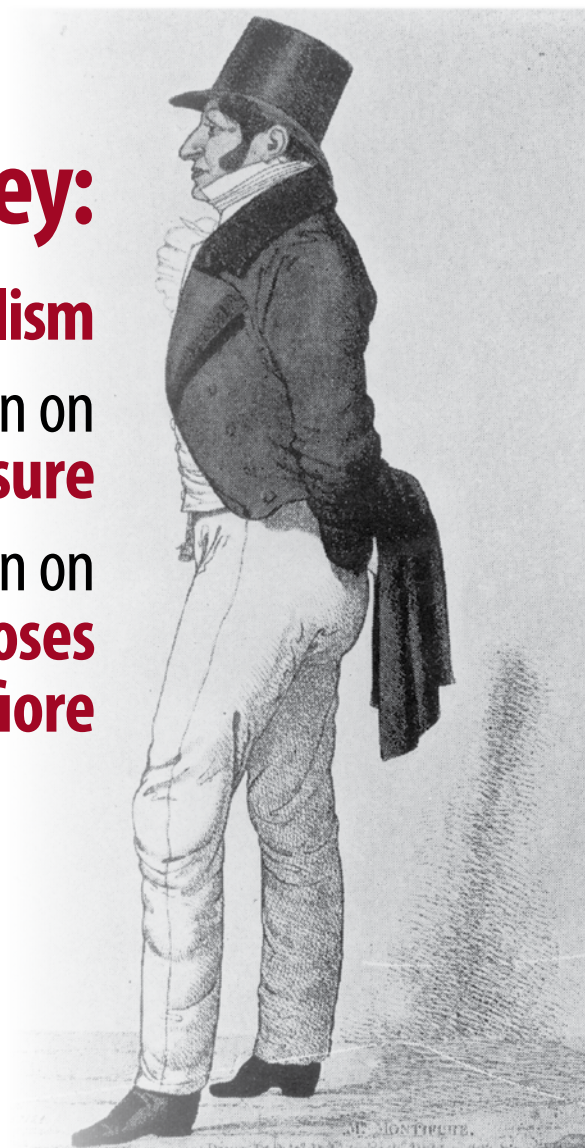
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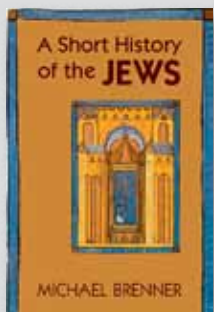


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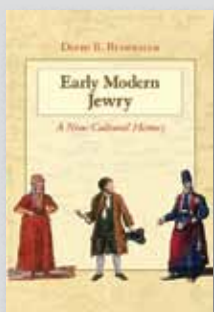
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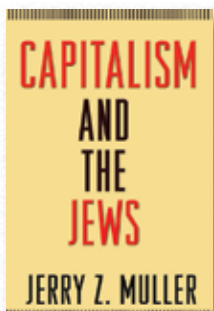
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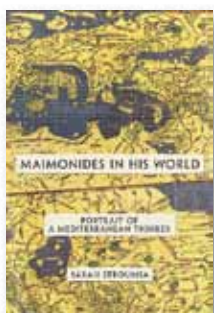
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JEWISH REVIEW
OF BOOKS



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LETTERS

- 4 **Jewish Narnias, Slighting the Conservative Movement, Strong Coffee or Weak Tea? . . . and more**

FEATURES

- 5 ANITA SHAPIRA **The Kibbutz and the State** *How the position of the kibbutz in Israeli society has changed, and why.*
- 10 RUTH R. WISSE **The Poet from Vilna** *Avrom Sutzkever and Max Weinreich, a memoir.*

REVIEWS

- 15 ROBERT ALTER **All the Good Things of Spain** *Yehuda Halevi* by Hillel Halkin
- 17 YUVAL LEVIN **With Interest** *Capitalism and the Jews* by Jerry Z. Muller
- 19 MARTIN KAVKA **Old-New Sabbath** *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* by Judith Shulevitz
- 21 ROBERT CHAZAN **The Christian Road to Jerusalem** *God's Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* by Rodney Stark
- 23 DAVID SORKIN **Montefiore and the Politics of Emancipation** *Moses Montefiore: Jewish Liberator, Imperial Hero* by Abigail Greene
- 27 WALTER RUSSELL MEAD **Friends of Zion** *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* by Shalom Goldman
- 28 DARA HORN **Animal Foible** *Beatrice and Virgil* by Yann Martel
- 29 ANNE TRUBEK **Going Public** *The Cookbook Collector* by Allegra Goodman
- 30 BEN BIRNBAUM **Posthumous Prophecy** *The Prophet's Wife* by Milton Steinberg
- 33 MARGOT LURIE **I, Terrorist** *American Taliban* by Pearl Abraham • *A Week in December* by Sebastian Faulks • *Terrorist* by John Updike
- 35 GABRIELLA SAFRAN **The Weaver** *Photographing the Jewish Nation: Pictures from S. An-sky's Ethnographic Expeditions* Edited by Eugene M. Avrutin, Valerii Dymshits, Alexander Ivanov, Alexander Lvov, Harriet Murav, Alla Sokolova

READINGS

- 38 STEVEN J. ZIPPERSTEIN **Underground Man: The Curious Case of Mark Zborowski and the Writing of a Modern Jewish Classic**
- 43 MOSHE HALBERTAL **The Limits of Prayer: Two Talmudic Discussions**

THE ARTS

- 45 RICHARD I. COHEN **The Rothschilds of the East** *The Splendor of the Camondos* at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme in Paris
- 47 ELLA TAYLOR **Swept Up** *Leap of Faith* Directed by Antony Benjamin and Stephen Friedman

LOST AND FOUND

- 48 MATT GOLDISH **Rashi and the Crusader: A Legend**

LAST WORDS

- 49 ALLAN ARKUSH **Moses Mendelssohn Street**
- 51 HARVEY PEKAR AND TARA SEIBEL **Gut Shabbes**

Rosenfeld and the Jewish Review of Books

Dara Horn's article on Isaac Rosenfeld is, by itself, an auspicious beginning for your new magazine. Lucid and wise, it's a wonderful essay. It is easy to despair of the careerism and problem solving that infuses today's higher education, and for those of us who do, Ms. Horn's first-rate piece restores a sense of perspective. **David Lebedoff, Minneapolis, MN**

No Jewish Narnia

I enjoyed Michael Weingrad's "Why There is No Jewish Narnia." Rabbi Odeya Tzurieli has argued in a recent essay that Israeli hyper-realism and complete lack of imagination stem from Zionism's idea of *hagshama* (realization), which strove to break with the Jewish tradition of dreaming about and aspiring for redemption and replace it with action and initiative. Zionism's success had an unfortunate price.

I also know of at least one fantasy book written by a learned Orthodox rabbi, Erez Moshe Doron, called *Lochamay Ha-temurot*. (A weak English translation entitled *Warriors of Transcendence* is available in Israel.) Rabbi Doron is the former head of an Israeli parapsychology organization and is now a popular Bratslav rabbi, who follows Rabbi Nachman's call to write fantasy (see *Likutei Moharan* #60).

Yeshaya Rosenman, Rehovot, Israel

I greatly enjoyed reading Professor Weingrad's piece on fantasy, and, as a life-long fan and amateur student of Lewis, Tolkien, and the Inklings, I have to say that I think he nailed it.

The piece really takes its place alongside G.K. Chesterton's "The Ethics of Elfland" and Tolkien's own "On Faerie Stories" as one of the best explorations and explanations of the relationship among European pagan myths, Christianity (particularly Catholic and Anglo-Catholic Christianity), and "high" fantasy. But those pieces are about why there is Christian fantasy, not why there isn't Jewish fantasy, or Jewish fantasy of the same sort, and I had never seen the latter question addressed—Professor Weingrad's explanation, however, is compelling.

John F. Watkins, New York, NY

I thoroughly enjoyed Michael Weingrad's article. However, Professor Weingrad may wish to read Neil Gaiman, who is Jewish and is also perhaps the most important fantasist writing today.

Dr. Robert T. Tally Jr.

Department of English, Texas State University

Michael Weingrad Responds:

My essay on the nature of fantasy literature and its relationship to Judaism provoked an avalanche of responses, both positive and negative. I have replied at some length to my online critics on this magazine's website. There I do acknowledge what Robert Tally, Jr. points out is the oversight of Neil Gaiman, though I continue to believe that Gaiman's work reinforces my theological arguments even as it may challenge my sociological ones.

Yeshaya Rosenman's letter indicates how much more there is to ponder on this topic. I am not convinced that Rabbi Nachman's *Sippurei Ma'asiyot* should be categorized as modern fantasy, but I agree that a fuller treatment of the subject is needed. Finally, I am grateful to John Watkins for his high praise.

The Prayers of Others

In his review of the new Koren Sacks Siddur, Hillel Halkin seems to gaze almost wistfully across the street at the Catholics and the Protestants, with their once-a-week church attendance, and the Muslims, with their frequent but brief services. He appears to feel that our own lengthy liturgy is too clunky to foster feelings of devotion. But Halkin doesn't seem to realize that even the ancients understood this, and that is why the primary prayer was and remains the *amidah*, the 18 blessings. All the rest is commentary, so to speak. If Halkin feels the other prayers detract from his concentration on the *amidah*, he should simply omit those auxiliary passages. In any event, I see no support for the idea that shorter services in other religions translate to better concentration. There is no shortage of lapsed Catholics and Protestants who can disabuse Halkin of that fanciful notion.

David Farkas, Cleveland, OH

Hillel Halkin Responds:

I can't imagine what David Farkas found "wistful" about my very brief references to Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim prayer. Never having been a Catholic, Protestant, or Muslim, I have no idea what it is like to pray as one. As I thought I made clear, the only prayers I feel wistful for are the ones I grew up with, which are those of a traditional, Orthodox Jewish service. Those I sometimes miss.

When Conservative Judaism was Ascendant

Why did Rabbi Lance J. Sussman completely decline to mention the Conservative movement in his review of Dana Evan Kaplan's *Prospects for American Judaism*? Particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, Conservative Judaism was in ascendancy. It wasn't overshadowed until relatively recently by the Reform movement, at least in terms of adherents. It has been and continues to be a major presence in American Judaism. The omission, therefore, is glaring.

Aura Ahuvia, ALEPH Rabbinic Student,

Ann Arbor, MI

Lance J. Sussman Responds:

The current situation of the Conservative movement is well known, and Dana Kaplan did a good job in his discussion of it. His account of Reform Judaism, by contrast, was inadequate as critical scholarship and required a strong response.

Weak Tea or Strong Coffee?

Azzan Yadin (whom I highly respect) believes I must have created *The Commentators' Bible* because I thought "that not enough had been lost in previous translations." Yes; that is exactly what I do think. And I can well understand if my English versions of the commentators are too diluted for his taste.

He is not the first scholar to view my project with a jaundiced eye. I would encourage those who share his opinion to realize that my purpose in translating the medieval commentators is not to have my readers study the commentators. It is to have them study Torah. What tastes like weak tea to my university colleagues is strong coffee to the Jews for whom I am writing.

If learning *The Commentators' Bible* eventually takes some readers far enough on their intellectual journey to share Yadin's opinion, no one will be more delighted than I.

Michael Carasik, Philadelphia, PA

From Left and Right

Shmuel Rosner claims that Zertal and Eldar "pretend to write history while engaging in raw politics." He then recites the chapter titles of the book to demonstrate how "angry" the authors really are. He then moves on to analyze, in a more subtle and appreciative way, books about settlers' personal lives.

Lords of the Land is arguably the most comprehensive survey of the settlements published thus far. Rosner wishes to dismiss it as merely a polemic, but he does not engage a single argument in the book. Zertal and Eldar examine the corrupt relationship between the Army and the settlement movement, and also expose—in detail—the outrageous leniency of Israel's High Court of Justice when dealing with settler, as opposed to Palestinian, crimes. To claim, as Rosner does, that a "mere glance at the titles of the book's chapters gives one a sufficient sense of what's inside" is totally inadequate.

Equally spurious is Rosner's claim, later on in the review, that "it will be the Palestinians, and their ability to overcome their shortcomings, who will decide whether or not the West Bank remains under Israeli control." As Zertal and Eldar's book makes clear, the settlement enterprise was first established to create "facts on the ground," "facts" that no Israeli government can possibly undo. If it is all up to the Palestinians, as Rosner suggests, perhaps he can explain why the Israeli government of Yitzhak Rabin allowed settlements to expand all throughout the period after the Oslo Accords? I would encourage readers to look at Zertal and Eldar's book for themselves. Rosner might be offended by the "anger" of the authors, but it is nothing compared to the offense the settlement project has engendered against democratic Israel.

Matthew Phillips, New York, NY

Shmuel Rosner's article leaves one with the impression that not only the authors of each book, but also Rosner himself, believe that the only Jews who live in Judea and Samaria are fervently religious Zionists. A closer look reveals a diverse population.

In Ariel, one of the oldest Jewish towns in Samaria, less than 20% of the population of about 20,000 is religious, according to Eldad Halachmi, Vice President of Development at Ariel University Center. In the towns of Nili, Tekoa, Beit Aryeh, Ma'ale Efraim, and Peduel the religious/secular ratio is about equal. In a recent BBC report, it was noted that 65% of Givat Ze'ev's population of 12,000 is secular.

Leonard Getz

National Vice President, Zionist Organization of America

Lower Merion, PA

Shmuel Rosner Responds:

A book can be a "comprehensive survey" of facts and still be a "polemic." Eldar and Zertal interpret the facts in ways that make the book, in my view, both "angry" and "political." One example: They blame Ariel Sharon for the second Palestinian Intifada. This—to put it mildly—is a questionable claim. The comment regarding "facts on the ground" can be answered with this very brief reminder: September 2005, the Israeli pullout from the Gaza Strip.

Factually, Mr. Getz is right, of course. However, the settlement movement was and still is a religious Zionist (according to some, post-Zionist) phenomenon. Most of the people who actively promote the policy of settlement are religious Zionists.

The Kibbutz and the State

BY ANITA SHAPIRA

TRANSLATED FROM THE HEBREW BY EVELYN ABEL

Just as today's VIP visitors to Israel are taken to see the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, so in the first decades of statehood were they ushered off to a kibbutz, especially if they were situated on the left side of the political spectrum. In 1972, for instance, at a time when many New Leftists had come to regard Israel as a present-day Sparta constantly brandishing its sword, the crowned prophet of the student revolution, Herbert Marcuse, visited Israel for the first time. His hosts took him to Kibbutz Hulda, where he was shown around by Amos Oz, who later gratefully quoted him as saying: "Yours is the only socialist experiment that has not spilt blood and so far has not turned bourgeois."

Overseas visitors lent the kibbutz movement the endorsement it so desperately craved. Nobody else on the Israeli scene seems to have been quite so much in need of constant confirmation from society at large or quite so sensitive to criticism. This vulnerability stemmed from the fact that kibbutz members, even in the 1960s and 1970s, were not content to live a life of pleasant, everyday routine. Since the first decade of the century, they had struggled to bring into existence an altogether new type of society, one that would both establish real equality and imbue ordinary life with special significance. At a time when the descent of the Soviet experiment into the worst sort of tyranny had made the utopian idea appear bankrupt, their achievements continued to hold out the hope that a radical social transformation was within the realm of possibility. But while the kibbutz managed for a long time to present an alternative lifestyle to idealistic young people, it did so with increasing difficulty and growing self-doubt. Indeed, from the day the State of Israel was born in 1948, a sense of crisis was the kibbutz's constant companion.

A century after the creation of the first kibbutz, more than sixty years since the establishment of the State of Israel, and nearly forty years since Marcuse's visit to Hulda, the kibbutz movement still has question marks hanging over it. To what extent has its heroic attempt to create a small-scale utopia through education and socialization stood the test of reality? Can one still say of the kibbutz, as Martin Buber once did, that it is an "experiment that didn't fail"? To address these questions, one must first take a close look at the impact of larger political and social developments on the kibbutz from 1948 to the present.

The War of Independence took a heavy toll on the kibbutz movement: the destruction of settlements, the loss of hundreds of its sons, the hundreds of fresh widows. In the words of Kadish Luz, a member of Kibbutz Deganya Bet and a leader of the Histadrut labor federation, children were "broken up into two categories: those with fathers and those without." There was, as he put it, a sense of "mission fatigue." The strain of mobilizing to es-

tablish a state, a luminous ideal that had justified so many hardships, had been relieved. A state now existed—and not every day could be as thrilling as November 29, 1947, when the UN had voted in favor of partition. The disappointments that followed were, perhaps, inevitable.

During the period of the British Mandate, the kibbutz had always been the standard-bearer, ready to establish "tower and stockade" footholds in dangerously exposed territory or to volunteer for whatever else needed to be done. After the attainment of independence in 1948, however, the pioneering tasks it had performed in the past were now assumed by the state. Settlement of the land was managed by the government and implemented not by self-sacrificing kibbutz youth groups, but by new immigrants summarily dispatched to frontier regions. Many new kibbutzim were still being set up along the borders, but they were no longer alone. Immigration ceased to be a clandestine operation conducted by kibbutz volunteers and became one of the state's responsibilities. Instead of volunteering for the underground, there was now conscription into the IDF. Kibbutz members, more than other citizens, volunteered for elite units, flight squads, and the commandos—a price tag of blood held up

the hour for pioneering has passed," he declared. "Without a robust pioneering drive to match the needs and possibilities that have increased and intensified with statehood—we will not manage the three great tasks of our generation: ingathering the exiles, making the desert bloom, and security." But this was reassuring rhetoric: the tasks were on a scale far beyond the means of the kibbutz movement, which could do little but watch as the state usurped its historical role.

The deepest cause for despondency was the fact that despite the massive flow of immigrants into the Jewish state during its first four years, the kibbutz suffered from dwindling numbers: some members left, no new ones came. The Holocaust had destroyed the human reservoirs that might have replenished the kibbutzim. On the whole, the post-Independence immigrants lacked the ideological education dispensed by kibbutz youth groups, whose graduates themselves had only rarely remained on the kibbutz. What is more, most of the newcomers were older and hailed from traditional societies in Muslim countries. They wished to preserve their family framework and had no inclination to adopt a communal lifestyle.

The new immigrants did not understand social-



Women farming on Kibbutz Deganya, May 18, 1948. (Photo by Bettmann/CORBIS.)

by members or outside supporters in the face of any criticism flung at the kibbutz. But the army too was, of course, run by the state.

Fully aware of what was happening, David Ben-Gurion, despite his statist orientation, strove to lift the kibbutz movement out of its doldrums: "There is no more harmful or dangerous assumption than that with the establishment of the state,

ist aspirations; their Zionist consciousness did not embrace such concepts as enlisting for national endeavors, subordinating individual interests to those of the public, or other keystones of a voluntarist and public-spirited worldview. The kibbutz's culture of direct democracy was alien to most of them, to say nothing of voluntary self-subordination to communal life. They regarded the kibbutz as a bastion of

uncompromising secularism hostile to tradition, an institution that dissolved the traditional family, and an ideology that opposed the principle of private property. In addition to everything else, they found it degrading that they were expected to work as manual laborers. It is difficult to imagine how this wave of immigrants could have been integrated into the kibbutz, even if much more energy had been invested in doing so.

Yet Ben-Gurion demanded that the kibbutzim throw open their gates. "What have the pioneers done for three hundred thousand new immigrants?" he railed in the Knesset in January 1950. "During the past two years I have been humiliated and shamed by the pioneering movement's failure: the greatest thing that has ever happened in its history has taken place, the exodus from Egypt has begun, the ingathering of the exiles has begun, and what have our pioneers done? Have the kibbutzim put themselves to the task?" Ben-Gurion argued that the principle of self-labor (no hired hands) had once been an appropriate barrier against employing Arab workers at a time when it was necessary to get "Hebrew labor" off the ground. But the new realities of the state required that immigrants be absorbed into the productive organs of the kibbutz and given jobs. This, in his eyes, was now the true pioneering. The kibbutz movement, including members of his own party who supported his immigration policy, rejected his demand because it militated against two basic tenets of kibbutz doctrine: equality and communality. "Hired labor in the kibbutz economy," insisted Shlomo Rozen, the secretary-general of the Kibbutz Artzi Federation, "means the destruction of the kibbutz economy, with its social and its Zionist-class values." The kibbutz could not have absorbed thousands of hired hands and still remained a kibbutz.

The establishment of the state exposed the duality of socialist and Zionist components that had defined the kibbutz movement from its inception. The kibbutz was to have been the model of the society of the future, a just and egalitarian society even as it shouldered its special responsibilities and missions in the realization of Zionism. But while "national and pioneering tasks were the chief substance of kibbutz life in the period preceding the state's establishment," as Haim Gvati, one of the founders of Kibbutz Gvat in the 1920s, put it, they were not always of equal significance. Shlomo Ne'eman, another veteran kibbutznik, distinguished between a "national matter" and "social goals" in terms of the energy people were prepared to invest in each of them: "There is no limit to the efforts people devote to a *national matter*. Nowhere does one find such dedication to *social goals*." In the pre-state period, the Zionist deed was performed by kibbutzim. In fact, Ne'eman claimed, the history of the kibbutz "as a way of life and the kernel of the society of the future" began only after the establishment of the state. Having been displaced from the vanguard of Zionism, and having seen its national functions greatly diminished, the kibbutz had to shift its main focus to the mission of social reconstruction. But there was a problem: what was to fuel the shift? As Ne'eman observed, it is easier to mobilize people for dramatic national tasks than for mundane social ones. A few idealistic youths plunged into the development towns to

live with and assist the new immigrants, but they constituted a distinct minority. The vast majority of kibbutz youth was not fired by the idea. Just as Ben-Gurion's call to embark on pioneering tasks, such as settling the Negev, evoked little response, so too did the attempt to have the kibbutz negotiate a 180-degree turn to focus on being a model of a utopian, egalitarian society. The prospect did not stir the imagination or generate enthusiasm. As if to convince themselves that they had not lost the luster earned by carrying the Jewish people on their shoulders, movement leaders kept enumerating the kibbutz's accomplishments: settling on the country's borders; making the desert bloom; developing modern, viable, and advanced agriculture; and

social revolution, or as a prototype for that society. In both cases, the relationship between the kibbutz and its surroundings vitally informed every vision: whether the kibbutz advanced revolution or set an example, there was a symbiosis between the kibbutz and the larger society. But by the late 1950s, Kadish Luz, by then Minister of Agriculture and a symbol of integrity and modesty, could protest that "our main difficulty today is that the very way of life and the need for it in the eyes of the broad public outside the kibbutz is problematic, and this attitude has filtered down to kibbutz members themselves." New definitions of the state's needs, tasks, and aims replaced the tasks traditionally undertaken by the kibbutz. Careers in science, the

Since the 1960s, city life has replaced the kibbutz as the main scene of action in Hebrew literature.

the volunteer service of their young people in elite IDF units. The anxiety that the kibbutz movement was losing its central place in Israeli society gnawed away at her devoted members and supporters in the 1950s and 1960s.

The centrality of the kibbutz in the pre-state period and the subsequent decline in its status were reflected in Hebrew culture. When Hannah Senesh composed her poem "My God, May it Never End" not long before she parachuted to her death in 1944 in a doomed rescue mission behind Nazi lines in Hungary, she was evoking memories of the Mediterranean coast near Kibbutz Sdot Yam, where she lived. S. Yizhar's first story, "Ephraim Returns to the Alfalfa," is set on a kibbutz. The first novels of the most important post-Independence writers are also set on kibbutzim. Naomi Shemer, who famously wrote the lyrics for "Jerusalem of Gold" in 1967, had, in her early years, sung of the eucalyptus grove at Kibbutz Kinneret, her birthplace. Moshe Dayan's eulogy for Ro'i Rothberg, a victim of terrorism at Kibbutz Nachal Oz on the edge of the Gaza Strip, symbolized the central place of farmer-soldier units and frontier kibbutzim in the public consciousness of the 1950s.

But this was not to last. Since the 1960s, city life has replaced the kibbutz as the main scene of action in Hebrew literature. When the kibbutz features in a work such as Yehoshua Knaz's novel *Infiltration* (1986), it is meant to represent the domination—unto death—of the individual by society. This had been an important theme of kibbutz literature since David Maletz's pioneering novel, *Circles*, which appeared in the early 1940s, but by the 1980s, it dominated the scene. The kibbutz became the symbol of the misery that Zionism inflicted on those who had followed it to the utopian wilderness. Thus, for example, the institution of children's dormitories became a topic of incessant discussion in Israeli culture, as if an unhappy childhood were the sole preserve of kibbutz society. It is difficult to find novels in which the kibbutz plays a major role in the past few decades. Asaf Inbari's recent book, *Homeward*, about the history of Kibbutz Afikim, where he was born in 1968, reads like a requiem.

In this bygone world, people had often asked whether the kibbutz ought to serve as an *avant-garde*, charged with guiding Israeli society towards

military, or service in the top tiers of the state apparatus were now considered no less important than being a kibbutz member. The kibbutz still enjoyed symbolic prestige; it was still a destination of foreign VIPs. But the milieu was changing. Minister of Education and kibbutz member Aharon Yadlin observed that the kibbutz had lost its supremacy in Israeli public consciousness and that people now saw "the kibbutz member as strange and eccentric, and his creation [the kibbutz] as anachronistic."

The kibbutz was never meant to be a sect. Its connection to the broader Zionist movement was vital to its self-image. But how could it avoid being marginalized when Israeli society as a whole relinquished the pioneering ideals of the early days and came to resemble the western bourgeois world? The process was stealthy: slowly, almost imperceptibly, Israeli society changed colors. The evaporation of social idealism in the general society caused the kibbutz to regard itself, in the best case, as an oasis and, in the worst, as an anachronism. In this atmosphere, the kibbutz was destined to shrink: there would always be drop-outs, but it was doubtful that there would be newcomers.

After the War of Independence, kibbutz members had sought to improve their standard of living, not with luxuries (heaven forbid) but with simple commodities: reasonable living quarters with indoor bathrooms so as to dispense with communal showers and sprinting to WCs in the rain; some furniture for the private living quarters; and more freedom in spending the personal funds allotted to them. As families grew larger, members sought housing that would enable them to host their dormitory-dwelling children in the afternoon. The demands were modest, not exceeding the accommodations of a worker's family in town. This particular comparative measure was critical both existentially and ideologically. Too large a gap would have caused people to leave the kibbutz and move to town. And the kibbutz had always contended that communal life was not only more just and equitable, but also more efficient economically. In 1949, Joseph Sprinzak, a veteran labor-Zionist politician and the first speaker of the Knesset, but himself a city-dweller, sought to define sympathetically the outlook of the kibbutz's new standard-bearers: they are "capable of supreme self-sacrifice at any

moment but not prepared for the ascetic self-denial of monks or hermits.”

“Is it inevitable that the accumulation of property will lower the temperature of the vision?” demanded a kibbutz member. “Can only people without means and without professions create a communal society?” That is, can a commune be sustained only at a low standard of living? And is it destined to pass from the world with the onset of economic prosperity? Sixty years later, this question sounds prophetic.

The rise in living standards was accompanied by a shift in the balance between the individual and the kibbutz. More and more, members sought some privacy within the communal framework. Electric kettles showed up first in family apartments, then record players, radios, and refrigerators. The kibbutz’s common domain also grew steadily weaker: with the advent of television, participation in kibbutz assemblies fell. The children’s dormitories fought a losing battle. As a result, family members gathered together to eat in private homes instead of in the communal dining room. The home became a focus of identity. The bond to the kibbutz was no longer preserved by ideology, which had collapsed, but by inertia and a sense of belonging to place and family.

The kibbutz had to respond to its members’ intellectual ambitions and cultural aspirations as well. Young people’s paths to the university could no longer be blocked and they had to be allowed to study whatever they wanted. The slogan of “self-realization” (through living on the kibbutz) was replaced by “personal growth.” Individualism eroded group commitment. Old-timers felt the kibbutz slipping away from them. “We are witness to a shift in emphasis,” complained one veteran in 1970, “from kibbutz to economy, from vision to interests, from all-embracing moral standards to criteria of efficiency.” Members of the kibbutz’s third generation did not accept their parents’ doctrines, and demanded the freedom to shape their own lives. “We see nothing wrong with the development of kibbutz careerism,” a younger member declared. So as not to lag behind the rest of the country, the kibbutz industrialized. This facilitated a higher standard of living and, just as importantly, provided an entire stratum of young people with challenging, interesting work in industrial plants where instead of picking oranges they could design and develop new plastic products or precision metal parts. Agriculture lost its primacy as the main branch of the kibbutz movement. A whole way of rural community life, bound up with the celebration of nature holidays and the education of youth towards manual labor, lost its bearings.

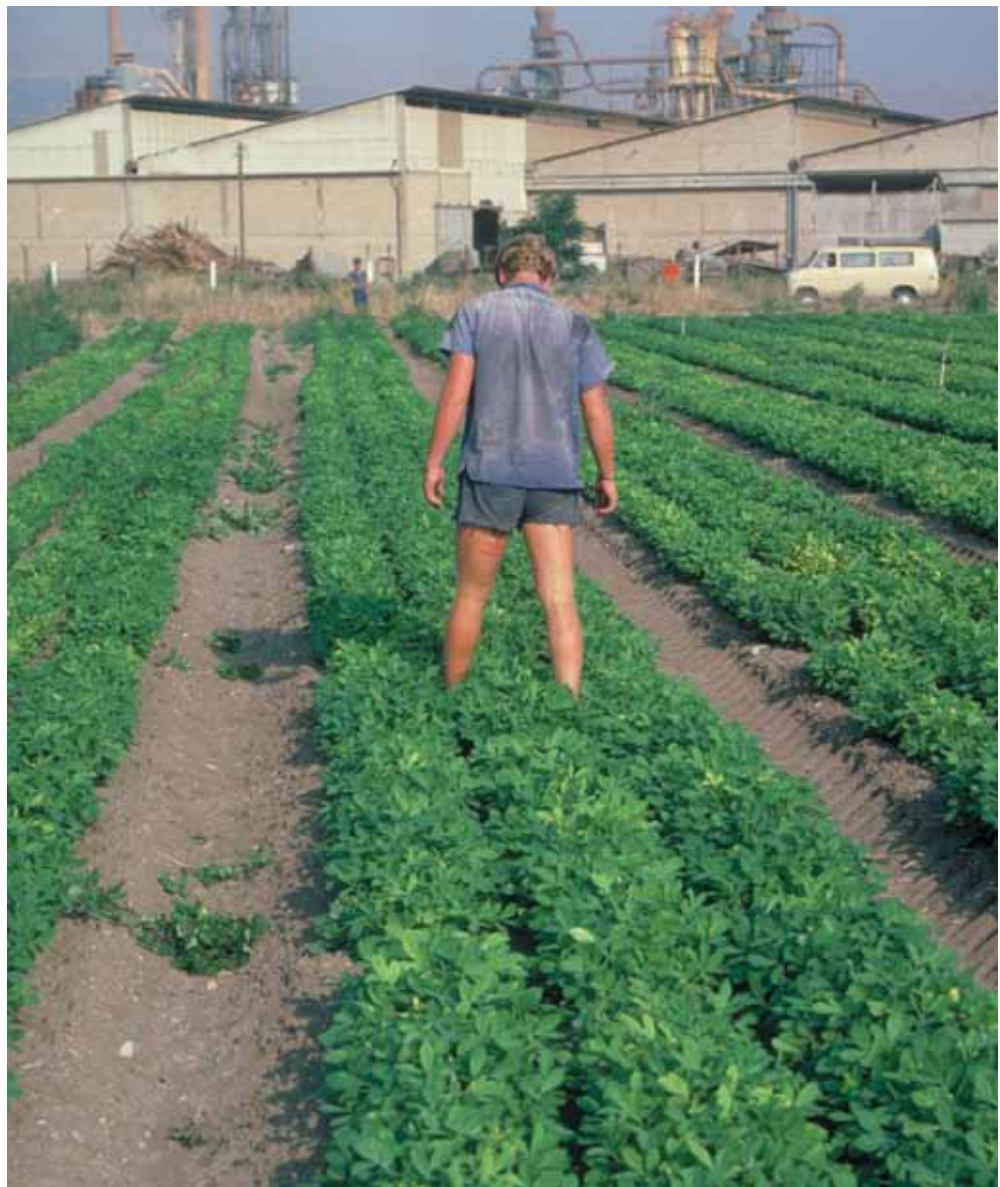
In November and December of 1971, the journalist Ya’ir Kotler published a series of articles entitled “The Kibbutz in the Era of Affluence” in *Ha’aretz*. He portrayed the kibbutz as wealthy, not truly egalitarian, petty bourgeois, disappointing to young and old, frustrating to those working for the members’ general good, imprisoned in the rhetoric of the past, and devoid of new horizons. The letters-to-the-editor columns of *Ha’aretz* and other newspapers were soon full of complaints and protestations: “Let’s see if you come close to living by the criteria you demand of the kibbutz.” “Look how much we give to the state, and the esteem in which the world holds us.” But there were also more balanced responses. One kibbutz member wrote

that, contrary to what some people may think, “the kibbutz is not a ‘nature reserve’, but an integral part of Israeli society” despite all of its problems. “Three and a half percent of the population cannot long withstand the general current of society.” No less than Kotler’s original articles, this statement pointed to an inherent paradox: to the extent that the kibbutz strove to reflect innovative trends in the economy and society, and sought to satisfy the third generation’s more individualistic ambitions, it moved away from its idealistic-pioneering image and lost its standing in Israeli society. The pioneering-national message melted away with the attainment of statehood.

The growth and consolidation of the kibbutz movement took place in the 1920s when the Jewish community in Palestine was pervaded by an al-

ment from exploitation to justice, a bold endeavor to refashion man and society. Different parts of the kibbutz movement lost their “Red fascination” at different times. The last ones sobered up after the USSR’s invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, but in the following decades, too, the USSR continued to serve as a yardstick for comparison. By the end of the 1980s, however, it was finally clear to everyone that the Russian experiment had failed in human, social, and political terms.

Even earlier, however, toward the end of 1960s, some young kibbutzniks had begun to look in an entirely different direction for inspiration. Members of the second and third generations of kibbutzniks began to explore traditional Jewish sources. At the center of this phenomenon was the journal *Shdemot*, which served as a platform for



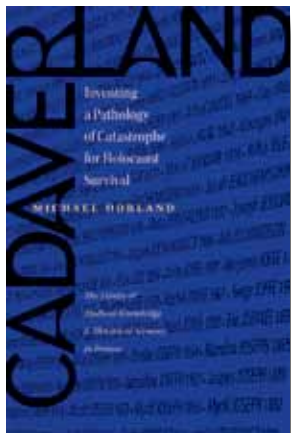
Kibbutz member works in the fields as industry encroaches. (Courtesy of Israel Ministry of Tourism.)

most messianic pathos, by hopes of revamping the world here and now. These hopes were connected with events in Russia—the country of origin of many kibbutz members and the guiding light of socialist actualization to which all lifted their eyes. This was of course an illusion, ending in one of the greatest disappointments in human history. But as long as the USSR sun still seemed to shine, the kibbutz in Palestine had a model against which to measure itself.

Even those who were repelled by Soviet brutality were, to some extent, reassured by the very existence of that huge state where a large-scale experiment was under way to put socialism into practice. They were fascinated by what they saw as a move-

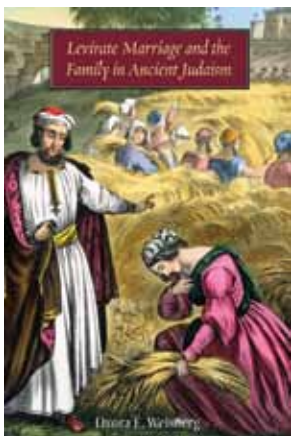
young people disillusioned with socialism, fed up with the spiritual emptiness of the kibbutz’s affluent society, and searching for God. Yearning for spiritual content and elevation, these people called for traditional holiday celebrations instead of the new rituals invented by earlier generations of kibbutzniks. They and others like them spurned the kibbutz *Haggadah*, which reflected contemporary culture and sometimes current events, in favor of a *Haggadah* to which God had been restored and which became increasingly similar to the traditional one. All of the wonderful quasi-biblical ceremonies devised by creative artists and teachers in the heyday of the kibbutz to express the new ex-

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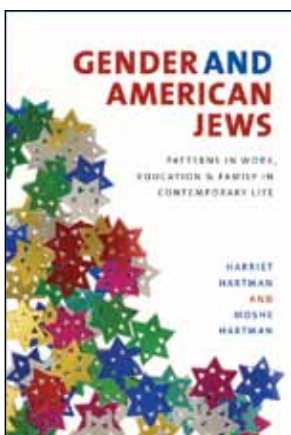
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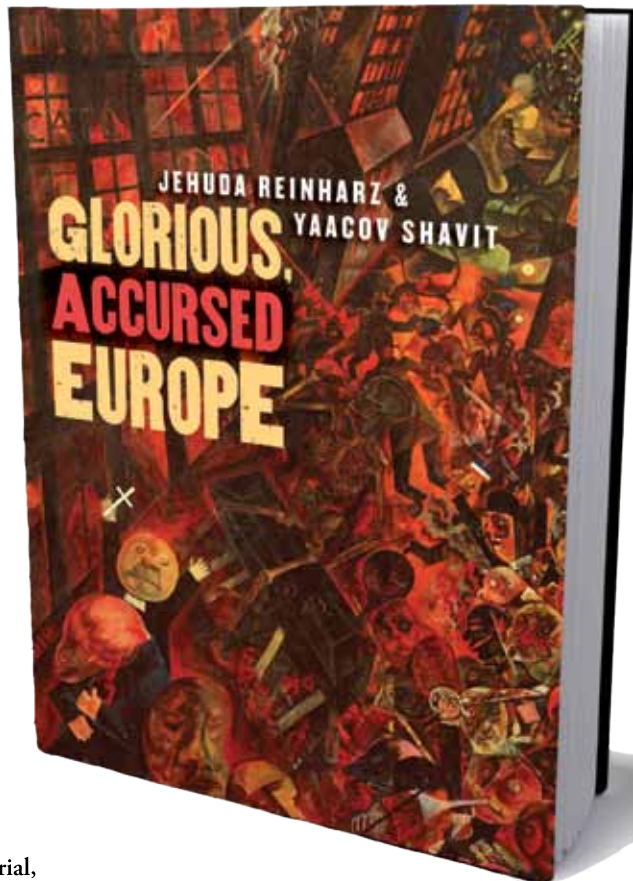
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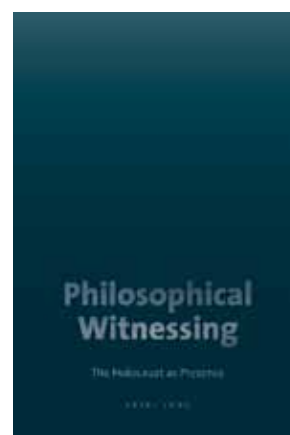
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perience of a village culture were now judged in terms of their fidelity to Jewish tradition. The ushering in of the Sabbath, including candle lighting, gathered momentum. The long-neglected holiday of Yom Kippur came back into the picture. The socialist bookshelf made way for the Jewish one. Kibbutz members took to studying Judaism at yeshivas or universities. All of this was a reaction to the exile of the Divine Presence from the kibbutz, as the poet Abba Kovner put it, an attempt to compensate for the death of the socialist utopia.

This new approach to Judaism was a component

sult, and pain of societal rejection. The egalitarian standard-bearers found themselves at the center of a class and ethnic confrontation.

Several months after the 1981 elections, Israeli television broadcast a program including a segment in which a member of Kibbutz Manara on the Lebanon border was seen swimming to his heart's content in the kibbutz pool. Menachem Begin, in an interview on Israel Radio on the eve of Rosh ha-Shanah, referred to this by then notorious kibbutznik and the pool as an arrogant expression of a culture of excess: "That man on a kibbutz, loung-

of considerable parts of the kibbutz movement in the late 1980s that disrupted this drab state of affairs. Affluence proved to have been temporary, perhaps even illusory. Yet a return to austerity and "making do with little" was not an option in late 20th-century Israel. The principles of egalitarianism and communalism were sacrificed on the altar of economic efficiency. The collapse of the USSR resonated powerfully: economics had defeated ideology, and the expert in social organization replaced the charismatic leader. The aspiration to reshape the world was replaced by a far more modest concern: to ensure a dignified old age, at least, for the generation that had given its all for the kibbutz.

Was the collapse of the kibbutz the result of poor management or did it point to the system's essential failings? Socialist ideologue Yitzhak Ben-Aharon believed to the end of his century-long life that in Israel, as in the USSR, the failure had not been inevitable, but rather the result of the incorrect application of correct principles. Since a large part of the kibbutz movement still believes in communal life and egalitarianism, and even succeeds economically, this assumption cannot be dismissed out of hand. At the same time, the inherent contradictions of raising a managerial class on the kibbutz were not merely accidental. The kibbutz spurned the idea of a socialism of poverty, holding up its economic success as proof of the success of its way of life and in order to ensure the loyalty of its next generation. But to society at large, the elevation of its standard of living made it seem that the kibbutz was shedding its pioneering spirit and, internally, it made the intellectual discourse sterile and created a comfortable, middle-class lifestyle. The result was an impoverished socialism. If Marcuse was right in 1972 that the kibbutz had "so far not turned bourgeois," he was not right for long.

All of this raises the question of the character of the third kibbutz generation. Its spokesmen have claimed that they are not prepared to accept the truths and norms of their parents, that they are entitled to choose their own way of life just as their parents once did. Does this attest to the success of kibbutz education or its failure? A great deal of creative thinking, as well as financial and intellectual investment, went into educating kibbutz children. Ultimately, communal education produced kibbutz members who take naturally to physical labor, excel at team-work, and are prepared to work hard. But it did not create a "new man" in the socialist sense, free of possessiveness, jealousy, and personal ambition. Education and ideology proved powerless against the influence of the surrounding society and, perhaps, against human nature, which turned out to be resistant to all attempts to redesign it. If the utopian project failed in the coercive world of the USSR, it could hardly succeed in the open, democratic society of Israel.

In the end, the fate of the kibbutz reminds us that idealistic projects are always shaped by the great events and movements of history. There are indeed moments when it seems as if the human will can change the course of history. But it is important to remember that Zionism was realized not only through the will of its champions and their sacrifices, but as the result of historical processes beyond its control: two world wars, colonialism and decolonization, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Holocaust,

of kibbutz culture that radiated outwardly to secular Israeli society. It awakened an interest in Judaism among many young people seeking an escape from the cold, modern world. Ironically enough, however, within the kibbutz itself it was a different story. Most people were not interested in such things. The intelligentsia, the spiritual elite who had established the Eyal Seminar, Oranim College, and the Kibbutzim College of Education, and who had studied "impractical" subjects such as history and Jewish philosophy, felt uneasy and frustrated with the ideological atrophy of the kibbutz. The economic managers, the active group that ran the industries supporting the kibbutz, were hardly thrilled by the steady growth of expenditure on education and higher studies not geared to kibbutz needs. Very likely, they felt that they were financing "idlers." Most kibbutz members sat on the sidelines, preferring to stay home and watch television rather than participate in discussions on the meaning of life on the kibbutz.

The kibbutz's status as a leading actor in Israeli society continued to decline through the early 1980s. It still played an important part in settlement and the IDF, and it still exhibited impressive economic viability. But gone were the days when kibbutz members featured prominently in the Knesset or the government. They did not find their place in the leadership of the Labor movement, much less act as catalysts in Israeli politics. The earthshaking victory of the Right in 1977 had turned their world upside down. But apart from bestirring themselves to campaign for the Labor Party in the following elections, they did not shake off their lethargy. It was as if the flame that had once burned in the hearts of their fathers had completely died out with the changing of the generational guard.

The kibbutz's supposed "Garden of Eden" had for some years harbored a snake: the metal-working, woodworking, electronics, and plastics industries established in the 1970s had revitalized the kibbutzim economically, but they rested on hired labor. The workers hailed from development towns, the managers from kibbutzim. This meant that there were now two opposing classes: employers, who devoutly upheld equality at home, but whose factories did not promote workers to management positions; and the children of those same Eastern Jews, who had been uninterested in joining the kibbutzim and grew up in development towns, like Kiryat Shmona, Yerucham, and Beit Shemesh, on the bitterness, in-

ing in the pool as if [you were watching] ... some American millionaire and talking with a good deal of condescension? Did I sit at that swimming pool? I have no such luxury." Begin's crude and demagogic use of the "ethnic card" reflected his awareness that the kibbutz, for all its faults and weaknesses, still posed an alternative to his new regime. Moreover, it still symbolized an idealistic society, the best of the Israeli nation. If Begin wished to rewrite the history of Israel and give voice to groups like his own Irgun, which had been excluded from the Zionist narrative, he had to undermine the symbolic keystone of the Labor movement—the kibbutz—by depicting its members as people living off the fat of the land while they exploited hired workers and denied these workers' children admission into kibbutz schools.

The Prime Minister's words created a media storm. The kibbutzim had some passionate defenders. "You obliterate the kibbutzim, you obliterate Israeli identity," wrote the journalist and novelist Amos Keinan. "The kibbutz does not belong only to the kibbutz, only to the Labor movement, but is an asset to all Israel, to the Jewish people as a whole, and one of the wonderful expressions of Jewish genius." Other leading journalists and writers rushed to the kibbutz's rescue and Begin was quick to apologize, though he termed the torrent of retorts condemning him "hysteria." Nonetheless, the damage had been done. In vain did kibbutz economists pull out numbers to show that they did not enjoy economic privileges. In vain did they list all the things kibbutz members had done on behalf of development towns. In vain did they explain that it was every kibbutz, not every kibbutz member, that had a swimming pool. The image of the rich, patronizing Ashkenazi kibbutznik was fixed in Israel's internal discourse on Eastern Jews.

Kibbutz members were deeply pained by this campaign of delegitimization. Where had they erred, they asked themselves. Could things have been done differently? If so, how? Martin Buber's famous definition of the kibbutz as an experiment that had not failed was repeated again and again, as if it were a magical formula with restorative powers. Certainly, the kibbutz did not quite fail—as a way of life it continued to be a symbol and an example to emulate. But neither did the excitement of the pre-state period return, except perhaps in wartime or on kibbutzim facing security dangers. In normal times and on calm kibbutzim, it was life in town that appeared interesting, innovative, and challenging.

Ironically enough, it was the economic collapse

The principles of egalitarianism and communalism were sacrificed on the altar of economic efficiency.

the Cold War, and other defining world events without which it is doubtful that any demonstration of Zionist “will” or kibbutz idealism would ever have prevailed. It was realized in an era in which states fought for their very existence and nations stood on the brink of the abyss. In this turbulent era, there was room for worldviews that regarded the community and the nation as the bases of human existence, and private life, comforts, and personal growth as secondary to the needs of the group. However, individual and general interests intersected only in times of massive emergency. In the absence of any such emergency over the past sixty years, new winds have blown away old ideas and fashions. If the Zionist idea had been born today, it would not

have caught on. Herzl’s “If you will it, it is no legend” has symbolically evolved into current Tel Aviv graffiti featuring a picture of the founding father and the words: “No will, no way.”

The same is true of the kibbutz. To be sure, the economic collapse of the 1980s could have been avoided. But it was impossible to prevent the decline in the kibbutz’s stature, both in the state and in the eyes of the kibbutznik. The disappearance of national-pioneering tasks had slowly dissolved any sense of urgency; constant attrition and the inability to attract new members had undermined self-confidence; and processes beyond the kibbutz movement’s control had produced enormous changes in the public and social climate.

But the story of the kibbutz has not necessarily reached its end. Although the movement has declined over the past sixty years, it has by no means disappeared. Nor has its intellectual legacy been forgotten or rendered obsolete. One can readily imagine that Israel might, in the future, face the sort of emergency that could revivify the kibbutz movement, or perhaps stimulate the creation of something new and different that will nevertheless draw upon its heritage.

Anita Shapira is Professor of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University (emerita) and Senior Fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute. In 2008, she received the Israel Prize in History.

The Poet from Vilna

BY RUTH R. WISSE

On the 6th of June, 1959, I arranged a rendezvous for the Yiddish poet Avrom Sutzkever, who was then on his maiden visit to North America. Unable to get a visa for the United States, he had come on a speaking tour of several Canadian cities, spending most of his time in Montreal, where I was living at the time. Quite a number of his friends who had known him before the war and writers who wanted to meet him for the first time made the trip across the border, swelling the audiences for his public lectures and readings. But the meeting I set up for him was to be secret and private. On the agreed morning, my husband Len and I drove Sutzkever to the Montreal airport where we picked up his visitor and then took them both to a cottage we had booked at La Chaumière, a secluded lodge in the foothills of the Laurentian Mountains. Once we saw them settled, we drove back to the city, returning the following afternoon to execute the plan in reverse.

Sutzkever’s clandestine visitor was Max Weinreich, linguist and historian of the Yiddish language, who had been his mentor in Vilna before 1939. The two men had not seen one another in twenty years. When the Germans invaded Poland, Weinreich happened to be attending a conference in Denmark with his elder son, Uriel. Father and son left for the United States, where Max took time off from his Yiddish scholarship to write *Hitler’s Professors*, documenting the participation of some of Germany’s most distinguished thinkers in the Final Solution. Meanwhile, Sutzkever and his new bride Freydke had been incarcerated with some 80,000 fellow Jews in the double ghetto that the Germans set up soon after they occupied Vilna in the summer of 1941. They were among the few who survived the massacres and deportations, reaching Moscow in March 1944, Paris (via Vilna and Lodz) in 1946, and Tel Aviv in 1947.

“It is true that we deal in words, each of us in his fashion,” Weinreich wrote to Sutzkever when they established a correspondence after the war, “but it doesn’t require words to express what we feel for one

another.” It was Weinreich who had asked that their meeting be private so that they could spend their short time together without fanfare or interruption.

Len and I had met Sutzkever two years earlier, during our honeymoon in Israel, and I was now shepherding him around Montreal, but I had not met Max Weinreich before. The three of us waited in the reception area, and when Weinreich emerged

The young poet, who had continued writing and reading his poems in the Vilna ghetto, had become a symbol of its creative resistance.

from the swinging doors, Len and I hung back as the two men greeted each other.

Their reunion was the most dramatic I was ever to witness. No more than a long hug betrayed their nervous joy, but I knew from the eagerness of some of the letters and phone calls leading up to this moment how badly they wanted to be face to face. Lithuanian Jews—as compared with their reputedly more warm-blooded and earthier Ukrainian, Galician, and Polish kinfolk—are known for their passionate reserve. Weinreich and Sutzkever never switched from the formal to the intimate second-person form of address. As Weinreich wrote in one of his letters, they would always have “weightier subjects” to talk about than their feelings.

Weinreich, nineteen years the elder, had founded in Vilna the Jewish scouting movement *Bin* (Bee), in whose magazine the nineteen-year-old Abrashe—as he was then known to his intimates—published his first poem, in 1932. Weinreich was also co-founding director of Vilna’s Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research), where Sutzkever came in the late 1930s to pursue his interest in Old Yiddish literature. When they had last seen one another, Sutzkever was transposing the early epic, *Bove Bukh*, into modern Yiddish, and Weinreich was touting Vilna’s talented emerging poet as one of the YIVO’s best fellowship students.

Now, the seniority appeared to be reversed. For one thing, Sutzkever had *been there*. Among my parents’ friends I had noticed how those who had survived the war in Europe were treated as valued messengers from the beyond. “I saw Nadushka right before the February roundup,” “Berl was still alive the day the SS came to pick up Wittenberg.” “The child was already skin and bones.” “Their farmer betrayed

them.” In general, refugees occupy a lower social status than settled immigrants, but in this case the testimony of those who came to be known as *survivors* often lent them authority that far exceeded that of earlier arrivals. And Sutzkever was more than such a witness. The young poet, who had continued writing and reading his poems in the Vilna ghetto, had become a symbol of its creative resistance.

On the strength of his reputation, he and his wife had been airlifted from occupied Poland to Moscow, where he wrote *In vilner geto*, an itemized account of the horrors of the Final Solution in Vilna. The Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg convinced the Kremlin to have Sutzkever testify on behalf of Russian Jewry at the Nuremberg Trials. A clip of him refusing the court’s invitation to be seated is available on YouTube. He delivers his testimony standing at attention like the soldier he could not be during the massacres he is describing. Of the aftermath of one roundup he says, “It looked as if a red rain had fallen.”

As part of his work in the ghetto, Sutzkever had organized the concealment of the most precious materials in the YIVO archives. After the war, he defied Soviet prohibitions and arranged for their transfer to Weinreich in New York. The student was now more experienced than his instructor in what the world had to teach.

I was twenty-three at the time of their meeting, two years married, two years out of college, working as Press Officer for the Canadian Jewish Congress, under whose auspices I had arranged Sutzkever's Canadian visit. I had no idea what I "wanted to do with my life," though that weekend I wished for nothing more than to act as go-between for these two men. *Vilne* was my ancestry no less than theirs. My maternal grandmother, Fradl Matz Welcher, had run a publishing house in Vilna when it was still part of the Tsarist empire. My mother was raised in Vilna's modern Yiddish and Hebrew culture when the city was Polish between the World Wars, and my father was class of 1929 in chemical engineering from Vilna's Stefan Batory University. When my grandmother contracted tuberculosis, her doctor was Tsemakh Szabad, about to become Max Weinreich's father-in-law. On one of his last visits, the doctor said, "You can't patch up silk." This intended compliment to my grandmother's refinement my then-fifteen-year-old mother correctly heard as a death sentence. She never forgave the good doctor his diagnosis. I myself had never been to Vilna, yet thanks to stories I had been hearing since childhood, I felt I knew the "green bridge" across the River Viliye as well as I did the one across the St. Lawrence seaway.

Shortly after that day spent ferrying my betters, Sutzkever asked me what I was planning to do in the future, implying that my job at the Canadian Jewish Congress was not commensurate with my abilities. Flattered by an assessment I fully shared, I said I would probably pursue a graduate degree in English literature. "Why don't you study Yiddish literature?" he asked. I laughed, "And what would I do? Teach Sholem Aleichem?" Those words were no sooner blurted out than I realized how I had insulted Sutzkever and the culture in which I had been raised. I had been making arrangements with a local impresario, Sam Gesser, for a Folkways recording of Sutzkever reading his poems: why, then, should I have questioned the status of Yiddish literature? I had been reading Sholem Aleichem since I was in grade school, so why doubt that he could be

taught—or taught by me? When I tried to explain to Sutzkever that universities did not include Yiddish in their curricula, he informed me that Max Weinreich was in fact teaching Yiddish at City College and that his son, Uriel, ran a graduate program in Yiddish at Columbia University where one could study both literature and linguistics.

The next day, I called Columbia to see how soon I could begin. Uriel arranged for my admission to

Weinreich and Sutzkever exuded potency—the quality that I had always associated with Yiddish.

the doctoral program in English and Comparative Literature, with Yiddish as my main secondary field. My husband supported my decision, and for pocket money I got a job teaching Jewish Sunday school in a suburban synagogue. I fancied myself independent, like those young men in 19th-century novels who go to the big city to seek their fortunes. It never occurred to me that during the two men's time together, Weinreich might have shared his concerns about the lack of students, or that Sutzkever might have been serving as his recruiter.

As it turned out, Uriel was on leave in Israel the semester I came to Columbia, so he arranged for his father to conduct a private weekly tutorial for me, his only graduate student in Yiddish literature. "Ruth Wisse has arrived," Max Weinreich wrote to Sutzkever in January 1960; "we will be devoting a semester to Mendele (the Yiddish and Hebrew writer, Mendele Mocher Sforim). "She is the kind of student *vos 'bagert'* and she has a feeling for literature and good common sense." *Bagern*, like the German *begehren*—a word Weinreich placed in quotation marks—means to desire, to crave. Students are sometimes said to crave learning, but used as it is here, without an object, the verb suggests that I must have seemed hungry for more than literature.

He was probably right. There was more erotic adventurism in my decision than the common sense for which he gave me credit. These two men were tested in a way that my coddled cohort of friends could never be. Giving not a thought to the practical outcome of my decision, I wanted to prove myself at least as daring as they were.

Weinreich and Sutzkever exuded potency—the quality that I had always associated with Yiddish. It was maddening in the years that followed to hear people say, upon learning what I studied, something like, "Oh, I spoke it with my grandmother," or, "Isn't Yiddish a dead language?" I never took the trouble to explain that I was attracted by the virility of Yiddish, whose exemplars were so much grittier than Shelley, a writer I was studying simultaneously, and livelier even than Samuel Johnson, then my favorite British author. It was the *youthfulness* of Yiddish that appealed to me. At Columbia, I worked on the literary group *Yung Vilne*, of which Sutzkever had been a member, and my first book on Yiddish literature was on the group's New York counterpart, *Di Yunge*.

Reading about the Second World War, I concentrated not on Jews who were led "like sheep to the slaughter" but on the songs of Leah Rudnitski, the heroic feats of Abba Kovner, the soup kitchen Rochel Auerbach ran in the Warsaw ghetto, and Yitzhak "Antek" Zuckerman's exploits on the Aryan side. These people had all been under the age of thirty.

Grittier than Shelley: When speaking of the war, Weinreich insisted we say not *Nazis*, but *Germans*. "One does not refer to international conflicts by political parties, but by the countries that fought them: This war was prosecuted by *Germany*." As a graduate of the University of Marburg, Weinreich was sometimes consulted by post-war German scholars. He told me he never entered into correspondence with anyone from Germany without first asking for a full account of the person's actions during the war.

We would have these conversations after our weekly tutorial over dinner at a Chinese restaurant on Broadway near 125th Street, where he and the waiter discussed distinctions between dumplings and *kreplakh*. After dinner, in the late wintry hours, I accompanied him to his subway stop at Lenox Avenue; we were usually the only white people on the bustling street. Only later did I realize that my teacher was blind in one eye, courtesy of anti-Semitic students who had attacked him in Vilna—and that this builder of institutions and author of the 1937 social science study, *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt* (The Way to Our Youth), was undertaking this weekly effort for the sake of a single student.

As for Sutzkever's own nerve, the first book of his poems he gave me, *Ode to the Dove*, contained this "Song of the Lepers," from a cycle inspired by a visit he had made to South Africa:

Warrior, dip your arrows in our blood,
The enemy will lose his feet.

Our blood is not from father-mother
But God's spit in crippled limbs.

When we die, the earth will boil like sulfur
Our blood can set water afire.

Warrior, dip your arrows in our blood
Whoever is struck—will not live.



Avrom Sutzkever and Ruth R. Wisse in Montreal, 1959. (Photo by Hertz Grossbard, courtesy of Ruth R. Wisse.)

Merely touched by its shadow—he will not live.
If the arrow misses its target—the fire endures.

Lightning birds in high nests of thunder
Singing, fall dead into the abyss.

We ourselves, we have no fingers,
We cannot rush the enemy—

Warrior, dip your arrows in our blood.

The leper-pariahs who turn their disfiguration into the deadliest of weapons are taking aim at an enemy otherwise beyond their reach. Accursed, they curse. Condemned, they condemn. Despised and feared, they deliver their sentence of death. The song reminded me of the closing lines of the 137th psalm, where the captive Jews of Babylonia charge others to wreak the vengeance they cannot exact on their own. The leper colony Sutzkever visited in Africa had obviously reminded him of the ghetto, but where was the poet in relation to this poem? Was he the avenging warrior whom the lepers urge to dip his arrows in their blood, or was he one of the powerless, inciting others to wreak vengeance on their behalf?

Because both Weinreich and Sutzkever godfathered my Yiddish studies, I became aware of how differently they assessed the future of our common project. Weinreich's confidence waned over the next decade, or more precisely, until his death in 1969, as Sutzkever's grew. This was certainly not due to any competition between them. In fact, what drew my attention to the asymmetry of

their expectations was the intensity of their mutual regard. One often spoke to me of the other with the same ardor they had displayed in Montreal. Nor did the difference in age seem decisive. In many respects, Weinreich was exceptionally youthful; I might have said about him, *er bagert*. He headed an apparently thriving institution in opulent America and was engaged in the culmination of his life's work—the definitive history of Yiddish from its origins in Western Europe, a subject independent of the fate that befell the speakers of the language. By contrast, Sutzkever occupied a small office in a Tel Aviv government building, working under a daily burden of grief—as one of his poems puts it—to keep the dead from dying.

During my years at Columbia, the YIVO in New York appeared to be the thriving successor of its destroyed Vilna branch. My favorite haunt was the reading room on the second floor of its building at 1048 Fifth Avenue (now the Neue Galerie, which I have never had the heart to visit). I enjoyed the heavy traffic inside the building, the permanently harried state of Dina Abramowitz who oversaw the library, and the steady rise and fall of its dumb waiter bringing documents to and from the archives below. In 1960-61, the annual conferences drew standing-room-only crowds. But Sutzkever saw things differently, or perhaps Weinreich took him into his confidence. He regretted that Max had not accepted the chair in Yiddish that the Hebrew University of Jerusalem offered him in 1952. When I asked Weinreich about this, he said that not having contributed to the building of Israel, he was not entitled to accept its bounty, but he may also have preferred to head

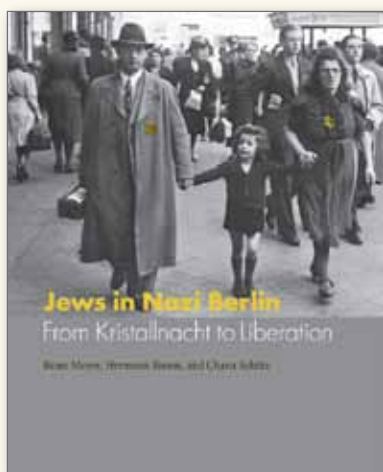
his own institution in New York, where his wife and sons had already been resettled and where he now belonged as he had once belonged in Vilna.

But as the time approached for publication of the *History of the Yiddish Language*, I began to share Sutzkever's doubts about whether Weinreich had truly succeeded in grafting a strong branch of Jewish Vilna in New York, and about his own assessment of what he had achieved. The complete *History* came to four volumes—two of text and two of footnotes. When the YIVO's Board of Directors tried to persuade the author to publish only the text, as a cost-saving measure, Weinreich was as bitter as I ever heard him. He said that in any case his work would have only ten readers—who would, however, be precisely the ones to want the notes.

Sutzkever happened to be in New York during the negotiations. Infuriated by this snub to the world's leading Yiddish scholar, he accompanied Weinreich to the board meeting, ostensibly as a guest, and berated the members for basking in the glory of their office while nickel-and-diming the man who earned it for them. I had no way of knowing if Sutzkever was reporting on how things really happened at the meeting, but both men credited *him* with securing the funding for all four volumes. Weinreich thenceforth spoke of his champion as a *mentshn-kener*, someone more adept than he was at dealing with people.

I don't think that Sutzkever understood people any better than Weinreich did. Any attentive reader of Sutzkever will recognize how little insight he even *attempts* to offer into any soul but his own. He seemed rather to know his own strength, certain that he could set wrongs right. The preeminence he

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Jews in Nazi Berlin

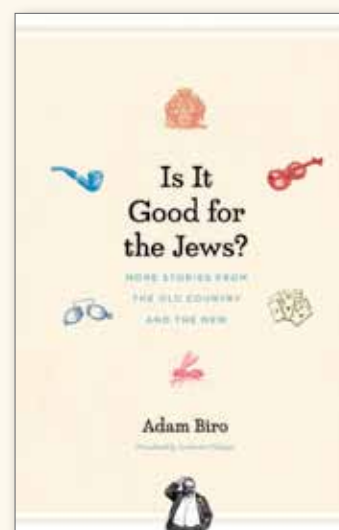
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ascribed to poetry persuaded him that he had supernatural powers, and no doubt this confidence gave him more than ordinary influence over others.

He, Freydlke, and their infant daughter, Rina, arrived in Tel Aviv in 1947, shortly before Israel's independence. Food was rationed, Arab armies were poised to invade, the provisional Jewish government

Because both Weinreich and Sutzkever godfathered my Yiddish studies, I became aware of how differently they assessed the future of our common project.

had its hands full, dealing with the British blockade of arriving refugees on one and resettling those who made it through on the other. Exigencies of absorption and defense ratcheted up the importance of consolidating Hebrew as the common language of incoming Jews from east and west. Sutzkever, however, was bent on founding a Yiddish literary journal. He was warned that the odds against getting financial support were greater than they had been against his survival in the ghetto, but took that as proof that he would prevail. With the help of Zalman Shazar, who would later become the third President of Israel, he secured the financing he needed from the Histadrut, the Federation of Labor, and in 1949 started up the journal *Di goldene keyt*, named for the golden—unbroken—chain of Jewish tradition.

For the next fifty years, Sutzkever's Yiddish quarterly was the central meeting point for a dispersed and depleted literary community. Around him there gathered a new group of poets and writers, *Yung Yisroel*—Young Israel. The American modernist Yiddish poet I.L. (Judd) Teller, who had stopped writing verse at the start of the Second World War, credited Sutzkever for his return to it. *Di goldene keyt* helped to defuse the conflict between two Jewish languages, enticing some Hebrew writers into Yiddish and raising the profile of Israeli culture in Yiddish. With the help of the Tel Aviv municipality, Sutzkever established a prize for Yiddish named for the poet Itzik Manger, who settled in Israel before his death.

Sutzkever liked to tell the story (which has been claimed by others) of being stopped on a stroll through the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Meah Shearim by a small boy who asked him why he wasn't wearing a hat. "The sky is my hat," he answered smartly. "Too small a head for such a large hat," the child replied. Actually, Sutzkever shared the child's sense of proportion in national as well as metaphysical terms. From the moment he arrived in the country, Sutzkever drew inspiration from the land, by which I mean not only its people, and not only the idea of "a third Jewish commonwealth," but also its wadis and animals and stones.

I had come to know something of this first-hand, before the rendezvous in Montreal, back in the summer of 1957, which Len and I spent in Israel. We had married in March of our graduating year—I from McGill University, he from the Université de Montréal Law School—and decided to go to Israel for what Yiddish calls the "kissing weeks." We were mostly in Tel Aviv, rooming (on Sholem Aleichem Street!) with a family my parents had known in Europe, but we explored as much of the country as we could. The poet Melekh Ravitch, with whom I had read Yiddish literature in Mon-

tréal, had provided an introduction to the well-known Avrom Sutzkever.

I dutifully called him shortly after we arrived. He was correcting proofs, and suggested we join him at the publishing house. Emerging to greet us, he looked just like the person in the photograph Ravitch had shown me, a trim man with a neat moustache,

in white short-sleeves, wearing a cap against the sun. From behind glasses, the blue eyes gripped us, seeing and taking note. Apparently satisfied, he invited us to attend a wedding with him and his wife the next night. Len and I were incredulous. We had spent anxious weeks before our wedding paring down lists of relatives and friends, yet here was an almost-stranger inviting us on the spot to a wedding of children of friends who were "certain," he assured us, to welcome us. His wishes, it seemed, were everyone's command, and soon became ours as well.

Shortly afterward, on a visit to the Sutzkevers' apartment, Len and I described what we had already seen of the country and mentioned a planned road trip to Eilat. Sutzkever proposed a slightly different route: Why not drive to Ein Gedi—the oasis near the Dead Sea where David had hidden from an irate King Saul? He and his daughter Rina, by now a teenager, were eager to see the area and could join us on our expedition. Before we knew it, we were discussing dates for the upcoming trip. When we later ran this by Didi, the son of the family with whom we were staying and our companion-guide on these travels, he was less enthusiastic. Having been through the army, he knew the terrain and was worried. The secondary roads past Beersheva were poorer than the highway to Eilat. One needed military permission to drive to Sodom. Civilian vehicles were probably not allowed near Ein Gedi, which was virtually at the border with Jordan. Five people in a car (this was before air conditioning) might not be comfortable driving through the desert in the middle of summer. Where would we stay in Beersheva or in Sodom or in Ein Gedi? There were no hotels.

But if Didi had served in the army, Sutzkever had survived the Vilna ghetto. All obstacles swept away by his enthusiasm, we rented a car and set out, with Len driving, Sutzkever riding shotgun, Rina and Didi in back with me in the middle. There being no hotel rooms in Beersheva, the five of us shared a huge room in a sheikh's house with beds along the walls, dormitory style. Long after the others were asleep or pretended to be, Sutzkever asked me to go on telling him all I knew about the Yiddish writers of Montreal. The next morning, we consulted the police about the route before ignoring their warning not to proceed without military escort. The sight of Sodom when we reached it at midday called to mind the punishment heaped upon it in Genesis 19. A soft-drink and sandwich stand squatted at what looked like the end of the earth.

In sum, all of Didi's qualms had proved justified. But, thankfully, Sutzkever's nerve prevailed. At the solitary gas pump a young man introduced himself as a member of the kibbutz at Ein Gedi, offering to act as our guide in exchange for a lift. The road? No

problem. Accommodations? The kibbutz would be glad to have us. We could swim in the fabled oasis pool and visit King David's cave. Long before we reached our destination, our guide confessed his deceit. The "road" was only a jeep path over rough terrain. He had missed yesterday's scheduled transportation and had we not come along, he would have had to wait another two days for the next van. But he did know the route, and once we reached our destination we were indeed given a short tour of the kibbutz, including a swim in the fabled pool and visit to the cave, supper in the common dining hall, and five outdoor cots for the night. As we lay down under the stars our hitchhiker came to advise us that it would be best for the tires if we started out before sunrise the next morning.

I have not been back to Ein Gedi since then, except in Sutzkever's poems recalling the trip. Naturally, he had felt a kinship with the psalmist "behind the waterfall in David's cave," inspired to write his own song, "A Mizmer in Ein Gedi," about the place where

I walk inside your veins.
My heart beats in yours.
I am a prayer dressed in wounds
Like a tree
arrayed with birds in a storm.

But the best of that trip was yet to come. Though we missed breakfast, we were rewarded by wondrous sights—clusters of cranes at the edge of the water and young deer prancing across a still and empty landscape. There was nothing manmade on the horizon. We drove as slowly as we could, so as to be less intrusive than we already were, and because we knew ourselves uncommonly blessed.

When I began studying Sutzkever's poetry, I realized that he had actually already visited the shore of the Dead Sea once before. One of my favorite poems, "Deer at the Red Sea," was composed in 1949. It also dawned on me that since he did not drive, Sutzkever always had to arrange such trips more or less like the kibbutz member who needed a ride. He could not see the land without transport, and it was imperative that he grow intimate with the land.

Sutzkever's translators, even Benjamin and Barbara Harshav, who have supplied what is so far the largest selection of Sutzkever in English, and his biographers, even the incomparable Abraham Novershtern, who has produced the most reliable overview of Sutzkever's life and writing—indeed, all who have written about the poet to date—inadvertently slight his poems of Israel. This is understandable given the more obvious drama of his pre-Israel life and the greater rhetorical force of his earlier verse. But Sutzkever started out as a poet by finding the signature of the Eternal in nature, and the discovery of nature in Israel was the corollary of that intuition. When he accompanied the army into the Sinai in 1956, he was also getting to know the landscape. He even navigated the cafés of Tel Aviv like an explorer of suns and shades. He drew much strength from the land—in this sense most differently from Max Weinreich who had been imbued in his Vilna youth a love of his physical surroundings but formed no similar attachment to New York. Sutzkever is one of Israel's modern psalmists. Were I choosing a thesis topic today, I would start with the Dead Sea

poems and trace his discovery of the land.

For my Master's thesis at Columbia in 1961, I translated and wrote a commentary on a series of Sutzkever's prose poems, *Green Aquarium*, that recalled the final days of the ghetto and the kinds of courage that Jews manifested in its aftermath: A partisan and Polish Catholic nun bring a dead boy to burial in the middle of a rain-soaked night; a partisan and his lover are separated and reunited in the swampy forest; two lovers conduct a romance from neighboring chimneys. These works are all about beating back death. Several years before I was to hear Theodor Adorno's pronouncement that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," or to read the essay in which he contends that our whole world is becoming "an open-air prison," I was persuaded by Sutzkever's contrary definition of poetry as the only credible alternative to barbarism. Governed by an autonomous standard, impervious to the Germans' depravity or any corruption, poetry was for Sutzkever not another casualty, but rather the *antidote* to Auschwitz.

Teaching Yiddish literature over a lifetime, I have Sutzkever and Weinreich to thank for my profession, though nothing thereafter ever went quite as smoothly as my admission to Columbia. For a number of reasons, I returned to Montreal without completing a doctorate, and eventually began graduate work afresh in McGill's fledgling program in English Literature. Meanwhile, I stayed in touch with Max Weinreich and visited New York periodically to be guided by him on the Yiddish study that I was pursuing on my own. His death on

January 29, 1969 hit me much harder than his son Uriel's even less timely death had two years earlier.

When I learned the news, I took the night train to get to New York for the funeral. I was in a rage, as though Weinreich had died to spite me. Our next meeting had been scheduled—I had his postcard in my purse—but he had followed his son to the grave instead of remaining my tutor and friend. And the funeral *was* spiteful: Max had given orders that there was to be no prayer, no Yiddish *hesped* or English eulogy, no words or music. We mourners sat in the silence to which the deceased had condemned us. I suddenly understood something I had read in a story by Isaac Bashevis Singer. The expression *opshrayen a mes* is used to describe a woman who screams a corpse back to life. This expression had made no sense to me when I read it, but leaning over the casket I said aloud, "*Ikh vel aykh opshrayen fun toyt!*"—I will scream you back from death! For a moment I was convinced that my fury could overpower his too great willingness to die. Yet as he did not rise from his coffin, I joined one of the buses taking us to the cemetery and even shoveled some obligatory earth into his grave.

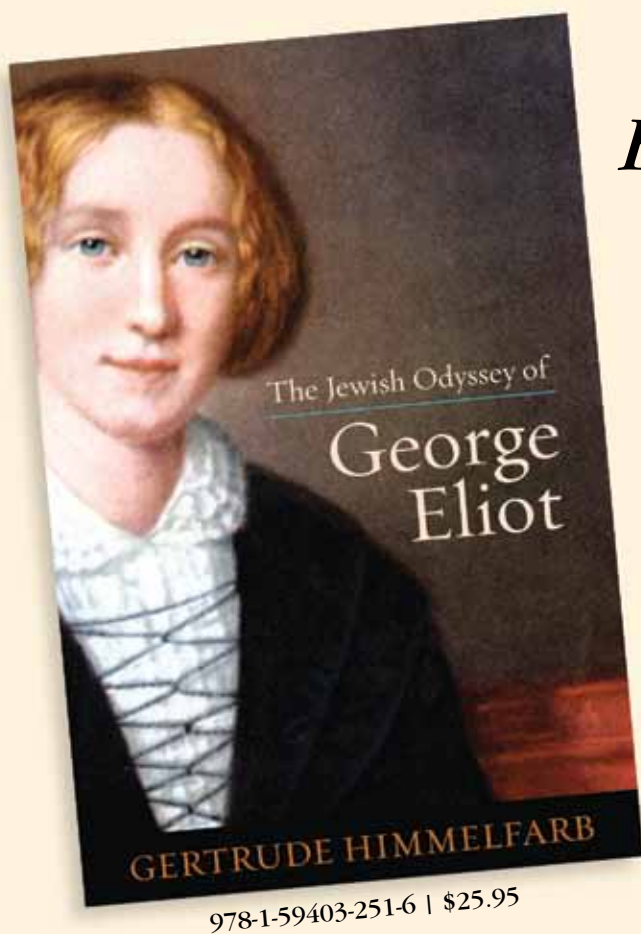
Sutzkever fought his despair to a better end. A recurring highlight of my visits to Israel was the prospect of one or more rendezvous with him at one of his favorite hangouts. When he could no longer navigate even the short distance from his apartment building to the nearest café, we would be served tea in his living room by a part-time housekeeper. Our last visits were at Beit Shalom, a supervised residence just a few blocks from a café on Dizengoff

that we once frequented. At the home he joked with attendants as he once had with the waitresses who used to reserve his favorite table. The staff respected and helped him maintain the fastidiousness of his dress. He suffered the indignities of a failing body with dignity, but he had not wanted to age, and did not reconcile himself to the process.

No official representatives of Israel's government attended Sutzkever's funeral on January 24 of this year. The poet would have been hurt by the slight. But President Shimon Peres was among dozens of notables at a large public commemoration held at the end of the month of mourning, and Dan Miron, a professor of Hebrew literature who has written splendidly about Sutzkever, informs me that the mayor of Tel Aviv intends to name a street after him. In one of his early poems, Sutzkever asks to be permanently "enfaced" in the radiance of Sirius, the morning star. I am sure he has been, but he may also soon be wryly pleased by his humbler enfacement in Tel Aviv.

I doubt that New York will name a street for Max Weinreich. Is it too much to hope that their two names might grace intersecting streets in their beloved Vilna, a city whose fame they will carry into history? Neither of them would have sought the honor, but should it come about, the city's fame will grow on their account.

Ruth R. Wisse is Martin Peretz Professor of Yiddish Literature at Harvard University. Her books include *Jews and Power (Schocken)* and a forthcoming edition of *The Glatstein Chronicles* (Yale University Press).



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YEHUDA HALEVI

by Hillel Halkin
Schocken, 353 pp., \$25

Yehuda Halevi is one of the great poets of the Western tradition and arguably the finest Hebrew poet between the Bible and the 20th-century, but it is difficult to convey his life and achievement to an English-reading audience. Ignorance, false preconceptions, and confusions abound regarding the medieval Spanish world in which he flourished: the distinctive social and cultural matrix of Halevi's poetry is not well understood, relations between Jews and Muslims at the time have too often been idealized, and the group identity of the Jews of medieval Iberia does not fit common stereotypes. The nature of Halevi's poetry is an even greater challenge. His technical virtuosity makes his poems extraordinarily difficult to translate. They are endlessly inventive in their word and sound-play, exquisitely musical, and constantly resourceful in their marshalling of biblical allusions in line after line.

Hillel Halkin has done a superb job in responding to these challenges in what is, in my view, his best book. *Yehuda Halevi* is Halkin's second foray into medieval Hebrew poetry. A decade ago, he published *Grand Things to Write a Poem on: A Verse Autobiography of Shmuel Hanagid*, about Halevi's great predecessor. Halkin is a translator and old-fashioned "man of letters" rather than an academic, but the scholarly thoroughness and rigor (both historical and literary) that he brings to bear in writing Halevi's biography are impeccable. He gives a lucid account of the emergence, in the latter part of the 10th-century, of a new Hebrew poetry that freely treated secular as well as religious subjects and that followed the qualitative versification, conventional tropes, and genre system of Arabic poetry. He also guides us through the political upheavals of the 11th- and 12th-centuries that drove Halevi from place to place.

The poet was born in Christian Spain, probably in Tudela, between 1070 and 1075. As a very young man, perhaps still an adolescent, he made his way to Granada in the Muslim south, where, in one of the most famous documented anecdotes in Hebrew literary history, he was befriended by Moshe ibn Ezra, the leading poet of the age, after a virtuoso improvisation in a verse competition at a drinking party. As Halkin vividly recounts the story, "the young man from Castile," when given the challenge of reproducing on the spot the intricate formal structure of a poem by ibn Ezra, not only did so flawlessly but "played repeatedly with its language, echoing it, reflecting it, and sometimes surpassing it while following its every step like a consummate dance partner."

After a few brief years of residence in Granada, Halevi, probably impelled by the invasion of the Almoravids from Morocco, began a period of wandering, eventually returning to Christian Spain and settling in Toledo. In Toledo, he supported himself as a physician, a profession for which, in Halkin's plausible account, he had no great love.

After more than three decades in Toledo, in 1040, Halevi left Spain, in a project that could have only been regarded as bizarre and misguided in his own time, for the Land of Israel, then in the hands of the Crusaders and possessing a meager Jewish population. The details of his last months have been much disputed by scholars, but Halkin does an excellent job of sorting out the facts. Halevi's ship disembarked at Alexandria in early September 1040. In

of the life from the existing evidence.

The book also offers a helpful account of the immediate and larger contexts of Halevi's career as well as of the later reception of his work. Against the common notion that this was a "Golden Age" of Hebrew poetry in which Arabs and Jews in Andalusia enjoyed the blessing of *convivencia*, or harmonious co-existence and mutual tolerance, he shows what serious historians of this time and place have long known: there were deep tensions between Arabs and Jews. Spanish Jews were on occasion subject to murderous pogroms, and though they drew from the riches of Arabic culture, the Muslims among whom they lived generally despised them. This attitude was richly reciprocated. Medieval Spanish Jews generally regarded Islam as, in Halkin's blunt words,

Yehuda Halevi abounds in brilliant translations of the poems, and Halkin has clearly taken great pleasure in producing them.

Egypt he was lionized and, indeed, fought over by competing hosts. After half a year, in which as his poems show, he was not insensible to the lushness and luxury of Egypt, he extricated himself from his importunate hosts and on May 7, 1141, departed by ship for Acre. As the documents Halkin canvasses indicate, he died somewhere in the Land of Israel about three months after his arrival there. The story of his being trampled by an Arab horseman at the gates of Jerusalem is no doubt apocryphal, though it vividly registers the devotion to the Holy Land that he expressed so memorably in his Songs of Zion.

Beyond this broad outline, the details of Halevi's life have to be teased out by inference, largely from hints in the poems. Halkin does this judiciously, though at least a few of his conclusions are necessarily conjectural. He proposes that Halevi had two children who died young, and a daughter who bore a grandson named after him and who was probably married to the son of the great poet and biblical commentator Abraham ibn Ezra. Halevi did not write about his wife, and Halkin infers from this that she did not play much of a role in his emotional life. This may well have been the case, but arguments from silence are always a little tricky. From the spectacular long love poem that begins "Why, my darling, have you barred all news," which Halkin justly rates as one of Halevi's finest poems, he concludes that the poet did have one early grand passion, but in the end was somehow separated from her. I would like to think so, too, though one must concede that there is a leap of inference in moving from poem to life and that even a poem as powerfully felt as this one might still have been an act of sheer poetic invention. Like many biographers, Halkin occasionally goes on to treat such conjectures as though they were established facts, though on the whole he is circumspect in building a picture

"an insult to human intelligence" for accusing Judaism of having fabricated a past about which the Jews alone possessed the authentic version.

Yehuda Halevi abounds in brilliant translations of the poems, and Halkin has clearly taken great pleasure in producing them. He has an apt sense for which are the finest poems. Such translation needs to be accompanied by commentary, and Halkin is consistently good in performing this task. His concise concluding comment on the famous poem that begins, "My heart in the East / But the rest of me far in the West" is exemplary: "It is a miniature marvel of balance in which opposites tug in different directions while remaining musically joined; an answer to a riddle that asks, what, though torn in two, remains whole; the last moment of equipoise in a man tensing his muscles to jump and to take Jewish history with him." That jump to the East, of course, will be recorded in detail in the last section of the biography.

The discussion of the poems is also quite helpful to the English reader in identifying many of the subtle and telling allusions to biblical texts. I noticed only one slip. In a poem written in Egypt in which Halevi begs his hosts to allow him to leave for the Holy Land, Halkin claims that the phrase "Let me travel to my Lord," *shalchuni ve-elkha la-adoni*, alludes to Moses' "let my people go" because the same verb is used. In fact, these words are a verbatim quote from Genesis 24:54, in which Abraham's servant implores Rebekah's family in Mesopotamia to let him go back to his master in Canaan, a more pertinent destination for the poem than the wilderness to which Moses is headed: "Do not hold me back ... send me off, that I may go to my lord."

The translation of these intricate and virtuosic Hebrew poems is a difficult undertaking, and Halkin

does an admirable job, producing English versions that seem to me preferable to Peter Cole's widely praised translations. The best of the translations exhibit a decorous eloquence, like this stanza from the elegy that may have been for Halevi's own daughter:

O daughter torn
From her mother's rooms!
What life have I left when,
Shaped from my soul,
She makes my tears flow
Like a spring from split stone?
How can she be so changed,
Once white as the moon,
That she now wears the earth
As her bridal gown,
Its sod the sweets
Of her wedding feast?
Bitter is my own misery,
For death has come between you and me.

In place of the monorhyme of the original, which is virtually impossible to reproduce in English, Halkin sensibly deploys, as he does often elsewhere, an irregular pattern of slant rhymes (stone-moon-gown) and almost-rhymes (sweets-feast). These hints of the musicality of the Hebrew reinforce the expressiveness of the English. At times, however, Halkin strains too hard for rhymes, producing odd or ungainly turns of phrase. In one religious poem, we encounter "Arabia's minions" who covet Israel's "beau," that is, her God. "Beau," which I suspect Halkin uses to get a near-rhyme with "sows" at the end of the line, is a mistake in register, carrying associations of Restoration comedy or antebellum Southern plantations. Similarly, in the love poem, "Why, My Darling, Have You Barred All News," Halkin gives us: "My heart, half sweetness and half bitterness, / Honeyed kisses mixed with hemlock of adieu, / Has been shredded by you into pieces, / and each piece twisted into curlicues." The first two of these lines are fine, but the shredding into pieces of the heart, and especially the curlicue, are something of an embarrassment. And yet, in this same poem, Halkin beautifully conveys the lovely force of the Hebrew in the following lines:

Between us lies a sea of tears I cannot cross,
Yet should you but approach its moaning waves,
They'd part beneath your steps,
And if, though dead, I heard the golden bells
Make music on your skirt, or your voice asking
how I was,
I'd send my love to you from the grave's depths.

The mostly iambic meter of this English version works very nicely. It is not necessary for Halkin to claim, in a justification for his own use of accentual-syllabic meters, that the medieval Hebrew poems exhibit regular patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables despite their deployment of ostensibly quantitative meters. It is perfectly true, as he says, that the adoption of quantitative verse from the Arabic was artificial because Hebrew does not intrinsically have an audible distinction between long and short vowels. Instead, the half-vowel *schwa* (like the "a" in "alone") and all its grammatical equivalents were conventionally defined as short syllables for metrical purposes. But poets attuned to the Arabic meters would surely have read the Hebrew in a

fashion that brought out the patterned sequences of short and long and that actually muted stress. (A small case in point from a familiar text: in the hymn *Adon Olam*, the only proper way to read the two words *azai melekh*, "then king," is *u - -*, which is one metrical foot, and not *u' u*, or as it is usually sung with a false stress on the last syllable to produce an iamb, *u' u*.)

As Halkin justly observes in contrasting his view of Halevi's last voyage with that of the American scholar of medieval Hebrew poetry, Raymond Scheindlin, "it is one of the measures of literary greatness that we see ourselves in it." For Halkin, who made the decision as a young man to move from America to Israel, the ultimate realization of Halevi's life was his determination in his last years to tear himself from "all the good things of Spain," *kol tuv sefarad*, and make his way to the

fall under the category called *ahavah*, the liturgical prelude in the morning service to the benediction "Blessed are You . . . who loves Israel." As Halkin properly notes, these poems are strongly inflected

As Halkin properly notes, these poems are strongly inflected by the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs . . .

by the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs, in which God is the lover and the people of Israel the beloved (though even in allegory, the sexiness of these biblical poems was not lost on Halevi). But there is also a strong carry-over from the secular love poems, shaped on Arabic models, in which the lovers have been painfully separated and the speaker (usually male), recalling the nights of rapture at some desert encampment, bemoans the separation. Some of Halevi's *ahavot* vividly individualize the abandoned beloved and endow her with an erotic psychology, representing her, for example, as masochistically reveling in her suffering and humiliation because, coming as they do from her lover, they alone give meaning to her life.

In one of Halevi's most memorable *ahavot*, the beloved begins with these words: "My love, have you forgotten how you lay between my breasts, / and how could you have let me be by slavers long oppressed?" At the end, after looking back on how she has been shamed and banished through the harsh stations of exile, she strikes an explicitly sexual note: "Give your strength to me, / and to you I'll give my loving." The last word, *dodim*, is drawn from the lexicon of the Song of Songs and obviously invokes the allegorical reading of that text, but, as Halevi was perfectly aware, it is a term that refers to lovemaking, not merely to an emotion of love. The messianic redemption is imagined in the poem concretely as a moment of sexual consummation: the divine lover, long absent, gives his strength to (or puts his strength into) his beloved, who

responds with welcoming rapture.

There is surely no single key that explains extraordinary achievement such as Halevi's, though sensual immediacy is one of his creative signatures. Hillel Halkin is no doubt aware of this characteristic, but his own emphasis falls elsewhere. In any case, his biography, with the translations it incorporates, gives us a vivid and persuasive sense of Yehuda Halevi that should make him more real and more understandable than he has been until now.

Robert Alter's most recent book is *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* (Princeton University Press).



A copy of Yehuda Halevi's poem "Mi Kamocha," printed in Venice by Juan DiGara in 1856.

Land of Israel. Halkin discusses this driving motive intelligently as it is expressed in both the poetry and in Halevi's famous philosophical dialogue, *The Kuzari*. He is careful not to represent it as a simple instance of medieval proto-Zionism. This is a plausible focus for defining Halevi's life and work, and I am not inclined to debate it. If there is an emphasis that might be added to Halkin's account, it is the rich sensuality that suffuses so many of the poems—those golden bells on the skirt of the beloved woman—religious as well as secular. Such sensualism sets him apart, at least in degree, from the other Hebrew poets of his era.

Many of Halevi's most brilliant religious poems

With Interest

BY YUVAL LEVIN

CAPITALISM AND THE JEWS

by Jerry Z. Muller

Princeton University Press, 272 pp., \$24.95

In November 2002, a prominent Al-Qaeda website posted a 4,000-word diatribe described as a letter from Osama bin Laden to the American people. In the course of the screed, which purports to explain the grievances of the Muslim world, bin Laden takes special care to lay out the reasons for America's moral inferiority. High among them, he writes, is the fact that:

You are a nation that permits usury, which has been forbidden by all the religions. Yet you build your economy and investments on usury. As a result of this, in all its different forms and guises, the Jews have taken control of your economy, through which they have then taken control of your media, and now control all aspects of your life making you their servants and achieving their aims at your expense.

Here was a compact summation of a centuries-old case for anti-Semitism, complete with the identification of capitalism with usury, the identification of usury with the Jews, and the assertion of a resulting Jewish conspiracy to dominate non-Jewish majorities through the exercise of economic, social, and political power. It showed that Islamism is not so disconnected from prior political and cultural extremisms. But it also evidenced the still thorny and complex relationship between capitalism and the Jews.

Much has been written on that subject through the years, by anti-Semites, by friends of the Jews, and, not least, by many Jewish writers—from Moses Mendelssohn to Milton Friedman. It is a subject riddled with mysteries and contradictions: Why did the decline of Christian prohibitions on usury make the Jews more rather than less resented for their economic prowess? Just why have Jews around the world in fact been such successful capitalists? Has that success helped or harmed the Jews' attachment to their religion? How could Jews be at once so closely identified with both capitalism and the assault on capitalism by socialism and communism? And what explains the exceptional persistence of the familiar tropes of anti-capitalist anti-Semitism—demonstrated by Bin Laden's charges?

These questions point to even deeper dilemmas regarding the social and cultural character of capitalism, and the inevitable scars and distortions wrought upon the Jewish soul by the struggle for survival in the Diaspora. It takes a scholar of uncommon broad-mindedness to take up such large problems, which combine economics, history, theology, and philosophy.

In his new book, *Capitalism and the Jews*, Jerry Z. Muller fully acknowledges that he has taken on a

daunting task. And rather than undertake a futile effort to be comprehensive, he approaches the subject from a few distinct angles, and attempts especially to counter some easy and commonly held assumptions. The result is an accessible, intriguing, and singularly perceptive little book.

Muller is a professor of history at The Catholic University of America and the author of several books on capitalism and the history of economics (most notably *The Mind and the Market*, published in 2002). He is certainly far more a scholar of capitalism than of the Jews, and his book generally uses the Jewish question as a lens through which to better understand the market economy and its social implications, rather than the other way around. But in the process, he clarifies the tension between the Jewish world and the modern world in a way that students of Jewish ideas will find very helpful.

He begins, like bin Laden, by looking at the identification of the Jews with usury. Moneylending was forbidden to Christians by the Church and therefore left open only to Jews in medieval Europe. This defined their identity in European thinking well into

become Jews," Karl Marx infamously wrote in 1844.

This view was further strengthened, as Marx's comment implies, by evidence that the Jews were thriving under capitalism. And indeed they were. Muller, with a keen historian's eye, brings to bear a mountain of evidence to illustrate Jewish advancement in those nations where capitalism took hold. This, he contends, in an argument indebted to Max Weber's famous account of the "Protestant Ethic," had more to do with Jewish culture than with medieval Jewish moneylending. "The life of mitzvot," he writes, "meant a style of life based on discipline, on the conscious planning of action . . . Jews came from a culture that favored nonviolent resolution of conflict, and that valued intellectual over physical prowess. All of this was a recipe for what economists now call cultural capital." And capitalist success is at least as much a function of cultural as of economic capital.

That success, of course, brought a further identification of capitalism with the Jews, and further resentment, especially when capitalism brought dislocation. As Muller shows, the response of the Jews to that resentment, and so to mounting anti-

Semitism, played a crucial role in giving shape to Jewish life in the 19th and early 20th-centuries.

Some Jews internalized the criticism and were driven into the arms of anti-capitalist movements, where they soon became prominent voices. But most, Muller argues, defended capitalist economics and the liberal politics that often came with them. This is not the image we generally have of the economic and political views of European Jews before the Holocaust, and perhaps the book's most significant contribution is Muller's careful parsing of the evidence to show that the vast majority of Jews in pre-war Europe supported pro-market liberal parties, and that openness to socialism (not to mention communism) was a decidedly minority view.

"The identification of Jews with capitalism was based on an exaggeration of the reality that

Jews really tended to be more successful capitalists," Muller writes. "The identification of Jews with Communism was grounded in the fact that while few Jews were in fact Communists, men and women of Jewish origin were particularly salient in Communist movements." It was their effectiveness, not their numbers, that made the Jews stand out in anti-capitalist parties.

But whatever the reason, they did stand out, and both before and after the Second World War, this meant that Jews were identified with communist movements—so that having been resented as the embodiment of capitalism, they now came to be



A 1531 woodcut depicting a farmer's visit to a Jewish moneylender, who sits at a desk with an abacus. (© Christel Gerstenberg/CORBIS)

the capitalist age. As capitalism advanced across the continent, Muller argues, anti-Semitism was often a surrogate for anti-capitalism, and vice versa. The new economic thinking was understood by some (especially among those most injured by its consequences) as essentially an extension of usury—of the making of money from money, and of the elevation of trade over work—all of which had long been associated with the Jews. Capitalism was therefore seen as a Jewish idea, a kind of conversion of Europe to Jewish ways of thinking. "The Jews have emancipated themselves insofar as the Christians have

hated as the enemies of it. As first Russia and then much of Eastern Europe came under communist domination, men and women of Jewish origin were prominent among the leaders of almost every communist regime, and local populations increasingly came to resent the Jews as their oppressors. As the Chief Rabbi of Moscow is said to have told Leon Trotsky (born Lev Bronstein): “The Trotskys make the revolution, and the Bronsteins pay the price.”

The Chief Rabbi of Moscow is said to have told Leon Trotsky (born Lev Bronstein): “The Trotskys make the revolution, and the Bronsteins pay the price.”

The response of some of the “Bronsteins” was of course to turn to Zionism. Oddly, Muller has almost nothing to say about the deep links between socialist idealism and the Zionist movement, though he devotes his final chapter to an analysis of the links between nationalism and capitalism. Far from a reversion to ancient blood ties in response to the displacement brought about by capitalism, he writes, nationalism was essential to bringing about the efficiency and order demanded by the capitalist economy. Strong central governments ruling cohesive nation-states are far more hospitable to orderly markets than are loose multi-ethnic empires, and the division of much of Europe into ethnic states was therefore an element of the larger process of industrialization and the evolution toward markets.

Just like the emergence of capitalism, and of anti-capitalism, this turn in European thinking also brought with it a wave of anti-Semitism. National-

ism left the Jews without a home, and in some places (above all Germany of course, and with it much of Europe when the Second World War came) in outright mortal danger, and worse.

In the end, the picture Muller paints is one of Jewish success against all odds—with every turn in the story providing fresh fodder for virulent anti-Semitism but also fresh paths to Jewish prosperity and prominence. Reactions against capitalism have

often taken the form of reactions against the Jews, and it is in those places where capitalism has been ascendant and harsh reactions rare (especially the United States and Britain) that the Jews have thrived most. Their fate, Muller suggests, has been closely tied to the fortunes of capitalism.

While he tells a gripping story, and illustrates his case with copious evidence and arresting insights, Muller does leave some holes, especially with regard to Jewish religious and cultural life. He seems to describe both Jewish capitalism and Jewish anti-capitalism as paths away from tradition. But in fact, the story of Jews in the age of capitalism has not simply been a story of increasing alienation from orthodoxy. Among the most interesting facets of that story are the means that Jewish communities have developed to take part in the economic life of the larger society while maintaining the coherence and integrity of their religious life. Almost entirely missing from his story, moreover, is the distinctly

Jewish critique of capitalism: the ways in which some Jewish moral teachings, especially the emphasis on justice drawn from the words of the prophets, have been employed in condemnation of the ethic of capitalism.

In his effort to highlight Jewish support for capitalism, Muller shows how the cultural capital of the Jewish community, combined with some powerful biblical injunctions to hard work and honest dealing, were important in giving form to what on the surface was a secular commitment to the ethic of the market economy. But he ignores the mirror image of that phenomenon: the ways in which echoes of the biblical injunctions to seek worldly justice were often plainly audible in the passion of Jewish socialists, even when they sought to couch their criticism of the market system in secular terms. Such echoes are, at least implicitly, still very much a part of many Jewish responses to democratic-capitalism in America, in Europe, and in Israel.

Capitalism and the Jews is, in short, more about the former than the latter, but Muller does not pretend otherwise. And by providing many valuable insights about the modern economy gleaned from the varied roles the Jews have played in its development, he also raises questions pertaining to Jewish thought and history that will no doubt be taken up by others.

In the meantime, in a lean and compact volume, Muller has offered a rich and valuable history filled with insights about the character of capitalism and the sources of anti-Semitism—both of which could hardly be more timely subjects.

Yuval Levin is the editor of National Affairs and a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

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Old-New Sabbath

BY MARTIN KAVKA

THE SABBATH WORLD: GLIMPSES OF A DIFFERENT ORDER OF TIME

by Judith Shulevitz

Random House, 288 pp., \$26

In 2003, Judith Shulevitz published an article in *The New York Times Magazine* called “Bring Back the Sabbath.” It was mistitled. What Shulevitz really wanted to command was something closer to “Bring Back a Sabbath,” some ritualized behavior in which the pell-mell nature of ordinary time could be brought to a stop. If this were all it needed to be, it could be different from traditional Sabbath observance. It could, to use Shulevitz’s words, be “religiously disciplined” without having to be religious at all. Yet what would it then mean to bring it back? How can something from the past return as something novel?

Part of Shulevitz’s answer comes to light in the genre of *The Sabbath World*, a book that incorporates and expands upon the 2003 piece. On the surface, the book mixes two kinds of nonfiction writing: the spiritual memoir and the light-footed synthesis of scholarship on a religious topic. Even the beauty of Shulevitz’s prose cannot prevent the reader from being occasionally disoriented by the oscillation between the two. One page narrates the sudden end of a relationship with an Orthodox man when she was in college, while the next treats the role of the Sabbath in the Gospel of Mark. But the true genre of the book is that of apologetics, and both Shulevitz’s history of the Sabbath and the more meandering story of her observance of (and failure to observe) it have roles to play in her argument for the importance of the Sabbath—or at least a Sabbath, whether it is that of traditional observance, something more eclectic, or even the development of what she calls “neo-Sabbatarian” social policy. Such policies would, like the traditional Sabbath, set aside time “for family, for community, for one another,” as she told a somewhat incredulous Stephen Colbert.

Shulevitz’s opening and closing chapters, which discuss psychoanalytic interpretations of ritual, show that she thinks the Sabbath—whether old or new—to be grounded neither in revelation nor superstition, but in illusion, in Freud’s not unfavorable sense of the term. Rituals “come out of our own dreams”; they are techniques developed out of our wish to forestall the insecurities of existence. And so each of Shulevitz’s historical narratives shows how truths are made, and the role that the Sabbath has played in making them. The Hasidim of 2 Maccabees kept the Sabbath to prove to themselves that the world was ordered, while the 19th-century preacher Charles Shaw, who grew up in poverty, saw the practice of being washed and brushed before Sunday school as one that opened up a vision of a better kind of life.

On the other hand, each bit of Shulevitz’s memoir reveals that we need truths to be made. During Shulevitz’s childhood in San Juan, her family life is marred by her mother’s unhappiness and her father’s distance. While a college student at Yale majoring in comparative literature, she throws herself into literary theory only to discover it to be a tool for forcing students into a lockstep campus culture. It is only later in life, in a Talmud reading group, that Shulevitz finds true interpretive freedom—this group values the compelling answer, not necessarily the true one—and gains a genuine self-assuredness. “We all

commanded in the Book of Deuteronomy). While this may help to explain and even defend her and her husband’s current failure to keep the Sabbath as much as she would like, she does not intend *The Sabbath World* to be merely an intellectual exercise. Study can be for the sake of politics, and Shulevitz is particularly compelling in her seventh and final chapter, where she argues for kinder, gentler blue laws that would protect American citizens from what Joseph Stalin once called “the continuous work week.” For instance, she suggests formulating policies that would encourage companies to privi-

Technology has made the demands of work even more burdensome than they were a decade ago, when the border between home and the workplace began to turn into mist.

look for a Sabbath, whether or not that’s what we call it.” To look for a Sabbath, for Shulevitz, is to look for a community not unlike her reading group.

Shulevitz is not the first to have justified Judaism through recourse to its evident usefulness. Earlier interpreters of Jewish ritual could also be described as utilitarian. In 1836, Samson Raphael Hirsch, one of the intellectual forefathers of Modern Orthodoxy, wrote *The Nineteen Letters on Judaism*, a series of letters in response to a young Jewish man’s charge that Judaism cannot bring Jews happiness. When treating the Sabbath, Hirsch’s fictional rabbi argues that since happiness has both a material and a spiritual component, Judaism has its own utility. Yet this could only be seen from within halakhic life. Hirsch had his rabbi write, “if you would conceive of yourself as God’s servant, surely then you would no longer see any reason for complaints.” Nine centuries earlier, Saadia Gaon had already defended the cessation of work on Sabbaths and holidays on utilitarian fictional grounds, “first of all that of obtaining relaxation from much exertion.”

Shulevitz uses similar rhetoric to try to coax her readers to re-enchant their social worlds through ritual. Observe a Sabbath! You’ll like it! (And you need it!) But Shulevitz differs from earlier Jewish utilitarians. First, she claims that Sabbatarian practice is useful whether God exists or not. God need not have commanded anything about the cessation of work in order for us to realize that overwork is, among other things, dangerous to our mental health. Second, she claims that study about the Sabbath need not at all lead to the halakhic practice of observing the Sabbath in order to be useful: “I need not be a Sabbatarian to be a Sabbatarian.” Learning is as useful as doing, because the life-changing force of a practice lies in its intellectual core.

As a result, she argues that we should remember the Sabbath (as commanded in the Book of Exodus) but need not exactly keep the Sabbath (as

lege a customary daytime work schedule for their employees, and that would guarantee employees the right to refuse “non-standard” hours.

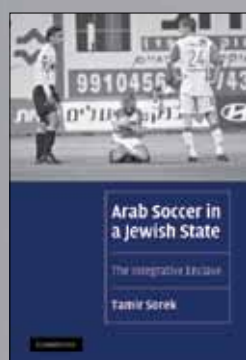
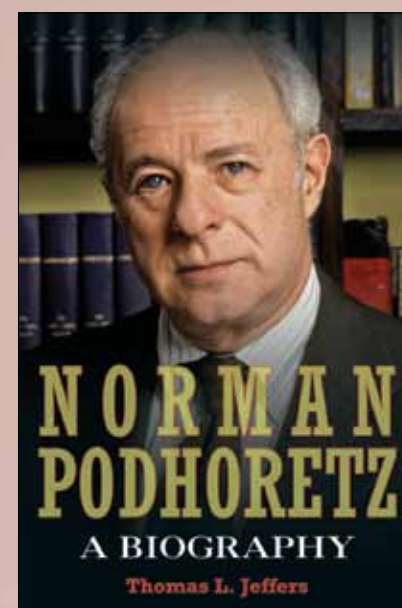
Here appears the specter that haunts all attempts to make the old new. Does one really need to point to the Book of Exodus to argue for policies that make it easier to protect a healthy balance between work and the rest of one’s life? Do we really need to remember the Sabbath, or imagine a new Sabbatarianism, in order to make its benefits real? Shulevitz wants to answer these questions in the affirmative. But she is not arguing for religious belief as a prerequisite for good policy. For her, “God is the ancestors” and nothing more. Neither does she seem to be claiming that a disciplined religious life is a prerequisite for good policy; if she were, she would be more worried about the flux of her own Sabbath practice. So what is her claim?

The policy orientation of *The Sabbath World* appears in its early pages. Shulevitz argues that technology has made the demands of work even more burdensome than they were a decade ago, when the border between home and the workplace began to turn into mist. Nevertheless, she is unhappy with current attempts at labor reform, for they assume that time is a commodity rather than something “relative and situational.” Time has value only through the depth of our commitment to the person or group with whom we spend our time, and such commitment can only be fostered by the structures of civil society. As soon as Shulevitz has made this claim, she introduces her reader to the Torah. Judaism and its Sabbath thus become interventions in a policy debate. The beautiful arouses commitment far more than any policy wonkery can, and for Shulevitz, the Sabbath and the rest of the tradition become a set of non-compulsory “poems to live by.”

This is a charmingly minimal sort of apologetics. Shulevitz need not ask anything more of her readers

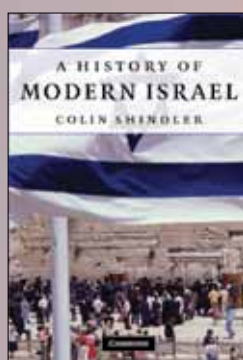
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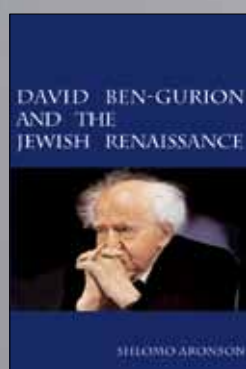
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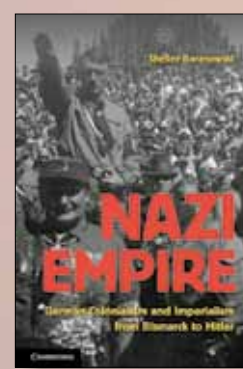


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(whether religious or irreligious) than to appreciate the beauty that our ancestors (whether Jews or Puritans inspired by Jewish practices) saw in the Sabbath. And yet, I worry that *The Sabbath World* might not be minimal enough. Like Abraham Joshua Heschel in his 1951 classic *The Sabbath*, Shulevitz apparently wants Jews to contribute something as Jews to the fabric of American culture. Whether

Must we assume that if someone observes a Sabbath, but never finds rest, there must be something wrong?

it is an appreciation for the reality of divine command (Heschel), or the utility of ancient custom, Judaism becomes that which can make our world extraordinary again.

Any focus on a Jewish contribution of this kind presupposes that the public sphere is lacking in some respect. But is it really true that all Americans are deeply needful of the Sabbath and the community that it allegedly offers? Could we all stand to go off the grid on a regular basis? Is it true that we will reap benefits when we do? Must we assume that if someone observes a Sabbath, but never finds rest, there must be something wrong

with that person? If someone just enjoys solitary activities—bowling alone, reading alone, cooking for one—is that a sign that he or she has fallen prey to false consciousness?

Different people in different places, I would say, have different temperaments. Banal as it may seem, this claim constitutes a great threat to a long tradition of Jewish theological writing, which either assumes that happiness takes the same form for all, or concludes that it is only attainable for the majority.

With admirable brio, Shulevitz resists the implications that ought to be drawn from the fact of human diversity. In her last chapter, she regrettably describes legal challenges to blue laws over the last fifty years. The mishmash of arbitrary state regulations that currently remain, for her, signal that there is nothing that we hold in common with our fellow citizens besides except labor and consumption.

But if the courts cannot make America keep a Sabbath, and if approaching tradition as poetry fails to motivate people who are content to bowl alone, then the only site from which one could possibly resist the alienating effects of the contemporary workplace would be a Law that transcends humanly made laws. Protection of the Sabbath would thus require a far different book than Shulevitz has written or could write, one that abandons the ambiva-

lent territory of the old-new Sabbath for the righteousness that comes only with knowing the God to whom one prays.

Shulevitz's ambivalence about tradition cannot be resolved. She is in the same position as all those whose temperaments lead them to feel both the pull of the ordinary present and the pull of the extraordinary past. They will never be Orthodox or fully secular, and will never be adequately able to account for the fact that certain rituals do or do not motivate them (or motivate them on some days but not on others). For rituals, in their eternal failure to offer up answers to the question "Why this way, and not that way?" cannot bear the weight that reasons—whether they be historical explanations or promises of the social benefits in the future—place on them. If those of us who are ambivalent about ritual give reasons for our ritual behavior or for our failure to engage in it, it is merely in the hope that we will find others with common temperaments. Perhaps it is only in the intimacies of such friendships, forever foreign to policy and politics, that we can find rest.

Martin Kavka teaches Jewish studies and philosophy of religion at Florida State University. He is the author of Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy (Cambridge University Press), which was awarded the Jordan Schnitzer Book Award in Philosophy and Jewish Thought by the Association for Jewish Studies in 2008.

The Christian Road to Jerusalem

BY ROBERT CHAZAN

GOD'S BATTALIONS: THE CASE FOR THE CRUSADES

by Rodney Stark

HarperOne, 276 pp., \$24.99.

THE CRUSADES, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

by Jonathan Riley-Smith

Columbia University Press, 138 pp., \$26.50.

The Crusades were a major development on the medieval European scene, but their effect was, in the end, ephemeral. The forces of Christendom conquered Jerusalem in July 1099, but losses piled up after that. In 1187, Jerusalem fell to the resurgent forces of Islam under Saladin, and, in 1290, Christians had to abandon their last stronghold in Palestine.

Rodney Stark is a sociologist at Baylor University who has emerged of late as a major academic apologist for medieval Christianity. One of Stark's most recent books is titled *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*. His latest bears a similarly polemical title: *God's Battalions: The Case for the Crusades*. To many read-

ers, this will seem a tough case to make. The great historian of the previous generation, Sir Steven Runciman, summed up his monumental three-volume history of crusading with the following:

High ideals were besmirched by cruelty and greed, enterprise and endurance by a blind and narrow self-righteousness, and the Holy War itself was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God, which is a sin against the Holy Ghost.

Although Runciman is one of the scholars upon whose work Stark draws, he does not, to say the least, share his convictions. By contrast, Stark ends his book with this pithy five-sentence conclusion:

The Crusades were not unprovoked. They were not the first round of European colonialism. They were not conducted for land, loot, or converts. The crusaders were not barbarians who victimized the cultivated Muslims. They sincerely believed that they served as God's battalions.

The four negative sentences reflect leading negative accounts of the Crusades that Stark has attempt-

ed throughout to disprove. The final sentence—the only positive one—provides the title for the book and Stark's justification for crusading: the crusaders "believed that they served as God's battalions."

At the outset, Stark acknowledges that the Crusades have not lacked for historians and that he is not one of them. Rather, he says, he has set out to "synthesize the works of these specialists into a comprehensive perspective, written in prose that is accessible to the general public." But lucid overviews of the Crusades, written by specialists, abound. I count at least half-a-dozen over the last 5 years, including: John France, *The Crusades and the Expansion of Catholic Christendom*; Thomas F. Madden, *The New Concise History of the Crusades*; Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*; Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*; Jill N. Claster, *Sacred Violence: The European Crusades to the Middle East, 1095-1396*, and, this year, Thomas Asbridge, *The Crusades: The Authoritative History of the War for the Holy Land*. What Stark has provided instead is a kind of lawyerly brief for the Crusades in which evidence is used selectively. It is not an attempt to understand or vividly recreate two hundred years of medieval history; it's the case for the defense.

Stark begins with a definition: "I exclude the

'crusades' against heretics in Europe and accept the conventional definition that the Crusades involved conflicts between Christendom and Islam for control of the Holy Land, campaigns that occurred between 1095 and 1291." He then adds the following: "However, unlike most conventional Crusade historians, I shall not begin with the Pope's appeal at Clermont, but with the rise of Islam and the onset of the Muslim invasion of Christendom. That's when it all started."

Thus, Stark cites a "conventional definition" of the Crusades, but quickly expands it beyond recognition. In other words, Stark's Crusades began four hundred years before the Church declared a crusade; Stark's Crusades do not include initiatives that the Church specifically called Crusades; and, for all we know, Stark's Crusades may not have ended yet. Indeed, what is the point of opening his book—as most Crusade historians do—with Pope Urban II's proclamation in 1095 if in fact that call represented nothing new? If Stark's definition of crusading differs dramatically from that of contemporary Crusade historians, it also clashes with the one enunciated by the Roman Catholic Church, which, after all, coined the term and controlled the phenomenon. The Church certainly considered the assaults on heretics to be genuine Crusades and provided the Christian warriors involved in these campaigns with all the temporal and spiritual privileges (including forgiveness for previous sins) of those who took on the cross to fight for Jerusalem.

Stark's treatment of crusader assaults on the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe in 1096—to which he devotes a scant two pages—is typical of his methods. These assaults, he argues, were perpetrated by rogue bands of German crusaders while being resolutely opposed by the bishops, and condemned by mainstream Christian chroniclers and thinkers. Thus, the Church, in Stark's view, bore no responsibility for these attacks. But can the matter really be so easily resolved? It is indeed true that such violence was not what Pope Urban envisioned at Clermont, and that many of the Bishops bravely shielded Jewish communities under attack, or at least attempted to do so. Moreover, little of the anti-Jewish activity can be attributed to the organized armies commanded by noblemen, though Godfrey of Bouillon, who was to become the first Crusader ruler of Jerusalem, seems to have extorted money from Jewish communities with threats of further violence, on his way up the Rhine River. But there is more to the story than this, if one is intent on actually understanding history rather than acquitting historical clients. A contemporary Jewish chronicle of the Crusades describes the motivations of the attackers as follows:

We travel to a distant land to do battle ... We take our souls in our hands in order to kill and subjugate all those kingdoms which do not believe in the Crucified. How much more so [should we kill and subjugate] the Jews who killed and crucified him?

Other Jewish chroniclers understand their attackers motives similarly. It was precisely some of those who were most conscious of their role as members of God's battalions, and were con-

vinced that redemption was at hand, who attacked and murdered Jews. This suggests that one of the essential lessons of the Crusades is that the ecclesiastical valorization of violence can easily and dangerously spin out of control. Bernard of Clairvaux pointed clearly to this possibility in his well-known admonition against anti-Jewish violence at the outset of the Second Crusade: "I have heard with great joy of the zeal for God's glory that burns in your midst, but your zeal needs the timely restraint of knowledge." The calls to crusading regularly, and predictably, outran "the timely restraint of knowledge."

Stark's accounts of other aspects of the Crusades are a similar mixture of potted history and special pleading. He strains mightily to minimize and justify the carnage described by the triumphant crusaders themselves ("men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins," wrote Raymond of Aguilers). Yet again, Stark's aim is not to understand the Crusades; it is to restore the simple image of the chivalrous knight liberating Jerusalem from the nonbelievers.

Those interested in genuine thoughtful reflection on the Crusades by one of its major historians ought to turn to Jonathan Riley-Smith's *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam*, originally delivered as the Bampton Lectures at Columbia University. Riley-Smith treats the dominant period in medieval crusading—the late 11th- through the late 13th-centuries—with the sure touch of an expert. He is, at the same time, much interested in the subsequent history of the Crusades as ongoing reality and potent image.

He writes:

Since crusading was far more embedded in Christian history than nearly everyone in the West now wants to believe, one purpose of this book is to draw attention to the gulf that has opened up between the historical actuality ... and modern convictions. I will try to explain how the Crusades were viewed in religious terms by the Christian faithful, how the language associated with them was appropriated by Europeans in the age of



An 18th-century rendering of Pope Urban II preaching the first Crusade at Clermont, 1095. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images.)



Battle between Crusaders and Muslims. (Illumination from a 14th-century manuscript.)

imperialism, and how [this] rhetoric, itself a distortion of reality, was in the twentieth century distorted again both in the West and in Islam.

Early on, he notes that recent research has led scholars like himself “to reject the long-held belief that [crusading] was defined solely by its theaters of operation in the Levant and its hostility to Islam—with the consequence that in their eyes the Muslims move slightly off center stage—and many have begun to face up to the ideas and motivations of the crusaders.” Riley-Smith and his fellow historians have begun to see the Crusades less in terms of its targets and more in terms of the pressures and needs of medieval Christian society. Stark, who cites a dozen items from Riley Smith in his bibliography, ought to have taken note.

Further, Riley-Smith shows that the complex composition of the medieval crusading forces, along with poor funding, limited preparation, and popular enthusiasm made it inevitable that the Church and its secular military leadership would not be in full control. To argue that the Church did not sanction the excesses of its warriors is, as Bernard of Clairvaux had already realized in the 12th-century, and as a sociologist like Stark ought to have realized now, is insufficient.

Riley-Smith’s reflections on the afterlife of crusading are just as cogent, especially with regard to the image of the Crusades in the 19th-century. Romantic misrepresentations of crusading came in two varieties in that period. In one, crusading represented the efforts of a more advanced society to bring its advantages to the backward Islamic

Stark cites a “conventional definition” of the Crusades, but quickly expands it beyond recognition.

world; in the other, the barbarous warriors of the West sought to impose their will on the cultured sphere of Islam. Both the modern Islamic world and the modern West have absorbed these distorted 19th-century perspectives, with harmful results. The juxtaposition of crusading and imperialism has created a counter-juxtaposition of anti-imperialism and anti-Christianity, which has become a powerful force in the contemporary Islamic world. In the West, a corresponding counter-rhetoric has

emerged, of which Stark’s book is an apparent example. Here is a case where actual historical understanding could serve useful political ends. As Riley-Smith writes:

We cannot hope to understand the circumstances in which we find ourselves unless we are prepared to face up to the fact that modern Western public opinion, Arab Nationalism, and Pan-Islamism all share perceptions of crusading that have more to do with nineteenth-century European imperialism than with actuality.

The Crusades must be studied and analyzed for what they were, what they teach about medieval Christendom and Christianity, and what they reveal about the human situation altogether. *God’s Battalions*, which trumpets on its back cover that it will tell the reader “the truth about the Christian Crusades and Muslim Jihad,” does neither.

Robert Chazan is S. H. and Helen R. Scheuer Professor of Jewish History in the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University. His newest book is Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe (Cambridge University Press), to appear in October.

Montefiore and the Politics of Emancipation

BY DAVID SORKIN

MOSES MONTEFIORE: JEWISH LIBERATOR, IMPERIAL HERO

by Abigail Greene

Harvard University Press, 560 pp., \$35

In March 1846, Moses Montefiore, an unusually tall, clean-shaven, traditionally observant, and inordinately wealthy English Jew, crossed the Dvina river in his luxurious private carriage, braving the thawing ice floes in order to travel along Russia’s notoriously poor roads to St. Petersburg, the capital. His appearance was extraordinary in every sense, and he meant it to be so. He arrived wearing the scarlet uniform of a Sheriff of London, with gold epaulets, a plumed hat, and a sword by his side. Once in the city, he made his way up the ladder of officialdom, first meeting with Tsar Nicholas I’s important ministers and, ultimately, with the Tsar himself.

Montefiore encouraged Nicholas, who had ruled for decades over millions of Jews but had never before spoken to one, to follow the example of Western European countries and grant the Jews of his empire equal, or at least greater, rights. The officials and the Tsar himself resisted any such ideas, complaining about the baneful influence of the Talmud, the Jews’

self-segregation through clothing and language, and their continued involvement in questionable economic practices such as smuggling and selling liquor to peasants on credit.

During his stay in Russia, Montefiore’s fellow Jews celebrated him enthusiastically. In St. Petersburg, he met with delegations of Jews from across the Pale of Settlement and prayed with Jewish soldiers in the capital’s barracks. Afterwards, on his way home, the 30,000 Jews of Vilna and the 36,000 of Warsaw welcomed him as a hero if not something of a messiah, the political futility of his visit notwithstanding. Montefiore’s trip to Russia became part of the folklore of Russian Jewry, retold for generations, with each new version diverging further from reality.

Very few people tell these stories anymore. Famous in his own day as an international advocate for the Jews, who journeyed on their behalf to Egypt and Constantinople, Russia and Palestine, Morocco and Roumania, Montefiore has mostly disappeared from the historical memory of contemporary Jewry. Today, his name usually brings to mind nothing more than a hospital in New York, a windmill in Jerusalem, or perhaps a local old age home. Why has such a towering figure been virtually forgotten?

The answer to this question has to do with what could be called Montefiore’s “emancipation politics.” Not only have such politics been overshadowed

by the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel; they have been discredited to the point that, for many Jews, they seem inconceivable if not ludicrous. This is as much the case in the academic as in the popular Jewish imagination. Scholars of modern Jewish history teach that from the 17th- to the end of the 18th-century, Jews engaged in the politics of intercession or *shtadlanut*, through which Jewish notables, often “Court Jews,” the privileged but precariously situated agents of absolutist rulers, negotiated on behalf of Jewish communities in distress. This practice rested on what the late historian Yosef Haim Yerushalmi dubbed “the vertical alliance”: Jews in the Diaspora looked to the highest power in the land for legally guaranteed privileges, usually given in the form of charters for individuals or communities, and for protection in times of need. Jews did not enter into “horizontal” alliances with other groups in society since these groups were generally regarded as enemies or economic rivals, or both.

Jewish historians have also described how the turn of the 20th-century marked the beginning of “modern Jewish politics,” the time when Jews began to organize themselves into the kind of ideological and political groupings that were currently emerging in Europe in consequence of the widening of the franchise and the mobilization of the masses. They have recounted how the 1890s witnessed the foun-

dation of organized Jewish liberalism (1893), socialism and Zionism (1897), with organized feminism (1904) and Orthodoxy (1912) soon following. Yet, most of these same historians would be at a loss to come up with a label or rubric for the century

Montefiore's trip to Russia became part of the folklore of Russian Jewry, retold for generations, with each new version diverging further from reality.

between the era of *shtadlanut* and the modern period. One of the many virtues of Abigail Green's new biography, *Moses Montefiore: Jewish Liberator, Imperial Hero*, is that she has given us a vivid picture of 19th-century Jewish politics, which we might call the "politics of emancipation."

Sir Moses Montefiore was a shining example of the Jewish politics of emancipation: his life virtually spanned the century (he was born in 1784 and died at the age of 101), and he was a political prime mover for over half of it. Born into a Livornese commercial family whose members followed the flow of trade to London, Montefiore made a fortune in the city as a broker and business partner of his wife's brother-in-law, Nathan Rothschild. He helped to found several major companies in the 1820s. He was also among the first of the Anglo-Jewish elite to be admitted to the Athenaeum club. When Queen Victoria ascended the throne, he was named a Sheriff of the City of London, one of whose perquisites was the uniform he wore to meet Tsar Nicholas. He of course purchased a country estate (Ramsgate, Kent), the *sine qua non* for entrance into the upper rungs of English society, and ultimately was appointed a Baronet.

What was particularly significant about Montefiore's early business and political career is that it crossed religious lines. His business partners included Christians, especially Quakers and Catholics. Montefiore contributed to, and participated in general and Christian charities in addition to Jewish ones. In fact, in 1835, after he had decided to withdraw from business, he "for the first and last time in his life . . . contracted for a major government loan" that financed the "final abolition of slavery in the British Empire." This was "bad business but very good politics"; for it demonstrated "his place at the heart of Britain's philanthropic and abolitionist nexus." In short, Montefiore entered into "horizontal alliances." There was a high degree of genuine cooperation, even friendship, between elite Jews and elite Christians. Montefiore's friends aided him and his fellow Jews by electing him Sheriff.

Emancipation also altered the "vertical alliance." This is not to suggest that Montefiore and his collaborators fought for Jewish emancipation or political rights in public. They decidedly did not. "The campaign itself was conducted largely behind closed doors—at meetings called in private houses and at political dinner parties, where Montefiore, Gold-

smid and Rothschild (and their wives) hobnobbed with the great and the good."

In view of this kind of collaboration, and for other reasons as well, it would be wrong to say that this campaign was like the politics of the previous period. Montefiore was not a "Court Jew"; he was a subject of the British Crown engaged in elite politics in an age of elite politics. True, he perpetuated the vertical alliance in looking to the state to remove the Jews' remaining disabilities, yet the state he addressed was



'Moses Montefiore' (1818) by Richard Dighton.
(Snark/Art Resource NY.)

not comprised of a sole ruler with the power to banish him at a moment's notice. It was a constitutional monarchy with a Parliament and functioning democratic institutions—however limited the franchise and corrupt some of the institutions. Montefiore and his collaborators were not asking the sovereign for a favor; rather, they were petitioning Parliament and lobbying its members for a favorable vote. Montefiore carried on public advocacy and closed door politics, both of which were and remain the standard practices of democratic politics.

What really made Montefiore famous, however, was not his domestic politics but his travels and sustained intercession on behalf of Jews elsewhere, a commitment that derived in the first in-

stance from his faith. Montefiore was the sort of believing, though non-intellectual Jew, typical of Anglo-Jewry. His Jewish education was limited to the Bible in English and the liturgy. He had little Hebrew and even less knowledge of Talmud and Rabbinic literature. Yet he was a fervent believer and his arduous pilgrimages to the Holy Land in 1827 and 1839 deepened his faith and strengthened his commitment to his fellow Jews. Montefiore, Green writes, had spent the ten years prior to his first trip "refashioning himself as an English gentleman," but "he now shaped himself consciously as a practicing Jew" and underwent a "spiritual rebirth." Upon his return to England, he immersed himself in synagogue (the Spanish and Portuguese Bevis Marks) and community affairs. He became President of the Board of Deputies (1835) and empowered a committee to write a constitution to place it on "a formal footing": it would have regular financing from the constituent congregations and would "assume sole responsibility for the political welfare of British Jews."

When the Jews of Damascus became the victims of a blood libel in 1840, Adolphe Crémieux came to London on behalf of the Parisian Central Consistory to seek the help of Montefiore, whom he saw as the man best fit to represent Anglo-Jewry in the Middle East. Montefiore set sail for Egypt alongside Crémieux with the blessing and backing of the English authorities. So began his efforts as the defender or advocate of the Jews. In that capacity he was to make four more trips to the Holy Land (1855, 1857, 1865, 1875), two to Russia (1846, 1872), one to Rome (1858), one to Morocco (1864), and one to Roumania (1867).

Montefiore's intervention on behalf of Jews abroad was not merely a humanitarian endeavor but represented an extension of his emancipation politics at home. Montefiore believed deeply in a "gradualist approach to emancipation," through which states incrementally relieved the Jews of disabilities and granted them additional rights. The Jews themselves would meanwhile learn the language of the country in which they lived, and obtain the skills to function as an integral and increasingly welcome part of the larger society. During his trip to Russia, Montefiore encouraged Jews to learn Russian and broaden the curriculum of their schools at the same time that he petitioned the Tsarist government, and especially Uvarov, the Minister of National Enlightenment, to proceed with legal emancipation. It was precisely his promotion of secular education in Palestine that propelled the ultra-Orthodox to excommunicate him in 1855.

Montefiore's promotion of emancipation and the Jews' use of the vernacular did not signify a willingness to exchange Jewish observance for political rights. On the contrary, he declared in his diary, "I am most firmly resolved not to give up the smallest part of our religious forms and privileges to obtain civil rights." His position was thus identical to that of Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler, who promoted an acculturated Orthodoxy that combined traditional belief and stringent practice with middle or upper class respectability. Montefiore vociferously opposed Reform Judaism in England and "cut his brother dead" when he founded the West End reform synagogue, refusing to speak to him for the last twenty-five years of his life.

The distinctiveness of Montefiore's politics can be seen by contrasting his methods with those



Global celebrity: The American Harper's Weekly marks Montefiore's ninety-ninth birthday, October 20, 1883. (Courtesy of Harvard University Press.)

of the *shtadlan* (community intercessor) and the Court Jew. For the typical *shtadlan* in Eastern Europe in the 18th-century, there were three methods to approach the powers that be: emotional appeals, including crying and wailing; claiming legal rights on the basis of writs, charters, or other documents; and the presentation of gifts or payments, in other words, bribery. Court Jews who attempted to overturn Maria Theresa's 1744 decree expelling the Jews from Prague, and who brushed aside the incompetent community intercessors of Prague and Vienna (Maria Theresa despised their wailing), created a controlled network of diplomatic correspondence with court and church officials across Europe. They acted entirely behind the scenes, winning the intervention of the Pope and numerous Archbishops, the Estates General of Holland and the Kings of England and Denmark.

Montefiore worked in an altogether different manner. Green instructively describes his conduct in the course of the "Mortara Affair," in which a Jewish boy in Bologna had been surreptitiously baptized by a Catholic servant and was subsequently kidnapped by the Inquisition to be raised within the Church:

First, apply for cooperation from Jewish communities overseas; second, publicize the issue as widely as possible and stress the universal aspects of the case; third, reach out to other religious and political constituencies in Britain that were likely to prove sympathetic; fourth, persuade the Foreign Office it ought to intervene;

and fifth (if necessary), send a deputation . . .

Emancipation and civil society, voluntary associations and the press, combined with a cross-confessional humanitarianism, had created entirely new conditions for politics. Montefiore was operating in a different world from that of the *shtadlan* or even of the Court Jew. He not only recognized these conditions but also mastered them. He was a consummate choreographer, recording and publicizing each philanthropic step.

This is not to say that such interventions were always or completely successful. In the Damascus Affair, he and Crémieux succeeded in getting the remaining prisoners released yet they neither conducted the independent investigation nor gained the exoneration they had promised. When Montefiore continued on to Constantinople he did get the Sultan to issue a *firman* prohibiting the blood libel, but that didn't prevent the charge from cropping up soon afterward elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. He succeeded, however, in turning himself into the hero of the day.

Montefiore was fortunate to have the British government on his side. His interventions often converged with British imperial politics. Foreign Secretaries such as Clarendon and Palmerston backed Montefiore's efforts in the Holy Land and the Ottoman Empire since they thought that they helped to support the Ottoman Empire and enlarge Britain's sphere of influence. The British did the same for Montefiore's efforts in Morocco and in Persia, considering the Jews' rights "as part of the imperial nexus of commerce, Christianity and civilization." Only near the end of Montefiore's life, with the Balkan crisis or "Eastern question" of the late 1870s, when Montefiore was in his nineties, did these interests diverge. Montefiore then joined Disraeli as the target of accusations of a Jewish conspiracy against Christendom.

Throughout an astoundingly long career, Moses Montefiore made skillful use of all the available institutions of the new civil society. He added to the *shtadlan's* and Court Jew's arsenal of private diplomacy a new dimension of public politics. The Jewish political movements at the end of the century were to develop and exploit these public politics in ways that Montefiore could hardly have imagined and, in so doing, they ironically went on to repudiate his legacy and efface his memory.

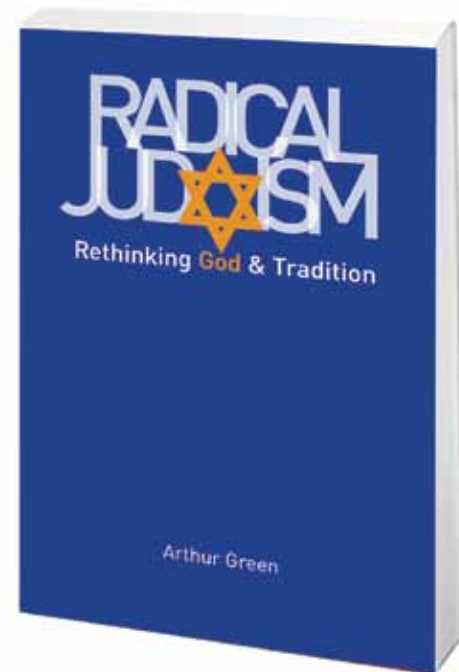
David Sorkin, who teaches at the University of Wisconsin, is most recently the author of The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna (Princeton University Press).

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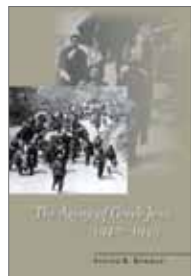
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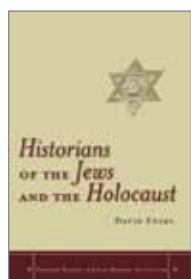
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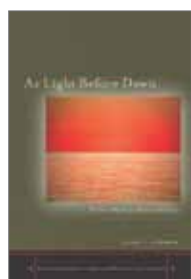
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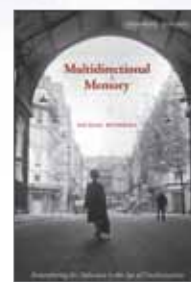
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Friends of Zion

BY WALTER RUSSELL MEAD

ZEAL FOR ZION: CHRISTIANS, JEWS, AND THE IDEA OF THE PROMISED LAND

by Shalom Goldman

University of North Carolina Press, 384 pp., \$35

Arthur Hertzberg's anthology of key Zionist writings, *The Zionist Idea*, has for many decades been the most widely used collection of its kind. But as Shalom Goldman points out in his recently published *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews and the Idea of the Promised Land*, it "makes no mention of Christian precursors of the Zionist idea." Historians of Zionism, in general he observes, have for a long time failed to give the movement's many gentile advocates and activists the attention that they deserve. Israeli historians, in particular, have tended to ignore the role of gentile Zionists. They have found it necessary, for a variety of reasons, to stress that the establishment of the State of Israel was solely an accomplishment of the Jews. As Goldman writes,

[I]n the prevailing ideology of the first decades of Israeli culture, Gentiles were actors in the history of Zionism only insofar as they had persecuted Jews and thereby generated the need for a Jewish state. If some Gentiles had helped pave the way, they were marginalized as rare exceptions. Their contributions were seldom mentioned and less often praised.

Lately, these unfortunate trends have been, to a significant extent, reversed. As Goldman observed not long ago in a review essay, in recent years "there has been an outpouring of books and papers on Christians and Zionism." His own new book makes a valuable contribution to this field. More a compilation of essays united around some common themes than a sequential historical narrative, *Zeal for Zion* offers important if sometimes unsettling readings of history that could point to a reshaping of the traditional Zionist story.

What Goldman has done seems simple: he has pulled together various accounts of gentile sympathizers with the Zionist project in the late 19th- and 20th-centuries. But the range of his references and scholarship is impressive. From Laurence Oliphant, a somewhat eccentric 19th-century British diplomat and explorer who, with his wife Alice, provided crucial assistance and friendship to the poet Naphtali Herz Imber (remembered in Israel as the author of the lyrics to *Hatikvah*), through figures like Vladimir Nabokov, Jorge Luis Borges, and Jacques Maritain, Goldman takes his readers on a rewarding tour through the intellectual and cultural life of the last 125 years.

Some of the connections he shows are truly fascinating. The poet and novelist Robert Graves (best known today for the autobiographical *Goodbye To*

All That and the historical novel *I, Claudius*, memorably serialized on BBC's Masterpiece Theater) was not the only member of his distinguished family who was friendly to both Judaism and Zionism. One of his half brothers, Richard, served as the last British administrator in Mandatory Palestine and another was the journalist Phillip Graves, who is widely credited with proving *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* a forgery.

Some readers will delight in Goldman's strolls down various byways of intellectual and cultural history; others will wonder where he is headed. The most useful way to read the book may be to divide it into two projects. One aims to document the way in which important 20th-century thinkers and cultural currents were influenced both by the Zionist project and their sympathy for it. Along the way, Goldman's mastery of many different fields provides striking insights into everything from Russian émigré politics to the development of American Catholicism and its relationship to the neo-Thomist revival.

The other aspect of the book, which has more interest for those whose thoughts tend toward policy and politics, is an account of some strategic interactions between gentiles and Jews that did more to shape the course of the Zionist movement than is often understood. It is here that Goldman seems to suggest that our understanding of the Zionist project must incorporate a significantly greater place for gentiles in the development and success of the Jewish national project.

While Goldman does not attempt a sequential narrative of this critical gentile role, he provides a very useful and comprehensive review of the Protestant role in the establishment of Israel, from the opening of the British consulate in Jerusalem through the alliance that currently exists between American evangelical Christians and the Israeli nationalist and religious right. In Goldman's view, this support was of much more than tangential importance; from Herzl forward, prominent Zionists understood that Protestant support was, in Goldman's words, "essential to the success of Zionist political aspirations."

This rings true; the establishment of the state of Israel was not just a Jewish project. Jews did the heavy lifting: the settlement of Palestine, defense of the Jewish community, and the development of national institutions were Jewish achievements. But the contribution of the Anglo-Protestant world to the rise of the Jewish state was not limited to occasional interventions by heavily lobbied political leaders. British and American Protestant support was more than an ace in the hole that Zionists were able to deploy at key moments like the Balfour Declaration or Truman's recognition of Israeli independence. It was a critical factor in the ability of Zionists to win the political competition among Jews.

The case of the Reverend William Hechler makes the point. Hechler, chaplain to the British

Embassy in Vienna, had published a pamphlet on the return of the Jews to Israel in 1883. On March 14, 1896 (weeks after the publication of Herzl's *Der Judenstaat*), Hechler appeared at Herzl's apartment in Vienna. As Herzl realized, Hechler was not just attached to the British Embassy but was also the former tutor of the sons of Friedrich I (Grand Duke of Baden and uncle of Wilhelm II), and therefore connected with the highest circles in Germany. Hechler arranged a meeting between Herzl and the Grand Duke; that meeting led to Herzl's audience with the Kaiser at the palace of the Ottoman sultan and subsequently in Jerusalem. Hechler remained one of Herzl's closest associates and was one of the few people at Herzl's deathbed.

To assess Hechler's impact on the fortunes of Herzlian Zionism, one must consider the effect on Jewish opinion of Herzl's extraordinary access to gentile princes, emperors, and sultans. A pamphleteering journalist calling for the establishment of a Jewish state is interesting; it is remarkable, however, that a Jew was meeting with emperors and sultans in Constantinople and Jerusalem to discuss the establishment of a Jewish state, all of which transformed Herzl into the uncrowned king of a reviving Jewish nation.

One can go further in establishing the importance of gentile decisions for the Zionist project. As Goldman demonstrates, the idea that Britain should sponsor a Jewish national home in Palestine did not originate with Chaim Weizmann, and his lobbying appears not to have been the decisive factor in the British decision to issue what became known as the Balfour Declaration. The belief that a revived Jewish presence in the Holy Land would bolster growing British interests in the Near East helped drive the original establishment of the British consulate and Anglican mission in Jerusalem before the Crimean War. That proposal received new currency when the opening of the Suez Canal transformed the Near East from a strategic backwater into the main line of communication between Britain and its Indian Empire. Had this idea not been kicking around the British foreign and colonial offices for decades, it is extremely unlikely that Chaim Weizmann's advocacy could have prevailed.

All of this needs to be remembered. Neglect of the crucial and strategic contribution of gentiles to the success of the Zionist movement can lead to an impoverished and unrealistic understanding of Israel's history. It contributes to the view today that support for Israel by the United States reflects the occult power of Jews in American society. When a historical idea is false, and when it contributes to anti-Semitic ideas around the world, it is time for a new look at an old story. Shalom Goldman is to be congratulated for his contribution to this necessary piece of historical housecleaning.

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Animal Foible

BY DARA HORN

BEATRICE AND VIRGIL

by Yann Martel

Spiegel & Grau, 224 pp., \$24

In her story “The Nurse and the Novelist,” a hilarious send-up of solipsistic Holocaust fiction, Anya Ulinich describes an imaginary bestselling novel about a young man who collects his toenail clippings in a jar without understanding why. When the man’s dying grandfather gives him an enigmatic gold charm, he travels to Belarus to find the old woman, a poetic crone, who saved his grandfather from the Nazis. Many maudlin chapters later, “it becomes clear to him why he has been collecting nail clippings in a jar, and he is able to stop.” If only.

Beatrice and Virgil, the new Holocaust-themed novel by Yann Martel—author of the mega-bestselling, Booker Prize-winning animal-fable novel *Life of Pi*—takes the solipsism of so much contemporary

Holocaust fiction to unprecedented depths by actually being about a mega-bestselling animal-fable novelist who writes a Holocaust-themed novel. His publisher thinks it won’t sell, but Henry, the writer-protagonist, “had noticed over years of reading books and watching movies how little actual *fiction* there was about the Holocaust,” which makes one wonder if Henry has ever been inside a bookstore. Henry insists that what Holocaust literature needs is a book like his animal fable: “Art as suitcase: light, portable, essential—was such a treatment not possible, indeed, was it not necessary, with the greatest tragedy of Europe’s Jews?” Lest we hope that this is some sort of joke, we quickly discover that we are holding precisely that light, portable suitcase, stuffed with the light, portable bodies of six million Jews, in our hands.

The publisher’s rejection is apparently Henry’s private equivalent of genocide: “Henry now joined the vast majority of those who had been shut up by the Holocaust.” Poor bestselling Henry, a silenced victim, now roams the earth just like a survivor,

immediately moving to some *chichi* city where he speaks the language fluently and doesn’t need a job. When an elderly taxidermist sends him a letter asking for help with a play he is writing, our hero takes the bait and visits Mr. Cryptic’s taxidermy crypt. The play’s characters, Beatrice and Virgil, unsubtly invoking Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, turn out to be stuffed animals, a donkey and a monkey. The Beckett-like play consists of these animals discussing their inexplicable humiliation and torture in supposedly mysterious Holocaust-like terms. Eventually, the play’s meaning is revealed: the Holocaust is the taxidermist’s metaphor for the suffering and extermination of . . . *animals*.

All of this could, conceivably, be worthwhile if it were a satire about the unacceptable ease and unearned moral absolution one receives by writing about the Holocaust to serve one’s own ends. The book occasionally offers hints of this, as when Henry’s wife, who refers to the donkey-monkey play as “Winnie the Pooh meets the Holocaust,” notices that the taxidermist is a creep. When (spoiler alert)

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the taxidermist turns out to be a creep, and Henry finally rejects him, the reader entertains the bright hope that the whole book is an unbrilliant but nonetheless ironic joke on writers who milk the Holocaust for gravitas.

In 2010, it doesn't take much courage to announce that the Holocaust was bad, unless one lives in Iran. And that lack of courage is the source of the Holocaust's prurient artistic appeal.

But parodies are supposed to be funny—and if this is a joke, neither Henry nor Martel is in on it. The novel ends with Henry composing, as we are told in the final triumphant line, “the first piece of fiction Henry had written in years,” which is then presented as an appendix. This “piece of fiction” is a collection of imagined pseudo-literary “games” for Holocaust victims, of which the following is typical:

The order comes at gunpoint: you and your family and all the people around you must strip

naked. You are with your seventy-two-year-old father, your sixty-eight-year-old mother, your spouse, your sister, a cousin, and your three children, ages fifteen, twelve, and eight. After you have finished undressing, where do you look?

These “games” are supposedly cringe-worthy because of our empathy. But the cringe they induce actually derives from something else. In order to care about how people died without bothering to care about how they lived, the reader has to be a creep.

Criticizing a novel written as a criticism-inoculated animal fable about the redemptive simplicity of art feels a bit like clubbing a taxidermed baby seal. Henry insists that he has written something brave and bold, like Orwell's *Animal Farm*. But *Animal*

Farm was published in 1945, while Stalin was a living menace. In 2010, it doesn't take much courage to announce that the Holocaust was bad, unless one lives in Iran. And that lack of courage is the source of the Holocaust's prurient artistic appeal.

There are certainly many brilliant imaginative works about the Holocaust, but it can also be a gold mine for lazy writers. All the hard work of developing characters and creating a moral universe is done for you, leaving only bad guys and childlike innocents who might as well be stuffed animals. Lived history is irrelevant for authors like Henry, because his story isn't about the Holocaust or even “representations of the Holocaust.” It's about writer's block.

“Afterwards, when it's all over,” one of Henry's fictional dilemmas reads at the book's end, “you meet God. What do you say to God?”

The answer is clear: *Why can't I stop collecting my toenail clippings in a jar?*

Dara Horn is the award-winning author of three novels, most recently, All Other Nights (Norton), which was released in paperback in March.

Going Public

BY ANNE TRUBEK

THE COOKBOOK COLLECTOR

by Allegra Goodman
Random House 384 pp., \$26

Everything is rising or falling in *The Cookbook Collector*: internet stocks, the value of old books, men in love, women out of redwoods, and twin towers. Although Random House advertises it as *Sense and Sensibility* for the digital age, it is more a novel of ideas than of characters. Goodman's first two books, *The Family Markowitz* and *Kaaterskill Falls*, were thickly settled works of domestic fiction. Her last two, *Intuition* and *The Cookbook Collector*, are concerned with the worlds of work as well. In scope and theme, she is more Dickensian, though she remains, like Austen, concerned with love, friendship, and the difference between the two. Goodman delves into women's private lives in this novel, but with well-nigh manly scope, she also goes public.

Through her rich, spot-on descriptions, Goodman makes the startling pronouncement that yesterday is history. The book opens in 1999, an era Goodman reconstructs as a period piece as dated as *Mad Men*, with “little houses skyrocketing in value in Cupertino and Sunnyvale.” Remember those? This world is one of Volvo station wagons, overly buttery Chardonnays, spotted owls, IPOs, and dial-up modems.

The novel spans three years, from the fall of 1999

to the spring of 2002, from the highest point of the NASDAQ through the aftermath of the collapse of the twin towers, the chronology is a narrative of rising and falling itself. Add in rare book-collecting, love, and family secrets, and the novel's arc becomes more ragged mountain range than classic climax and denouement.

The two main characters are indeed inspired by *Sense and Sensibility*. Emily is Sense, the CEO of Veritech, a Bay Area start-up. She is “tall and slender with her hair cropped short,” and favors “a pinstriped shirt, elegant slacks, tiny, expensive glasses. She was an MBA, not a programmer, and it showed.” Jess, a doctoral student in Philosophy at University of California at Berkeley, is Sensibility. She is “small and whimsical. Her face and mouth were wider than Emily's, her cheeks rounder, her eyes greener, and more generous.... and her hair ... who knew when she'd cut it last?” Jess, through whom many of the novel's most poignant scenes and ideas are expressed, is a convincing character, but her back-story is less so. Would a flighty, irresponsible naïf whose family is always badgering her to become more serious also be a doctoral candidate in the rarefied, extremely selective department of Philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley?

Emily and Jess are surrounded by a cast of new types born of late 20th-century capitalism. George, the owner of a book store where Jess works, is “old money”—he made his fortune in Microsoft in the 1980s and then opted out, choosing to read the classics and

cook Chez Panisse-inspired meals for himself in his historically preserved house in the hills.

His friends took different paths. They bought small houses, and then bigger houses, and then they renovated those houses and commissioned furniture: sculptural dining tables and beds and rocking chairs in bird's eye maple. They collected glass, and bought Chihuly's by the dozen. They retired and purchased boats and traveled, and some started little companies and foundations of their own, and others flew to cooking classes in Tuscany and hosted fundraisers for Bill Clinton. Along the way, they married and divorced, raised children, and came out, not necessarily in that order.

If Goodman's main characters are sometimes flat, we forgive her when she offers us such gimlet-eye descriptions.

Emily's long-term boyfriend Jonathan is another start-up founder living in that other dotcom city, Cambridge, and they commute bicoastally. Jonathan exemplifies the go-go nineties, and is too polite, “square-shouldered and forthright,” for hippie Jess. Jonathan's old friend and Emily's childhood sweetheart, Orion, is the lefty, romantic developer, a fan of the “Free Software Foundation.” His father is a poet living in Vermont, always disheveled and sometimes sleeps on park benches. Orion has “an eye for detail, a grasp of the small picture.”

These set-pieces act out Goodman's inquiry into the

nature of risk. Emily and Jonathan's start-ups, Veritech and ISIS, sell security software, products aimed at minimizing risk. But of course, these ventures are themselves highly volatile. George's book collecting friend, Raj, argues that risk is "an erotic pleasure," endemic to humanity's acquisitive nature. George, the aesthete, demurs, claiming, "some aesthetic experiences satisfy," like a good glass of wine, a leather-bound quarto, and solid oak. "There is such a thing as excellence ... and when I find it I am fulfilled." Emily, who, like George, is patient, seems to be the risk-averse sister, with her prim ways and MBA, but she is much more leveraged than Jess, who made the staid choice of graduate school, and is so terrified of heights that her fear of falling threatens her credibility with the Save The Trees activists who sit atop redwoods to save them.

Into the lives of these late-nineties seekers come Bialystockers (read Lubavitchers) in an initially incongruous sub-plot. They surprise the characters, too, with their odd black coats and financial speculations. Jess meets Rabbi Helfgott in Berkeley, and he writes her a check for \$1800 so she can buy stock in Veritech for a murky reason Jess does not trust. Rabbi Zylberfenig runs the Bialystocker Center in Canaan, Jess and Emily's hometown. Zylberfenig is considering buying a lot behind the girls' childhood home, a purchase his wife considers unwise, since "Canaan's Jews were older and well settled and often mistrustful of their own religion." Zylberfenig, though, is not a saver "but a spender, and a buyer, and always, every day, expected miracles," a quality his wife finds charming but annoying, because she "was constantly sorting out her children's shoes, performing the countless details of mother and *rebbetzin*, even though the Messiah was due at any moment."

Goodman's comfort with describing these characters is unique; she weaves this sub-culture into the other ones she describes—environmental activists, dotcom startups, gourmands and bibliophiles.

If this is a Jewish novel, it is so in that it feels no need to pronounce itself as such, but interweaves Judaism into the mélange of the American late nineties. She accomplishes what she once said she aimed to do in *Kaaterskill Falls*, "to write about an Orthodox community grounded in tradition, but to do so in a way that was neither anthropological, nor sentimental."

As Bialystockers invest in the Internet, and tree



Allegra Goodman. (Photo by Nina Subin.)

activists camp out on branches high above the earth, values fluctuate. How much is a share of ISIS worth? One day it is two hundred dollars, the next a penny. How much is a first edition of a rare 17th-century cookbook worth? How does one put a price on the handwritten poems found inside its leaves? Goodman questions whether we should be investing in the immaterial, suggesting it might be better to lovingly treasure the material—the trees Jess is trying to

save, the books she reads, and the architectural details George restores in his home.

Relationships go up and down in value too, but mainly they go up again. Orion, discussing his troubled relationship with Jonathan, says, "I think when you go that far back with someone, the friendship never disappears completely, and sometimes, eventually, the relationship regenerates."

As Jess learns more about her Jewish background, she discusses Judaism with Helfgott. She wonders whether social activism could be considered a form of prayer. No, Helfgott responds, because action is original, whereas prayer is derivative. Prayer, he tells her, "is total catastrophic insurance, covering every possibility." Prayer mitigates the choice between the material and the immaterial. It provides insurance in a world in which private security software loses all value only to regain it as government surveillance, in which aesthetic pleasure suffices until it is no longer enough, and in which we have to sort socks while waiting for the Messiah. Summer turns to winter and then becomes summer again as the novel progresses through its eight parts, and one love turns out to be worthless while another grows. "As it was written," Rabbi Helfgott thinks to himself, "there was a time to plant and a time to reap, a time to mourn and a time to dance. Naturally, reaping was preferable!" Within such a world, where value is relative and change constant, you might as well risk a start-up, or fall in love.

Or write a risky novel. To say Goodman is the Jewish Jane Austen—or, as I suspect some might, that this is the "great 9/11" novel—would limit by labeling Goodman's aims in this novel. *The Cookbook Collector* is a baggy monster, charmingly so.

Anne Trubek is a professor of Rhetoric and English at Oberlin College and the author of the forthcoming *A Skeptic's Guide To Writers' Houses* (University of Pennsylvania Press).

Posthumous Prophecy

BY BEN BIRNBAUM

THE PROPHET'S WIFE

by Milton Steinberg
Behrman House, 384 pp., \$24.95

Though prolific as writers, readers, and hostages of history, modern Jews have rarely produced serious fiction based on the Jewish past. A famous but only partial exception to this is Milton Steinberg's *As a Driven Leaf*. Steinberg's novel tells the story of rabbinic Judaism's classic heretic, the 2nd-century rabbi Elisha ben Abuya, on whom the compilers of the Talmud famously bestowed the pungent epithet *Acher*, or "other."

The 36-year-old rabbi of New York City's Park Avenue Synagogue when the novel was brought

out by Bobbs-Merrill in 1939, Steinberg was a trained philosopher who had been a favorite student of both Morris Raphael Cohen, at City College, and Mordechai Kaplan, at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He was known more widely as the author of 1934's *The Making of the Modern Jew*, which concluded (lucidly, given the time) that history had left 20th-century Western Jews high and dry: their insular but sustaining past had been lost as a consequence of their having eaten from the fruit of the Enlightenment, while their way forward was blocked by Christian anti-Semitism. What Steinberg was not, however, was a storyteller, and the first submission of *As a Driven Leaf* was politely returned with the complaint that it was "almost entirely intellectual," which was not a bad description of Steinberg himself, who then (with the help of his wife Edith, it's

said) reworked the novel into publishable shape.

The book received mixed reviews, and though it sold out its small first printing within two years, it made little money for the author. Stung, Steinberg told a friend he would never write fiction again, which turns out to have been almost true. After Bobbs-Merrill informed Steinberg it had no interest in a second edition, friends of the author urged the book on Behrman's Jewish Book House, which then (as today, as Behrman House) specialized in textbooks for the Jewish day school trade. Behrman reissued the novel in 1948, and it has been in print ever since. Since 1980, it has sold more than 100,000 copies, according to the publisher. I tracked *Driven Leaf* on Amazon.com during February and March 2010 and found that it sold a little better than *Marjorie Morningstar* and lengths ahead of *Exodus*, *Call it Sleep*, Elie Weisel's recent memoir, or any book

by Martin Buber, Bernard Malamud, or Sholem Aleichem.

From a business perspective, therefore, it's no surprise that Behrman House has spent the last decade or so trying to find a way to bring out a second Steinberg novel—an incomplete manuscript that the author was working on when he died of heart disease at the tragically young age of 46. This work-in-progress, called *The Prophet's Wife*, was also an exercise in historical fiction, in this case an attempt at re-imagining the life of the biblical prophet Hosea.

Behrman began the project by trying to hire a brand name Jewish writer to complete the draft. According to former *New York Times* religion reporter Ari Goldman's foreword to *The Prophet's Wife*, Chaim Potok and Herman Wouk declined, while Goldman said yes and spent "many years . . . trying to craft a proper ending." Ultimately, however, and for reasons neither Goldman nor the publisher's chatty publicity kit make clear, Behrman House determined after all this to issue the novel in its original embryonic form, wrapped in warm apologies by Goldman, the novelist and essayist Norma Rosen, and Rabbi Harold Kushner of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* fame.

The biblical book of Hosea is about fidelity: that of the people of Israel toward God, and that of Gomer, Hosea's "wife of harlotry," toward her husband. Neither marriage is working: Israel worships strange gods while Gomer strays. God ominously names her three children Jezreel, the site of a murderous royal usurpation; Lo-ruchamah, "no mercy"; and Lo-ammi, "not my people." God's promise, however, as voiced by Hosea, is that He will return love to a repentant people. Or as Steinberg sensitively put it in his *Basic Judaism* (1947), "Out of the capacity for forgiveness that he found in himself, [Hosea] leaped to the dazzling vision of a God inexhaustible in mercy."

What Steinberg does with this biblical material is to mostly ignore it. *The Prophet's Wife*, it turns out, is not about a prophet's wife (or prophet), nor is it about Israel, idolatry, or God—who plays an abstraction of Himself in three brief and late cameos. Rather, it's the story of a nebbish named Hosea who grows up on a rural estate in fruitful northern Israel along with his robust father, his robust older brothers, robust house servants—"ruddy" comes in for a lot of use—and lots of other robust and genial guys with appetites and habits that the priggish Hosea finds off-putting. This future prophet unwisely marries a little flirt named Gomer, who lives down the road apiece on a hardscrabble farm with her dissolute (but robust) uncle. One midnight, a year or so into the marriage, he returns early from a business trip and finds Gomer tangled in the "overripe redness" of one of those robust brothers. Hosea divorces Gomer (who turns to whoring) and becomes a scribe in the palace. One day, when rebels attack, Hosea sets down his quill, picks up a bow, and begins a long-range duel with an assailant who turns out to be—yes—the brother who cuckolded him. And there, with Hosea dodging his brother's tossed spear, the book ends.

This tangle of clichés is made worse by the notable absence of cogent copyediting—a remarkable oversight given that the work was known to be a first draft, and the author known to have been compos-

ing it under great physical and mental stress, sometimes in an oxygen tent. Early on, for instance, we're advised that except for children, "no one in . . . in all Jezreel laughed at Talmon," the Shrek-like overseer of Hosea's father's estate. Two pages later, however, we read "whenever Talmon opened his mouth in song, all who heard him burst into laughter." Then there are the temporary lapses into present tense that begin to occur near the 100-page mark, as though we've now got a clutch problem.

berg's two sons—Jonathan, a distinguished historian at the University of Pennsylvania; and David, another historian and the longtime president of Long Island University—were certainly entitled to publish *The Prophet's Wife*. My guess is that they did not view publication as a literary venture (Jonathan Steinberg once acutely characterized his father's *As a Driven Leaf* as "half Danielle Steel and half Spinoza"), but as a *matzevah*, a permanent headstone for a famous father who died when



Edith and Milton Steinberg. (Courtesy of Dr. David Steinberg.)

But as annoying as such bumps in the narrative road are, they are nothing as compared with the stylistic lurches the reader experiences when spoken conversation veers from the King Jamesian to something like *True Confessions*: "Seek not to brush me off so." Then there is Hosea's brother's unintentionally hilarious response—this time a collision of King James and Vaudeville—when he's caught *in flagrante delicto*: "Yet, it is not as bad as it appears."

Nor did the editor care to do the late rabbi and us the favor of untangling a host of sentences like this one: "The world was multicolored, unhindered, where nothing came into being but found expression, an expression which never faltered and was ever true to the reality it bespoke." Or (a personal favorite) "Her eyes burned black under eyebrows that glanced upward as though about to take flight." And certainly something could have been done to solve the ambiguity of "As he had never desired anything in his lifetime, he wished to comfort her," or the solid wrongness of "A rose may grow amidst briars, as the song says, but in my observation, only seldom." (Actually, roses *are* briars, as the author of the Song of Songs is well aware.)

Of course, it's hardly a crime to bring out an inept novel. And as copyright holders, Stein-

they were still young. I saw some evidence of this at a book launch that took place in March in the sanctuary of the Park Avenue Synagogue. At the conclusion of the program, David Steinberg went to the *bima* and read the final paragraphs of *The Prophet's Wife*, drifting into tears as he neared the end. "Those were the last words my father wrote," he told us.

Behrman House, however, is not in the *matzevah* business. It's a book publisher, and book publishers are not supposed to insult texts or the authors for whom they are responsible. The insult here is not merely editorial—again, an unfortunate commonplace—but an insult to probity and to Steinberg's memory. It begins with a press release that describes the novel as a work "discovered [by Behrman House] deep within the archives of the American Jewish Historical Society." In fact, not only has *The Prophet's Wife* received consideration in every serious reflection on Steinberg since his death, but the American Jewish Historical Society archives are deep only as thoughts are deep and not as are the tombs of ancient Egypt. *The Prophet's Wife* has been listed in a publicly available finding guide since 1981, and in an online catalog, for all the world to see, since 2003: "Creative Writing: *Prophet's Wife* (manuscript) Box 10."

Having credited Behrman House with an ar-

cheological achievement, the press release goes on to ascribe a scholarly feat as well, in arranging for a “triumvirate of important contemporary writers” to enter into “an artistic and intellectual collaboration [with] Steinberg,” which in plain English means that the publisher, aware that it was releasing an unfinished book without artistic merit, had solicited essays from the likes of Goldman, Rosen, and Kushner so as to be able to present the project as scholarship, or even as a religious act. It’s no accident, certainly, that Rosen and Kushner’s afterwords are termed “commentaries” and are set within a “Reader’s Guide,” that includes “questions for discussion,” as though anticipating our need to gather as Jews around this text as we would around the Torah portion or a passage from the Prophets (the Book of Hosea, for instance): “What effect do . . . family dynamics have on Hosea’s outlook on God, community, and family?”

Let me take Harold Kushner’s essay first, because it is not only exemplary as a response to the book but also shows what might have been. Written with respect for the text and for the author in that it makes not a single extravagant claim for the novel, it honors Steinberg by offering a learned reading of the Book of Hosea, and of the intellectual and theological challenges that Steinberg faced in writing a novel about the prophet. Had the Steinberg family and Behrman House decided to publish the draft without fanfare, and prefaced it with Kushner’s article on the place of the prophets in rabbinic thought in the mid-20th-century, they would have had themselves a *matzevah*.

By contrast, Norma Rosen’s essay runs off the road with appreciations of Steinberg’s Gomer as a woman oppressed “by the iron hard social subjugation of her time” and of Milton Steinberg as a visionary proto-feminist who ventured where no rabbi of his time dared to go. It’s an absurd thesis, whether from a biblical or biographical perspective (though not quite as nonsensical as Rosen’s con-

wasn’t published immediately after Steinberg’s death was that it was “not something that could hold up as literary work.” But, he then whispers, “there was another reason.” And what was that reason? The book was “was too hot to handle,” Goldman writes. And why? Because Milton and Edith Steinberg had a “tempestuous marriage,” and “[t]he story of Hosea and Gomer cut too close to the bone.”

How will any of this affect Steinberg’s standing in 20th-century American Jewish history? Not a whit.

tention that the novel is elevated by “Vermeer-like detail”). Rosen then disappears completely into the ideological muck by referring to Steinberg’s “astounding midrashic innovation” in making Gomer “a woman who is as independent minded as she is beautiful.” Let me be as clear as I can be: the Gomer invented for this book has no mind to speak of—only a feral cunning, some excellent dance moves, “curves of womanhood,” and an uninteresting but indiscriminate libido. She’s an ancient Israelite Jessica Simpson.

In his essay, Ari Goldman presents a brief hagiographic life of Steinberg, and generally extends the lifeless cheerleading he’d done for *The Prophet’s Wife* since pre-publication, as when he told a newspaper reporter that Steinberg makes the metaphor of God’s love for Israel “real and concrete and not just a metaphor.” But then he does something quite strange. Goldman lets us in on a conspiracy. He notes that the “official reason” *The Prophet’s Wife*

Certainly, those of us who have studied Steinberg know that his marriage to Edith Alpert was difficult. One wonders, however, what possible reason Goldman might have had to leeringly share this information except to gin up sales by allowing us to imagine that in *The Prophet’s Wife* we would not only be treated to a bit of novelistic midrash, but the marital truth about Milton and Edith. No one who reads Goldman’s introduction before reading the book will be able to encounter particular scenes and passages—Hosea’s disastrous wedding night, and his fevered thoughts about sexual pollution—without wondering things that don’t want wondering. Thus is the despoilment of the writer and man, Milton Steinberg—by publisher, editor, publicist, and attendants—completed.

How will any of this affect Steinberg’s standing in 20th-century American Jewish history? Not a whit—and for three reasons. First, there’s

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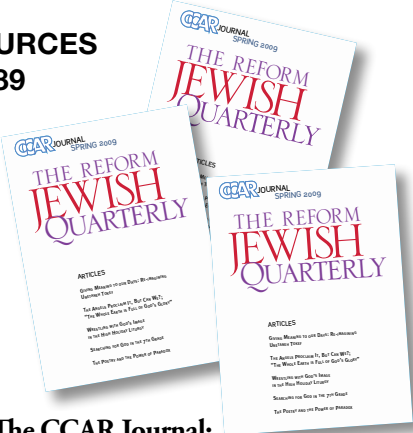
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his distinctive place in American rabbinic history. When the leaders of the Jewish Theological Seminary began to imagine a characteristically American synagogue rabbi who would be distinguished by his secular erudition as well as his Jewish learning and integrity, Steinberg came along to fit the bill. He was a poster rabbi not only for his elders but also for generations of rabbis (among them Harold Kushner) who followed him to the American pulpit.

Second, Steinberg's status is also secured by the fact that he wrote wonderfully when he wasn't writing fiction. His essays on Judaism are almost invariably smart, even wise, and occasionally lyrical. *Basic Judaism* remains in print because it is clearer, more learned,

more generous, and lovelier to read than almost any of the popular accounts of Judaism that seem to tumble from the presses each season.

And finally there's *As a Driven Leaf*, a novel that was probably just as awful in its first draft as *The Prophet's Wife* remains, but was feverishly reworked by Steinberg, his wife, and anonymous editors at Bobbs-Merrill. They did not create a literary classic. In fact, most of the book's characters are robed adjectives (loyal, clueless, wicked), and the one character who lives—Elisha—has an annoying habit of talking like a high school valedictorian practicing his very important speech in front of the mirror. But what they did make—what Steinberg himself made, ultimately—was a book that spoke to two great Jew-

ish theological problems of both the 130s and the 1930s: a just God of Israel who does not intervene in the hideous maltreatment of his people; and the threat to those people posed by a secular civilization (Rome/America) that welcomes all comers. In the wake of the Shoah and then the virtual disappearance of consequential anti-Semitism in the United States, these issues became singularly important for American Jews, and so they remain, which is why *As a Driven Leaf* continues to sell, 71 years after its initial publication. *The Prophet's Wife* will have no such luck.

Ben Birnbaum is an award-winning essayist and a senior executive at Boston College.

I, Terrorist

BY MARGOT LURIE

AMERICAN TALIBAN

by Pearl Abraham
Random House, 272 pp., \$25

A WEEK IN DECEMBER

by Sebastian Faulks
Doubleday, 400 pp., \$27.95

TERRORIST

by John Updike
Ballantine Books, 320 pp., \$14.95

On May 1, two Times Square street vendors saw smoke wafting from a Nissan Pathfinder SUV parked with its hazard lights on. Police were summoned to the scene and disarmed the crude car bomb before it could cause any injuries. The bomber manqué was Faisal Shahzad, and speculation as to his motives and training is, as I write, still driving the news.

Shahzad's story turned out to be distressingly familiar: a naturalized U.S. citizen, he returned to his birth country of Pakistan for training in bomb-making after becoming violently radicalized. There are many such stories in the New York Police Department's 2007 report, "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat." Its pages are filled with example after example of young men like Shahzad who have embraced, and acted on, a murderous jihadi-Salafi ideology, mostly in a progression whose four stages the NYPD calls pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination, and jihadization. It is a novelistic arc, and it is fitting that several contemporary novelists have taken it up. In doing so, they have given us a new kind of antihero, a ripped-from-the-headlines young man, raised in the West, affluent, smart, idealistic, who works out his salvation through other people's fear and trembling.

Sebastian Faulks has a background in journalism, and he layers his novels (nine previous, including a turn as Ian Fleming for the James Bond book,

Devil May Care) with impasto-thick plots rich in newsy, knowledgeable detail. His current work, *A Week in December*, is a Tube-and-Thames loop around London, set in 2007 and centered around two societal threats. One is the collapse of the subprime mortgage system and subsequent economic meltdown, the chief concern of John Veals, a glint-eyed quant; the other is a terrorist plot that occupies Hassan al-Rashid, the radicalized 22-year-old son of Muslim immigrants to Glasgow. Attention is a kind of affection, and Hassan's thoughts, both pre- and post-radicalization, are touchingly earnest: "It was perplexing to him that people paid so little heed to their own salvation; he was puzzled by it in the way he might have been by the sight of a mother feeding whisky to a baby."

Faulks has gone to some pains to portray Hassan's parents as loving and sympathetic after his 2009 comments to the *Sunday Times Magazine* about the Qur'an being "depressing" and lacking an ethical dimension spread like wildfire through the British press. In a rejoinder in *The Telegraph*, Faulks wrote:

There seems to be an almost inevitable irritation when novelists in Britain and America, with their long history of free speech, touch on matters Islamic . . . My new novel, *A Week in December*, is carefully researched, and, among its main characters, presents a hugely sympathetic and loving Muslim family; it is furthermore made clear that the parents' kindness and good citizenship spring not just from being naturally good eggs but from their devotion to the Koran.

The al-Rashid family is indeed sympathetic and un-stereotypical. But the novel undercuts Faulks's ostensible point: while Hassan's parents' deep but undogmatic devotion to the Qur'an makes them "good eggs," their son's more fervid devotion puts him at risk of becoming a thoroughly bad egg. Further, while one can't doubt that Faulks believes there

is a moderate Islam, he makes clear that it is not the parts of the Qur'an that appeal to Hassan's father Farooq ("the nice bit in 'The Bee' for instance, which suggested that in an emergency you could even eat pork,") that are spurring over 100,000 people a year to convert to Islam. Rather, the novel suggests that it is the rhetoric of relentless "hard threats" that is the heart of the Qur'an, and of the religion that springs from it. One character, encountering the muscular, Miltonic language of the Qur'an, likens it to the inner monologue of his paranoid schizophrenic brother.

The most successful parts of the book are those in which Faulks turns his sharp eye and arch humor to the counter-intuitiveness of societal shifts. In a jihad logistics meeting, Faulks gives us this exchange:

"What time on Friday?" said Hassan
"I'll let you know the day before. Why?"
"It's just . . ." Hassan stopped. "It's difficult to explain. My father is . . . is . . ." He felt his throat constrict. He was frightened of Salim's anger.
"What is it?" said Salim.
"My father is going to Buckingham Palace to get the OBE," said Hassan. "And my mother and I have to go with him."

This is less implausible than one might think. Faisal Shahzad possessed an M.B.A. and a black Mercedes. One terrorist cluster, the Virginia Jihad Network, included a diplomat's son, a kitchen designer, a doctoral student in computational biology, two former U.S. Marines, and two former U.S. Army soldiers.

The presence of military personnel in a terror cell is particularly shocking—a point that John Updike seems to have anticipated in *Terrorist*. After Updike's young antihero, Ahmad, expresses his seditious, radical views to his high-school guidance counselor, one willfully assimilated Jack Levy, Levy advises Ahmad to "think about the Army. It's not everybody's sweetheart any more, but it still offers a pretty good deal—teaches you some skills, and helps with an education afterwards. If you

have any Arabic, they'd love you." The career of Major Nidal Malik Hasan, the Fort Hood shooter, brings this fictional episode into tragicomic relief.

Updike's Ahmad, "seeking to walk the straight path," ends up on a more circuitous route, trucking hazardous materials meant to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel. Ahmad is a kind of Islamic renunciant, quivering between piety and spite, in thrall to "his imam—not his mama, his imam." Updike, who died in 2009 with *Terrorist* the last of his twenty-two published novels, was trounced in the press for Ahmad's head-bashing lack of subtlety and stilted language ("the American way is the way of infidels. It is headed for a terrible doom."). In fact, compared with Faulks's Hassan, Ahmad is a more plausibly frightening terrorist.

Aggrieved and insecure, self-conscious of his mixed parentage, Ahmad is rudderless and corruptible. While his dialogue is painfully stiff, his thoughts betray the Updike stamp, a lyric tautness and subtlety:

In his travels through New Jersey, [Ahmad] takes interest less in its pockets of a diluted Middle East than in the American reality all around, a sprawling ferment for which he feels the mild pity owed a failed experiment.

Updike's lyricism has not always endeared him to his critics. Anthony Burgess, writing in 1966, called Updike guilty "of a sort of democratic heresy in pouring the riches of language on characters and situa-

tions so trivial." Trying to create a nontrivial character in Ahmad, Updike ran afoul of James Wood, who blasted him for hiding behind poeticisms like "two aged infidel animals." "This is Ahmad's thought," Wood wrote in 2006, "but because it could not be the boy's language or diction, it cannot function as his thought." What's a lyric novelist to do? Whatever Updike's deficiencies (and they were real), *Terrorist*, four years after its publication, looks better and better.

If we are to understand what makes someone with a radical ideology turn violent, a novelist's imagination may be exactly what we need.

Pearl Abraham's *American Taliban* gives us John, a protagonist of a wholly different sort. John is not a loner, not a loser. He has wealthy parents who make him feel loved and understood; he is adored by the bikini-clad wahines of North Carolina's Outer Banks, where he surfs; he is precocious and self-possessed beyond what most of us imagine possible for a human being, much less a teenager. John is a thoroughly American *talib*, nicknamed "Mr. Skating" for the way he grinds around the white concrete of Pakistan's Islamia

College. After his radicalization, he appears bearded and dirt-camouflaged, with a knapsack full of pita, olives, and Zone protein bars.

Unlike *A Week in December*, which weaves the story of Hassan through shifting social strata and intricate Victorian plotting, *American Taliban* focuses wholly on John's internal life. And unlike *Terrorist*, which begins after its protagonist has already been violently radicalized, Abraham endeavors to enter the mind of John along this process. Herself raised in the Satmar sect of Hasidism, Abraham understands prayer, and her writing has a buoyancy appropriate for a teenage seeker. The book is most convincing when Abraham shows John mastering skills, from counting the breakers to evaluate the surf, to the rough breathing of Arabic and the right-left head turn of the *salaat*. *American Taliban* is the only one of the three novels to feature a convert to Islam, and John's story is roughly comparable to that of John Walker Lindh, whose sobriquet provides the title of the book, and whose capture and trial become an obsession for the fictional John's mother.

Abraham eschews quotation marks, which lends conversations in the novel a seamless, dreamlike feel. After three weeks of training in the hills above Peshawar, John has this exchange with the agent of his radicalization:

You're ready, Jalal said, tracing John's newly hardened muscles, ligaments, and sinews. . . . The Taliban has been calling for help.

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But the lorry came. The lorry went. John stayed a fourth week until Jalal reminded him of his duty, of what he wanted, and why he'd come: He must think wu-wei, give himself over to the chance of death, become. His reward: greater spiritual life. The great spiritual men of this world would escape biology, become immortal.

Do you know the "Tale of the Sands"? Jalal asked.

From the *Mystic Rose*?

Think of yourself as the stream that allows the wind to carry it across the desert sands, then falls like rain and becomes a river. You, too, will return as the higher essence of yourself.

If it strains credulity to see *mujahideen* drawing inspiration from the Tao and Sufism (as well as

Emerson and Richard Burton along the way), that just shows why this book is false at its core. Abraham's fictional terror cell, where the boys learn English from John during the day ("My oom's name is Barbara. My ahb's name is William. I have no ahk or ohkt. I am from Washington, D.C., . . . and I am visiting Pakistan. My favorite food is pizza.") and the men read the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz aloud at night, is more plausible as a Baha'i retreat—or even a Boy Scout camp with exceptional marksmanship training—than as a terror cell. Abraham must know that this world is steeped, for instance, in the most retrograde and toxic sexism and anti-Semitism, but when she nods to this at all, she treats this rhetoric more like acne than cancer. John innocently wonders why women are missing from his new world. The book is without mention of Israel or Zionism.

Whether it is cowardice, political correctness, fear

of risking the reader's sympathy, or the impenetrability of this world that leads Abraham to such a skewed portrait, is unclear. I don't mean to suggest that smart, idealistic young people have never turned to terrorism: from the café anarchists in the circle around Félix Fénéon, to the Weathermen of recent decades, this is, sadly, not uncharted territory.

If we are to understand what makes someone with a radical ideology turn violent, a novelist's imagination may be exactly what we need. All three writers have great imaginative gifts, but neither Ahmad, nor Hassan, nor, certainly, John is sufficient. The Great Anti-American Novel has yet to be written.

Margot Lurie recently received her MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her work has appeared in Commentary, Tablet, Parnassus: Poetry in Review, and The New Criterion.

The Weaver

BY GABRIELLA SAFRAN

PHOTOGRAPHING THE JEWISH NATION: PICTURES FROM S. AN-SKY'S ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPEDITIONS

Edited by Eugene M. Avrutin, Valerii Dymshits, Alexander Ivanov, Alexander Lvov, Harriet Murav, Alla Sokolova
Brandeis University Press, 228 pp., \$39.95

All of the photographs in this volume were taken by Solomon Iudovin, an artist who shared at least one teacher with Marc Chagall. In black and white, they depict traditional Jews like those who fill Iudovin's famous contemporary's colorful dreams. Iudovin took these photographs at the request of a man who, like Chagall, grew up in Vitebsk: his cousin, Shloyme-Zanvl Rappoport, the journalist and revolutionary known under the pen name S. An-sky, best remembered today as the author of *The Dybbuk*.

A self-taught ethnographer, An-sky was inspired by the teams of Russian researchers who brought cameras and phonographs to places far from the Russian Empire's capitals to document the lives of subsistence farmers and reindeer hunters, to write down their stories, inquire into their familial relationships, and purchase objects for museums. Two years before the outbreak of World War I, he succeeded in convincing some wealthy Russian Jews—including the distinguished banker Vladimir Gintsburg—to finance an ethnographic expedition that would treat the Jews of Western Ukraine as people just as worthy of study as Slavic peasants or Siberian Yakuts. To join him in this expedition he recruited his cousin Iudovin, as well as the composer Yuly Engel and later the ethnomusicologist Zinovy Kiselfhof, to record folk songs on wax cylinders.

An-sky's true goal was to help modern urban Russian Jewry create a new secular Jewish culture based on their memory of the structures that governed the lives of shtetl Jews. He therefore sought to collect evidence of Jewish folk culture, to capture it in image, recording, text, and object. Convinced that shtetl craftsmen could inspire their urban brethren to become creators themselves, An-sky directed Iudovin to photograph blacksmiths, cigarette makers, shoemakers and others. There is a particularly striking picture of a slightly built weaver who stands inside the box of his loom, bare feet on a wooden pedal attached by ropes to the center of a mechanism that is taller than he is.

An-sky was certain that, through publication, museum exhibits and public lectures (he drew crowds of thousands), he could bring about a Jewish renaissance. He wanted to combat what he saw as a plague of assimilation and conversion to Christianity, to lure big-city Jews back to their people with art that they could not resist.

The idea was quixotic, as An-sky's friends were quick to tell him when he gathered them in St. Petersburg to help plan the expedition. But when they insisted that no folktales or songs could compete with the material benefits of assimilation and conversion, he was



Weaver, Mezhirech, 1912. (Photo by Solomon Iudovin from Photographing the Jewish Nation: Pictures from S. An-sky's Ethnographic Expeditions. Used with permission of Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England. Copyright 2009 Brandeis University Press.)

undaunted. He was sure that intellectuals could pick and choose their favorite parts of traditional culture, present them attractively, and thereby produce something vital and enduring.

An-sky knew that what shtetl and big-city Jews had in common was a past in which cultural options were fewer. In 1905, he wrote to his childhood friend, the diaspora nationalist Chaim Zhitlowsky, "Until recently the Talmud and messianism have bound Jews together around a single national idea, which prevented disintegration. However, one can't substitute one steel corset for another, that is to say, Palestinian messianism or territorialism." Later he would grow more enthusiastic about Zionism, but he retained his suspicion of "steel corsets." Still, he was certain that even after the rigid structures of tradition disappeared, Jews would find meaning in the traces these shapes had left in their memory.

This conviction made sense for the people in his circles, Russia's Populist ("narodnik") intelligentsia. The Populists were glad that Alexander II had emancipated the serfs in 1861, but they believed that Russia's peasants had developed a unique and valuable culture under slavery, and they wanted to help the peasants preserve some of the old, even as they modernized. As a revolutionary, An-sky hoped that the Jews, like the peasants, would find that the memory of the old forms would make their modernity more socialist, less capitalist. To trigger this kind of creativity, he filled his museum with objects to remind people of the past—silver Torah crowns, centuries-old Hebrew letters, women's holiday dresses—and photographs of these things and the people who used them, the weaver, the blacksmith, the shtetl's children.

Photographing the Jewish Nation: Pictures from S. An-sky's *Ethnographic Expeditions* is a beautifully produced and lovingly edited collection of a cache of Iudovin's expedition photographs that was discovered in an apartment in St. Petersburg only in 2001, and that subsequently formed the basis of a series of successful exhibits in that city. In six essays, the editors—some of whom also curated the exhibits—locate An-sky, Iudovin, and their colleagues in their cultural contexts.

Iudovin's work differs from that of other photographers of Eastern European Jews, such as Alter Kacyzne, a writer and photographer born two decades after An-sky, who became his protégé and friend. In the 1920s, Kacyzne took photographs in Poland for the Yiddish *Forverts*, published in New York; many appear in an elegant 1999 volume, *Poyln: Jewish Life in the Old Country*, edited by Marek Web. Where Iudovin photographed laborers and avoided traders, Kacyzne took pictures of busy marketplaces and pleading vendors. Where Iudovin's Jewish boys play in a circle, Kacyzne's glance up from heavy volumes.



Boy with a cigarette.



Recess at Talmud Torah, Kovel. (Photos by Solomon Iudovin from *Photographing the Jewish Nation: Pictures from S. An-sky's Ethnographic Expeditions*. Used with permission of Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England. Copyright 2009 Brandeis University Press.)

Kacyzne's Jews are photographed, often, from close up: they look at the camera longingly, as if saying to their New York relatives, "Remember me? When will you send money again?" His weaver glances up, worried, from a loom that is only partially shown. Where Kacyzne's Jewish images, produced for an

of text and law, was all periphery, no center. "How can multiple perspectives and open-mindedness and diverse backgrounds be celebrated without a grounding in knowledge, without history, detail, object and belief? Can a museum serve its community without leading it into the unknown past

stimulate a vital, enduring response, and indeed, they already have, although from the last quarters that he would have imagined. The photo that has created the greatest contemporary stir is of a previously unknown handwritten letter from Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, the great grandson of the founder of Hasidism, the Ba'al Shem Tov, and a charismatic Hasidic master whose followers never replaced him after he died of tuberculosis in Uman at the age of 38. This letter—apparently the first Rabbi Nachman wrote from Uman—is addressed to his daughter, "the modest and pious wise woman of valor, Adil." Since the photograph was published, the letter has been meticulously transcribed, annotated, and published in *Shibolim*, the journal of the Bratslav community in Israel.

The incident reveals both An-sky's prescience and his blindness. He was certain that the shifts in the shtetl did not have to mean the death of Jewish culture, but he would never have believed that the 21st-century would include Hasidic journals. Nonetheless, with his hope that careful documentation of the Russian empire's traditional Jews would be of value to a thriving new Jewishness, An-sky has something to offer Jews today in St. Petersburg, San Francisco, and even Jerusalem.

Gabriella Safran is a professor in the Slavic Department at Stanford University. Her new biography, Wandering Soul: The Dybbuk's Creator, S. An-sky (Harvard University Press), will be published in fall 2010.

One barefoot boy of ten or twelve, cigarette between his lips, sits on the ground and looks straight at the camera; give him a kopeck, and he'll run an errand for you right now.

overseas market, show a world that, having been abandoned, is fully available for nostalgia, Iudovin's Jews are absorbed in their own world, which still has something to offer its viewer.

Despite their distant origins, An-sky's project and Iudovin's photographs speak to current Jewish concerns. In San Francisco—like the tsarist St. Petersburg, a city on the water, named after a saint, home to a sizable, wealthy, assimilated Jewish population that enjoys the benefits of living at the very edge of an empire—the new Contemporary Jewish Museum was built in 2008. Its exhibits stress the interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish cultures and are housed in a postmodern building by Daniel Libeskind. In a nervous review, *The New York Times* complained that this museum, with its lack of interest in the rigid structures

as well as into speculative realms? Can the Jewish thrive without Judaism?"

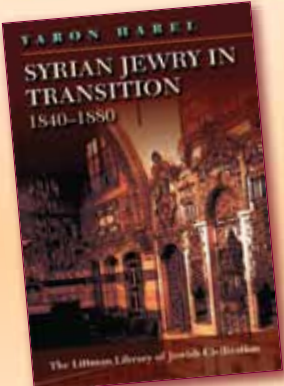
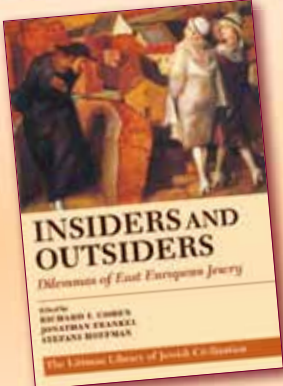
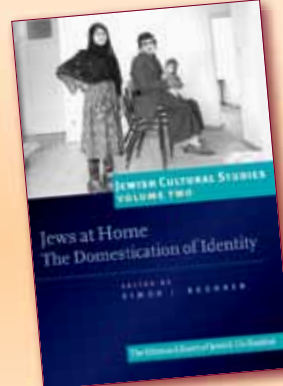
Of course, An-sky, like Libeskind, did not fully reject the Jewish past or the textual tradition. He collected rabbinic books and community records, but he displayed them in the same space as objects that no pious Jew would touch: a Jewish skull from the 17th-century Chmielnitsky uprising, a finger cut off by a boy's family to save him from recruitment into the army. Iudovin's Jewish children are rarely studying: they look up from their school desks, play circle games at recess, and sneak gleefully into photographs of adults. One barefoot boy of ten or twelve, cigarette between his lips, sits on the ground and looks straight at the camera; give him a kopeck, and he'll run an errand for you right now.

An-sky believed that these photographs would



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The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization

Underground Man: The Curious Case of Mark Zborowski and the Writing of a Modern Jewish Classic

BY STEVEN J. ZIPPERSTEIN

The most influential of all popular renderings of Eastern European Jewry in the English language and, arguably, the book that Jewish historians of the region loathe more than any other, is *Life is with People*. Few books written in the last half-century have more resolutely enveloped the Eastern European Jewish past in nostalgic amber. It was, to be sure, only one of a cascade of books, some of them translated from Yiddish, that sought to do much the same thing in the midst or the immediate wake of Hitler's war, among them Maurice Samuel's *The World of Shalom Aleichem*, Bella Chagall's memoir *Burning Lights*, Abraham Joshua Heschel's elegy *The Earth is the Lord's*, and Roman Vishniac's book of photographs *Polish Jews*. But *Life is with People* was the most ambitious of the lot. Published in 1952, it sought to capture an entire civilization from cradle to grave in 400-odd pages of accessible, even buoyant prose. The world it explored was, it insisted, continuous with—but also distinct from—everything around it, not quite part of Russia or Poland yet inside both, a kind of island of unadulterated *Yiddishkayt* before it was diluted, then destroyed.

The book—originally subtitled “The Jewish Little-Town in Eastern Europe” and altered once it appeared in paperback in the early 1960s to “The Culture of the Shtetl”—concentrates on the essence of this culture, which, as it sees it, was the “shtetl.” Shtetl is Yiddish for small market-town, and *Life is with People* examines shtetls not in their considerable variety but as instances of a single ideal type presented in the present tense, as if it still existed.

The book's enduring appeal (it went through several editions, sold more than 100,000 copies, and is out of print now for the first time in almost 60 years) can probably be traced to its sweetness; its blend of collective genealogy and ethnographic Jewish lore. It is the rare commemoration that leaves the reader feeling good, even though the world it depicts has been obliterated. Its tone is conversational, and it takes the reader through the rhythms, the sounds of the Jewish week starting with the Sabbath, and on to schooldays, workdays (depicted, despite the pervasive poverty of Eastern European Jewry, mostly in cheery tones), marriages, circumcisions, and deaths. It is an ethnography that is also a “how-to” book (“Prayers are accompanied by a rocking movement, from the waist to the toes”), and yet one that understands how to satisfy its readers by doing little more than nudge them toward an unobtrusive voyeurism.

When Tevye sings the famous lines “If I were a rich man, I'd have the time I lack / To sit in the synagogue and pray / And maybe have a seat by the

Eastern Wall,” in *Fiddler on the Roof*, he is actually versifying a passage from the second chapter of *Life is with People*: “the men who sit along the Eastern Wall are pre-eminently the learned and the rabbi . . .” Later editions of the Schocken paperback featured a blurb

When Tevye sings “If I were a rich man . . .,” he is actually versifying a passage from *Life is with People*.

from *Fiddler's* lyricist Sheldon Harnick. “*Life Is with People* told us about the life in Jewish villages as no other book.” Indeed, Schocken also marketed it as part of a box-set of a half-dozen books that were necessary reading for every literate Jew. Bernard Malamud consulted the book when he was writing his Pulitzer Prize-winning 1967 novel about a blood libel case in Tsarist Russia, *The Fixer*.

The study that culminated in *Life is with People* was part of the Columbia University Research in Contemporary Cultures project, headed up by the two leading cultural anthropologists of the period, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, and funded, oddly enough, by the Office of Naval Research. But its co-author and central intellectual figure was Mark Zborowski. Mead appears to have thought of Zborowski as the perfect insider-outsider: someone “who combined . . . the living experience of shtetl culture . . . and the disciplines of history and anthropology.” The book, she added in the Preface, was “the realization of a plan [he had] cherished for many years.” This was true, or almost true, but it also omitted a great deal, most of which Mead didn't know. Zborowski was not really from a shtetl but from Uman, a Ukrainian town of 28,000, and though he might, conceivably, have cherished the idea of writing an ethnology of Eastern European Jewry, it was not a culture that he himself held dear. In fact, he had been estranged from it since adolescence, and his most significant professional experience was not as an anthropologist (he never really received a doctorate, as he sometimes claimed, from the Sorbonne), but as a Soviet spy.

Zborowski, whose GPU codenames included Mack, Max, Tulip, Kant, and Etienne, infiltrated the Trotskyist circle in Paris in the 1930s, and—though he probably never murdered anyone personally—several of his anti-Stalinist acquaintances died sudden, violent, and mysterious deaths. Indeed, when Zborowski's work was done in Paris and Leon

Trotsky's son, Lev, along with many others, was dead, his GPU handlers tried to get him to Trotsky's lair in Coyoacan, Mexico in order “to get to the OLD MAN.” Zborowski, however, appears to have preferred to continue his anthropological studies at the Sorbonne, and contrived to remain in Paris. In Richard Lourie's 1999 *The Autobiography of Joseph Stalin: A Novel*, Stalin muses about his gratitude to Zborowski whose reports, he says, are “concise, to the point without a wasted word.” In the 1956 Senate subcommittee hearing which would eventually lead to his conviction and imprisonment for perjury, Zborowski acknowledged that he was aware that Stalin took special interest in his work: “I heard about it, yes,” he admitted, laconically.

What, if anything, does Zborowski's biography imply with regard to how one now reads his reassuring account of the Jewish past in *Life is with People*? True, books should not be conflated with the biographies of their authors, and it would be a mistake simply to collapse the activities of Zborowski as spy and anthropologist, even if their skill-sets overlap. Nonetheless, it remains striking how similar his “field-reports” to both Stalin and Trotsky (often giving drastically different accounts of the very same events) are in texture to his ethnographic work on the shtetl.

Scholars, most prominently anthropologist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, have written insightfully about the evolution of *Life is with People*, its ethnographic failures and its place in mid-century American anthropology. But when the book is re-read with an eye fixed on Zborowski's own life, it emerges as a different, more intriguing text, a work infused with not inconsiderable feeling and occasionally startling insight, indeed with insights that cut against the grain of the book.

Much of Zborowski's life was conducted behind curtains. Yet, it can now be described in some detail, despite major gaps, because of newly accessible Russian sources, declassified FBI data, and Margaret Mead's papers, housed in the Library of Congress. Mead's project, Columbia University Research in Contemporary Cultures, was launched in 1946 to examine cultures touched, in one way or another, by the Second World War (Russian, Polish, Czech, Chinese, Japanese, and so on). Jews were added to the mix rather late, and the transcripts of the researchers' meetings on the “Jewish Book” involve leading anthropologists, including Mead, Conrad Arensberg, and Ruth Landes, and offer a vivid glimpse into Zborowski's central role in the project.

Unsurprisingly, Zborowski was not given to

self-revelation. But amidst the huge body of material about Jews collected for Mead's project—more than 100 transcripts of interviews with Eastern European Jews, summaries of memoirs and works of Yiddish literature, translated bits and pieces from contemporaneous memorial books (*yizker bikher*) published by survivors, meticulously sketched maps of towns, transcripts of jokes, depictions of local deviants, saints, and others—is an interview with



Mark Zborowski

Zborowski about his childhood and youth that is probably the most honest statement he ever recorded. He provided the information in 1947, just before anti-communism surfaced as a major post-war preoccupation, two years after his espionage work had ended, and almost a decade before he was unmasked. He seems to have felt safer from detection, freer to talk, than ever before or afterwards.

His childhood, as he tells it, was spent in Uman, where he was born in 1908, and which he insisted on calling a shtetl. His family was solidly middle-class, (wealthy by Bolshevik standards, as he later put it), and

He remembered himself walking around Uman with grenades in his pockets.

he was the youngest of seven siblings. His father was a shopkeeper, a mildly devout Hasid who was nonetheless open to reading modern literature, in which his mother also indulged. Still, this wasn't an intellectually flexible or free-spirited home. Zborowski's recollections range from cool to hostile. He recalls little about his siblings except for the fights he had with them. As the youngest, he had no room, or even bed, of his own, and had to "wander around" nightly in search of a place to sleep.

One of his most vivid boyhood memories is of harassing the local Bratslav Hasidim, known as the "Dead Hasidim" due to their refusal to select a successor to their founding leader, Rabbi Nachman, who had died in Uman a century earlier. The Bratslavers were ecstatic even by hasidic standards and known to attract the poorest and most marginal

members of Jewish society. "We boys were standing in the doors and windows of the [synagogue], pulling them by their clothes, spitting in their faces, and throwing stones and dirt, while they were dancing and singing their prayers."

After the revolution, Zborowski volunteered at a communist library, and when his father learned of his work, he beat him with his mother watching closely, insisting only that he not be hit on the head. Of Sabbath and festivals—the subject of glowing depictions in *Life is with People* ("Sabbath brings joy of the future into the shtetl. . . . On no point is there more unanimity. . .")—he describes only countless, oppressive rules, and warnings that "if we weren't good we would be torn to pieces by the devil."

At fourteen, Zborowski left the Soviet Union with his family for Poland, first Lvov, then Lodz, where it is unclear how his father earned a living. "Before, he was a very important member of the community. Then, they took his store, they took everything away. They took his honor. After that, he stopped paying attention to me." At least part of what Zborowski meant was that his father gave up monitoring his son's behavior. He remembers himself as a radical young adolescent walking around Uman with grenades in his pockets.

Zborowski's recollections of the revolution and its aftermath are permeated with loss: "In my case, everything was undermined." With the disappearance of his father's money, the "foundations" of their life as a family were gone. Zborowski insists that the reason for his father's fury over his communist activity—the beating over his library work was the worst he'd ever undergone—was because of the cost to his communal stature. Elsewhere in the transcripts, Zborowski muses, "My parents despised people who cursed. They called them '*proste* [*Yidn*,' crass Jews." No beliefs, certainly not those picked up from Marxism, weighed quite so heavily on Zborowski as did his preoccupation with the gap separating high-class *sheyne Yidn*, from such lower-class Jews.

Zborowski left Poland for France in 1928, probably to avoid imprisonment. He and his wife, Regina, were already married and both were communists. However, he later told friends, it was only in Grenoble, where he was working his way through university as a busboy, that he came to understand Marxism. He was stunned at the indifference of bourgeois women at his hotel who "looked right passed him," not even bothering to cover themselves when he delivered breakfast to their rooms. He was approached by a Soviet agent staying at the hotel who pushed the right buttons. The recruiting agent dangled the possibility of tuition-free study in Russia, and told him that reparation would be easier if he cleansed himself of his bourgeois taint as the son of a storeowner by monitoring the activities of anti-Soviet Trotskyists. In 1933, he moved to Paris and was so successful that plans to return to Russia were put aside.

To most of his new Trotskyist comrades—the group was small, factionalized, and hungry for new members—he seemed unimpressive, little more than a willing volunteer at its Parisian library. "Colorless . . . rather like a mouse" and "not conspicuous in any way . . . There was nothing you could grapple with, except for his insignificance." Such comments were typical, while others (like the characterization



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of him by one leading member of the group as “that dirty, Polish Jew”) were more vicious. However, he contrived to bump into Lev Sedov, Trotsky’s son and the movement’s European head, in a hallway at the Sorbonne, and befriend him. Soon he was adopted as Sedov’s right-hand man, working with him almost daily as an unpaid, all-but full-time assistant. The movement had few native Russians (most had been jailed, or silenced by Stalin), and Zborowski showed himself willing to perform any chore, however trivial, in a group where nearly everyone argued about quite nearly everything. (Sedov’s own wife belonged to a different faction from that of her husband.)

When questioned at a Senate subcommittee hearing as to whether or not he “was given an assignment to lure [Sedov to] . . . where Soviet agents would assassinate him,” Zborowski admitted that “At a very later time, I was given such an assignment,” but added that he failed to carry it out. Crucial to his easy access to Sedov was his capacity to remain obscure, an uncharacteristically mild, acquiescent Trotskyist. So invisible was he that when Victor Serge—a large-hearted, generous man close to the Trotskyists—speaks in his memoirs, which appeared before Zborowski was unmasked, of experiences they had together, he doesn’t bother mentioning his name.

The story of his relationship with Sedov is chilling. For some three years, Zborowski rendered himself indispensable, and although he was suspected of being a spy, nearly everyone in this circle was accused of sedition at one time or another. There was certainly mounting evidence that some member of the inner circle was a mole. Trotsky’s papers were sto-



Lev Sedov, Trotsky’s son.

len. Then, one after another of the communists prepared to go over to Trotsky’s side was murdered: one beheaded, another shot, the body of an activist was found floating in the Seine. Ignace Reiss, who had run the network of Soviet spies in Europe and then decided to defect to the Trotskyists, was found dead, his body riddled with bullets on a Swiss road outside Lausanne. In his Senate testimony, Zborowski admitted engineering the theft of Trotsky’s papers and informing the Soviets about the whereabouts of several of these men, but denied complicity in the killings. (He insisted, despite evidence to the contrary, that he hadn’t informed on Reiss.)

Soon after these deaths, Sedov took suddenly ill. He was hospitalized and died shortly thereafter at the age of 31. There were rumors of a poisoned orange, but nothing was ever proven. It is certainly the case that Zborowski had found him a Russian-run, almost certainly Soviet-infiltrated hospital, and informed his Soviet handlers of the location while hiding it from his fellow Trotskyists. Trotsky was warned in an anonymous letter from a former spy that a Jew named Mark with excellent Russian and a young family (Zborowski sometimes brought his son George with him to his clandestine meetings) had infiltrated his Paris headquarters and was responsible for its decimation. Moreover, the letter-writer warned, Trotsky himself was to be this Mark’s next victim. Trotsky dismissed the note as Stalinist meddling. In fact, the letter was written by Alexander Orlov, a GPU agent who had helped recruit the infamous Cambridge spies, Kim Philby, Donald Maclean, and Guy Burgess, but was now on the run from Stalin, and the letter appears to have been sincere.

Despite these rumors and with Sedov gone, Zborowski’s star in the now-decimated movement began to rise. At the inaugural meeting of the Fourth International, held outside Paris in 1938, he was elected a member of its Central Committee, and its only Russian representative (Trotsky couldn’t attend). It was there that he might have introduced a New York comrade, Sylvia Ageloff, to Jacques Mor-nard, alias Ramon Mercader, who used his relationship with Ageloff to get access to Trotsky and kill him two years later.

Soon afterwards, Europe was torn asunder. Zborowski and his wife managed to escape to the United States in 1941, with the help of one of

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Zborowski's few remaining Trotskyist friends, Lila Dallin, wife of David Dallin, a leading expert on Soviet espionage. Still a spy, Zborowski now reported on the anti-Soviet Russians he met at the Dallin's

Zborowski helped Kravchenko edit his anti-Stalinist memoir, all the while sending copies to Moscow where Stalin annotated some of its pages.

New York apartment. It was at the Dallin's that he managed to meet Victor Kravchenko—much as he had first managed to meet Sedov—and befriend him. Zborowski ended up helping Kravchenko edit his anti-Stalinist memoir, *I Choose Freedom*, all the while sending copies to Moscow, where Stalin himself annotated some of the pages.

Zborowski's first American job was at a factory but he was soon hired by Max Weinreich as a librarian at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and then brought under the benevolent wings of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. Now he started to win grants from the Russell Sage Foundation, research stints at Cornell, Harvard, and the American Jewish Committee. He worked with Marshall Sklare, compiling a reader of Jewish ethnography, and they collaborated on the Riverton Study, a highly regarded examination of post-war American Jewish life. Norman Podhoretz recalls dining with him during this period of his life, shortly before news of his espionage surfaced, and he gave the impression of a man of confidence and self-assurance.

It was much the same self-assurance that he brought to Mead's project, where, from the start, he exerted a decisive influence. It was, in fact, Zborowski who had persuaded Benedict to add Jews as a subject. At their weekly meetings, usually held at Mead's Greenwich Village house, they sat for hours at a time patching together a consensual understanding of some of the most elusive features of Judaism. Few, except for Zborowski, had more than a sketchy knowledge of Jewish life. A notation at the close of the session held on December 7, 1947 reads, "A discussion then ensued concerning 'authority' [in Jewish communal life] and . . . whether or not it meant respect or fear. The general consensus . . . was that it was respect, rather than fear." By mid-1949, support from the Navy had dried up and the group was still unclear about how to construct the book's argument. "I just don't trust our impressions give a valid picture," stated Elizabeth Herzog, who would become Zborowski's co-author, at a meeting in mid-1949. Half-jokingly, Herzog proposed that the book be entitled "Now I Understand My Mother."

Confusion remained as to how to weigh the significance of modern versus traditional trends, or whether to discuss the many dozens of towns and cities mentioned in the interviews they'd conducted. By the late 19th-century, Jews in the region were increasingly clustered in large cities like Warsaw, Kiev, Minsk, and Odessa, or middle-sized towns, like Zborowski's Uman, as well as shtetls. It was Zborowski who put an end to this confusion by

imposing a definitive, if spurious, structure on their study. This was done most decisively in an otherwise rambling session in the summer of 1949, devoted, as it happens, mostly to prostitution, which unsurprisingly did not make its way into the book. ("Did prostitutes," asked someone, "observe ritual rites [and go] to the *mikvah*?") The following exchange would set the book on its course:

Mark Zborowski: I vaguely remember streets reserved for Jewish prostitutes and others for non-Jewish prostitutes in Lemberg.



Margaret Mead

Ruth Landes: But Lemberg is not a shtetl.

Naomi Chaitman: Yes.

Natalie F. Joffe: In Chortkov.

Margaret Mead: How big is Chortkov?

Zborowski: Population of about 15,000.

Mead: That's a city!

Zborowski: The shtetl can be any size, if it's big there can be sub-groups. But there is only the Jewish community. It's not a place, it's a state of mind. The problem of size is so different. You can't use words 'smaller' and 'bigger'.

Joffe: It's interesting how informants time and again talk about the shtetl.

Elizabeth Herzog: Did people living there call it a 'shtetl'?

Zborowski: No, 'shtot.' But the esprit was shtetl and the organization was shtetl. It's not size at all.

Chortkov was, in fact, much smaller than Zborowski said it was. He often spoke at the meetings with more authority than knowledge. (Scholarly reviews of *Life is with People* would later note many such errors, some of them howlers.)

Still, Zborowski exerted decisive influence on all aspects of the book, none more than on its emphasis on social status. On rereading *Life is with People*, it is striking how pivotal this theme is to its portrait of Jewish life. Social stratification is, of course, a central theme in the social sciences, but it was Zborowski who thrust the issue into the heart of the group's deliberations with an interest that seemed anything but dispassionate. At nearly every meeting of the group there was close analysis of the impact

on religious and cultural life of "*sheyne*" and "*proste*" *yidn*. The index heading in *Life is with People* for "social stratification" lists sixteen subheadings, and the book lavishes no fewer than seven pages on who sits closest to the Eastern Wall in the synagogue (no wonder it was picked up on by the writers of *Fiddler on the Roof*).

Hence, we find close analysis of how *sheyne yidn* walk, pray, raise their voices, curse (they don't), divorce (not often), why they prefer commerce to manual labor, how they clean their homes. "To call a house 'sheyn' means, not that its outward aspect

is pleasing, but that the household is orderly, dignified, harmonious. . . . Obscene language, on the other hand, is referred to as 'ugly' words." Status is born of a medley of factors that include money, of course, but also pedigree, learning, and comportment. Self-restraint is a commodity known best to the *sheyne*; the bad, unrestrained behavior of the *proste* can come perilously close to that of gentiles.

In the midst of this tepid, even cloying, book, then, is a surprisingly perceptive view of social gradations in Jewish culture, a difficult topic to pin-down yet one of critical importance, as one of the more original historians of Eastern European and American Jewish life has recently reminded us. Eli Lederhendler's new book, *Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism: From Caste to Class* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), makes a persuasive case for the impact of mounting uncertainty about social stratification as one of the community's most pressing, debilitating concerns. Its importance as an influence in the migration of millions of Jews from Eastern Europe has, as Lederhendler argues, been underestimated:

The social crisis in east European Jewry was the result of a protracted process going back at least to the 1850s, and entailed a gradual weakening of economic and social distinctions between petty trades and small artisans, and between artisans and laborers. Simultaneously, there was a widening gap between a very small, favored minority at the top and, below them, a population of several million of the underemployed, underfed, and under-stated.

If the last years of the nineteenth century seem qualitatively different from what had come before, it is because of cumulative effects of decades of social dislocation capped by newly imposed government restrictions . . . brought about *the loss of class itself*.

Lederhendler's insight is the product of hard historical labor, and keen analytical skill. Zborowski's insights were, it seems, mostly intuitive.

True, much of *Life is with People* is an exercise in avoidance in its portrait of a way of life that Zborowski knew to be darker and more complex than the bright, Chagall-like hues in which he painted it. The book's title is drawn from a chapter on the pleasures of community in a world where all knew everything about everyone else—“there are no secrets in the shtetl”—which was just the sort of place Zborowski would have deplored. Yet, embedded inside the book, too, is a story about class and status, *sheyne* and *proste Yiden*, that is probably as sincere as he would ever tell.

When Norman Podhoretz first heard that Zborowski was a spy he dismissed it as nonsense because at their meal Zborowski sounded like a Stalinist. Why, he asked himself, would he express such views openly if he was a spy? Disentangling truth from falsehood in the life of someone like Zborowski can never be done with anything close

to certainty. His espionage career became known only because of the testimony of Alexander Orlov—the same informant who had contacted Trotsky years earlier. At first, Zborowski denied the charges, but once he learned of the evidence against him he admitted only to what the government already knew. He lied under oath before a Senate subcom-

He lied under oath before a Senate subcommittee, saying that his spying had come to an end in 1937—long before he came to the States.

mittee, saying that his spying had come to an end in 1937—long before he came to the States. Later he claimed he couldn't recognize a Soviet agent with whom he met at least fifty times because he was, as Zborowski put it, “too insignificant” to remember. He lied to Margaret Mead, a stalwart friend to the end, telling her he was forced to work for the Soviets because they threatened his Russian relatives. Years later, Mead's daughter, Catherine Bateson, repeated the same story to me, which she had continued to believe. Much of the anthropological community supported him. One prominent anthropologist confronted Ignace Reiss' wife at one of Zborowski's trials and declared piously to her, “In this country we are against human sacrifice.” (Reiss was the would-be GPU defector who was gunned down on

a country road outside Lausanne in 1937.) Charged with perjury, Zborowski was eventually convicted and sentenced to five years in prison, in 1963. He was released after less than two for good behavior.

Soon after his release from Danbury prison in 1965, Mark Zborowski had already become a figure to be reckoned with in San Francisco's eager, messy

world of experimental medicine, a patchwork of clinics and institutes marked by vast aspiration, and spotty oversight. Especially then, San Francisco was a place for new beginnings. Zborowski, Sorbonne-trained, a friend of the fabled anthropologist Margaret Mead, and the author of the by-then standard work on Eastern European Jewish life, stood out as a man of solidity and learning, a well-credentialed European refugee. With Mead's support, he had been hired as a medical anthropologist by Mt. Zion Hospital, a well-regarded private institution in the city's Fillmore district. Eventually, he became the co-director of its new Pain Center and wrote a book entitled *People in Pain*, a study of the intersection of medicine and culture in the lives of patients from different ethnic backgrounds (its chapter on Jews describes a people with unquenchable passion for complaint). The book solidified his clinical standing despite reviews, which ranged from equivocal to awful.

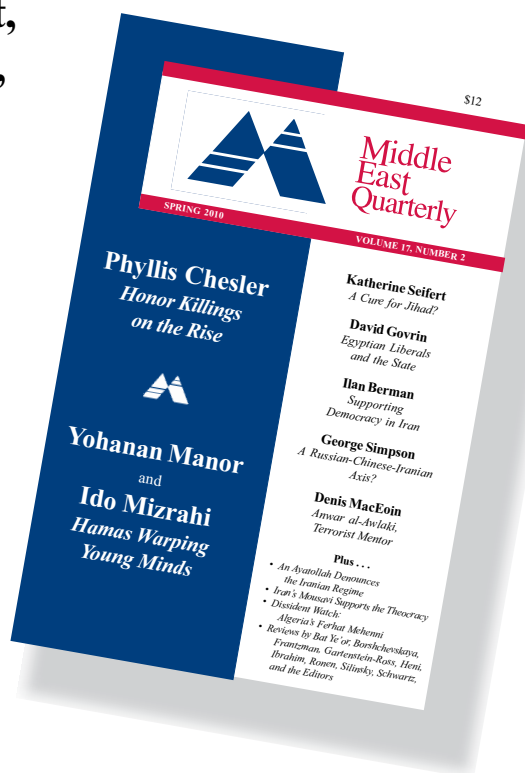
Zborowski remained something of an exotic, cosmopolitan presence: his Russian accent retained its thickness, he smoked incessantly, starting a new cigarette before the old one burned out, and nearly every evening he and Regina would begin their scotch. Although his son George had moved to Israel as an adult, he rarely visited him, complaining that the cuisine was terrible and that it was impossible to find a good drink. He tended to be known affectionately but also distantly as Dr. Z, and left the inaccurate impression that he had earned a doctorate in France. He and Regina resisted putting down permanent roots, rented and never bought, describing themselves as “Wandering Jews” though they lived in San Francisco for the last two and a half decades of their lives.

A graduate student who had worked closely with him, Kitty Corbett, now an anthropologist at Simon Fraser University, told me of a conversation they had late in his life and after she'd learned that he quit smoking. She asked if this was hard, given the extent of his habit. Zborowski replied that his doctor had ordered him to do so because of heart problems and he had stopped the same day. She prodded him a bit more—hadn't it been difficult? He stared at her with the searching, fierce look he adopted when forced to say more about himself than he cared to reveal and then answered, “I have a self-image as a hero. And with a self-image as a hero, you can do what you do, and you never look back. You just move forward.”

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The Limits of Prayer

BY MOSHE HALBERTAL

One who prays to change the past, says the Mishnah, “utters a vain prayer.” A person should not beseech God to undo events that have already taken place, even when the outcome is still unknown. And yet there are circumstances where one is naturally tempted to do just that. Suppose, for instance, that I miss a crucial basketball game, but manage to avoid learning the final score. As I watch the replay, I may find myself not only rooting for my team, but actually praying for it. (One shouldn’t bother God with basketball, but fans can be desperate.) Other, more wrenching circumstances can also tempt one to utter such backward-looking prayers. The Mishnah imagines a man returning home from a journey and hearing cries of distress. If he prays that the cries are not coming from his house, it is a vain prayer. Indeed, it would appear that even the more altruistic prayer that no one in the city has been harmed, whoever they may be, would also count as vain, according to the Mishnah. Whatever has happened has happened.

In a discussion of causality with the Oxford philosopher Michael Dummett, the great logician Georg Kreisel once characterized this passage from the Mishnah as holding that “it is blasphemous to pray that something should *have* happened, for, although there are no limits to God’s power, He cannot do what is logically impossible,” from which Dummett concluded that the Mishnah was in error.

But does the Mishnah’s ruling on the limits of prayer relate to the limits of logic, or is something deeper at stake? Why does the Mishnah consider vain prayer to be such a bad thing, and what can it teach us about the nature of prayer? When is an event considered to have been concluded, a matter of the past, and when is it still open? This passage is discussed in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, each of which offers a very different answer to these questions. But before turning to the Talmudic discussions, let us examine the larger and, I think, very revealing context in which this matter is discussed in the Mishnah.

The ninth and last chapter of Tractate Berakhot deals with blessings of praise that are to be uttered at particular moments.

1. One who sees a place where miracles have been done for Israel, says, “Blessed be He Who did miracles for our ancestors in this place.” [Upon seeing] a place from where idolatry has been uprooted, one says “Blessed . . . Who uprooted idolatry from our land”.

The Mishnah then moves from history to nature:

2. [Upon witnessing] shooting stars, earthquakes, thunderclaps, storms and lightning, one says, “Blessed . . . Whose strength and might fill the world.” On seeing mountains, hills, seas, rivers, and deserts, one says, “Blessed . . . Who created the world” . . . For rain and good tidings, one says, “Blessed . . . Who is good and bestows good.” For bad tidings, one says, “Blessed be the true Judge.”

It is here, oddly, that the Mishnah introduces the new category of vain prayer:

3. One who has built a new house or bought new vessels says, “Blessed . . . Who has kept us alive [*she-hechyanu*] and preserved us and brought us to this season.” Over [something] bad, a blessing is said similar to that over [something] good, and over good, a blessing is said similar to that over bad.

One who supplicates about a past event utters a vain prayer. If a man’s wife is pregnant and he

But does the Mishnah’s ruling on the limits of prayer relate to the limits of logic, or is something deeper at stake?

says, “[God] grant that my wife bear a male child,” this is a vain prayer. If he is coming home from a journey and he hears cries of distress in the town and says, “[God] grant that this is not from my house,” this is a vain prayer.

4. One who goes through a city should say two prayers, one on entering and one on leaving . . . He gives thanks for the past and supplicates for the future.

The editor of the Mishnah understood the difficulty of the requirement that one must bless the bad as well as the good, with which the second mishnah ended. He therefore departed from the usual pattern of the Mishnah of stating only the rules and not their underlying justifications, and used the fifth mishnah to anchor it in the ideal of the love of God:

5. It is incumbent on a man to bless for the bad in the same way as for the good. As it is says [in Scripture], “And though shalt love the Lord thy God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). “With all your heart” means with your two impulses—the bad impulse and the good impulse; “with all your soul” means even if He takes thy soul; “with all your might” means, with all your money. Another explanation of “with all your might” is—in whatever measure He metes out for you [good or bad] you should thank Him very, very much.

Thanking God for the bad as well as the good is understood by our mishnah as an expression of the unconditional, non-instrumental nature of love commanded in Scripture: “And though shalt love the Lord thy God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

The Mishnah proceeds then from a statement in the second mishnah of the duty to bless for the bad along with the good to a theological and scriptural explanation of it in the fifth mishnah. But why, we are bound to ask, does the Mishnah interrupt its elaboration of this important subject to discuss the apparently unrelated concept of a vain

prayer? Shouldn’t a treatment of the latter concept be situated elsewhere in the tractate, perhaps in the chapters that deal with petitionary prayer? Indeed, if the third and fourth mishnahs were removed, the chapter would flow more smoothly.

This might seem to be a rather technical problem, but textual anomalies sometimes conceal theological tensions. In our case, the tension is between thanking and petitioning, and it stems from the idea that a person ought to thank God for the bad just as he does for the good. But if this is so, why should someone peti-

tion for anything at all? The duty to thank God for the bad seems to call for a posture of resignation and acceptance, yet petitioning involves a plea for change. Wouldn’t it have been better to abolish petitionary prayer altogether and thank God ahead of time for everything that he might choose to do for us?

The ninth chapter of Berakhot should be read as if it were tacitly answering these questions. The third mishnah does deal with petitionary prayer, but the limits it sets to such prayer are intrinsically connected to the theme of our chapter—blessings of gratitude and praise. A person who prays after the event has happened fails to thank for the bad. Rather than accepting what has happened and blessing God for it, he keeps on demanding change. We can thus restore the flow of our chapter: “Over [something] bad, a blessing is said similar to that over [something] good. . . .” but the one who keeps on demanding and screaming about the past, refuses to shift to such a mode of acceptance, and is uttering a vain prayer.

What appears to be an irrelevant digression in our chapter turns out to be a clarification of an essential aspect of religious life. It rejects two possible and completely consistent solutions. The first one suggests an easy division of labor—a person should thank God for the good and may petition him to counteract all that is bad. The second option could have been to adopt a resigned attitude and to repudiate the religious value of petition altogether. Such fatalistic opposition to petitionary prayer has been adopted by some religious traditions on the grounds that a devout person should leave his fate in God’s hands. In rejecting these two options, the Mishnah shapes a complex attitude towards evil. When bad things are still avoidable, a person ought to fight them with all his strength. He should act on his own and petition God up to the last moment. But once the events have actually occurred, he has to shift from demand to acceptance.

When a man’s beloved is sick, he should act and pray, but once she has passed away, he must accept the fact. Thus, after adducing the case of vain prayer as a manifestation of a failure to thank God for the bad, the Mishnah sums up, at the end of mishnah four, its approach to the relationship between act-

ing and accepting: “He gives thanks for the past and supplicates for the future.” Praying is forward-looking, thanking is backward-looking, and both are essential to the religious attitude.

If we understand the concept of vain prayer within the larger context of the obligation to thank God for the bad, it follows that the vainness of prayer for past events is not dependent on the argument that backward causality is impossible, logically or otherwise. The point of the Mishnah is not that by asking God to undo the past we request what is impossible or absurd. The crucial third mishnah that limits prayer deals with a different problem altogether. The basis for such a limitation on prayer is not the limits of logic but the limits of complaint. There is no need to take a stance on the deep metaphysical problem concerning the logical possibility of backward causality, since the point of the Mishnah concerns not metaphysics but the nature of the religious and human stance towards the world.

To proceed on the basis of such wisdom, however, we need to know when an event is really over and the time has come to switch from action to acceptance. The third mishnah provides two very different examples to assist us in thinking about this matter. The first involves a case in which someone prays for his wife to give birth to a baby boy while she is already pregnant. Since the gender of the fetus has already been determined, he shouldn’t pray for it even though he has no knowledge of what it actually is (such a prayer, one might add, is not only backward-looking but retrograde). The second example describes a person who hears a scream in the city and prays that no harm should befall his family. In this case, the disaster has already happened, and such a prayer is a vain attempt at undoing the past.

In dealing with the first example, the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud offer different conceptions of vain prayer and different conceptions of when an event is past. The Jerusalem Talmud wishes to delay the moment in which petition is declared to be vain, in part by citing a fanciful midrash about the birth of Jacob’s and Leah’s daughter, Dinah.

The School of Yannai said [it is a vain prayer] when she is giving birth, before that [during pregnancy] he can pray, since it is said [that we are] “like clay in the hands of the potter.” In the name of the School of Yanai: At the beginning [of Leah’s pregnancy] Dinah was a male. After Rachel petitioned, she became a female. This is what is said [in Scripture], “And *afterward* she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah” (Gen. 30:21). That is, *after* Rachel prayed, she became female. (Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot, 9, 3, 14a)

While a straightforward reading of the third mishnah suggests that the gender is determined at the time of conception, the School of Yannai wishes to postpone the moment of thankful acquiescence. This reading of that mishnah allows for continued petition for a change until the moment that the birth has taken place. The Jerusalem Talmud supplies a rationale by claiming that it is within the power of God to refashion human embryos. It even cites a precedent for such a gender change in the midrashic account of the birth of Dinah. Dinah was supposed to be a boy, but Rachel, knowing that Jacob would have only twelve sons, prayed for the gender of Leah’s fetus to be altered. Since ten sons had already been born to Jacob, Dinah’s

switch would enable Rachel to have two boys.

The School of Yannai does not, of course, defend a retrospective prayer that the child should always have been a male from the moment of conception, since that would unquestionably be a vain prayer. Rather, any such prayer must be focused on the future, since God has the power to intervene miraculously and change the course of nature. Why, then, doesn’t the Jerusalem Talmud conclude that such a prayer might be uttered even when the child is one year old? If God is the potter of human clay, He could change the child’s gender then too. It would be difficult to squeeze such a notion into the text of the Mishnah, but in principle, it seems to follow the logic of prayer, as the Jerusalem Talmud understands it.

The Babylonian Talmud, however, offers an alternative understanding of the limits of prayer:

Are prayers of no avail? R. Joseph cited the following objection. “And *afterward* she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah” (Gen. 30:21). What is meant by “*afterward*”? Rab said: After Leah had passed judgment on herself saying, “Twelve tribes are destined to issue from Jacob. Six have issued from me and four from the handmaids, making ten. If this child will be male, my sister Rachel will not be equal to one of the handmaids.” Forthwith the child was turned a girl, as it says, “and she called her name Dinah.” [To R. Joseph’s question, the Talmud provides the following answer]: We do not cite a miraculous event [as a precedent]. (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot, 60a)

The Babylonian Talmud begins with a challenge to the principle of the Mishnah similar to that of the Jerusalem Talmud. If prayer can change the course of events, a petition for a gender change shows faith and is not vain. This position is supported with a variant of the midrash about Dinah. But unlike the Jerusalem Talmud, which postpones the moment of closure in order to enhance the transformative power of prayer, the Babylonian Talmud rejects the story of Dinah as a precedent, since “we do not cite a miraculous event.” It therefore offers a different and expanded notion of a vain prayer.

According to the Babylonian Talmud, a prayer is vain when the supplicant is making a request for a miracle that goes beyond the natural order, even if it is future-directed. The Babylonian Talmud’s position might be restated as follows: a person should not pray for something that is altogether unlikely to occur without his prayer. If someone dies we do not pray for his resurrection, biblical precedents notwithstanding. We know that for the dead to rise, a miracle must take place. On the other hand, we do witness, however rarely, the recovery of a desperately ill person, even when we haven’t prayed for it. For this reason we must not pray for resurrection, but we can pray for recovery, even of the desperately ill. I was told that when Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, who is widely considered to be the greatest living rabbinic authority in Israel, was asked whether one could pray for the recovery of someone who was brain dead, he immediately answered, “This is a vain prayer!” In that ruling, he followed his principled position that praying for miracles is not allowed.

To return to the basketball analogy with which we began, according to the Babylonian Tal-

lud, not only is it a vain prayer to ask for your team to win while watching a replay; it is also a vain prayer if they are trailing by twenty points with three seconds left on the clock. The result of such a game is already determined even if the game is not over. God could make the last three seconds of the game longer, but that would be a miracle, and to ask for one is a vain prayer.

Thus, while the Jerusalem Talmud sticks to the distinction between backward-looking and forward-looking prayer, the Babylonian Talmud is interested in the question of whether the event is fully determined or not. The Babylonian Talmud assumes the open-endedness of the future, but only with respect to what is naturally possible. The establishment of such a restriction on future-oriented prayer might reflect a sense of religious modesty, an understanding of the limits of one’s power to sway God. Asking for a miraculous intervention is presumptuous; only the prophetic matriarchs Leah or Rachel ask for such things. Such broad definitions of vain prayer might be motivated by a sober prudential policy. If a person can ask only for things that might occur anyway, prayer can be protected from falsification. Indeed, when the thing prayed for comes to pass, it is possible to claim that the prayer as its effective cause.

In his remarks on Victorian scholar James George Frazer’s influential work of anthropology, *The Golden Bough*, Ludwig Wittgenstein makes the following point concerning the nature of ritual and prayer:

I read among similar examples of a Rain King in Africa to whom the people pray for rain *when the rainy period comes*. But surely that means that they do not really believe that he can make it rain, otherwise they would do it in the dry periods of the year in which the land is “a parched and arid desert.” For if one assumes that the people formerly instituted this office of Rain King out of stupidity, it is nevertheless certainly clear that they had previously experienced that rains begin in March, and then they would have had the Rain King function for the other part of the year.

According to Frazier, primitive rituals were inspired by bad science. Wittgenstein thought that Frazer confused expressive gestures with descriptive theories, misconceived ritual as false technology, and then criticized it for being superstitious. The tribe that prays to the Rain King does so only in the rainy period. Contrary to Frazer’s assumption, the members of the tribe seem to have had a good sense of the nature of the world. If they thought that such a ritual had causal power, why wouldn’t they pray in the summer? Prayer, according to Wittgenstein, is not based on causal premises, rather it is an expressive gesture, embodying people’s hopes and yearning for a moral order in the universe. The Babylonian Talmud’s conception of vain prayer may anticipate such a Wittgensteinian stance. Praying for a miracle, according to the Babylonian Talmud, is a manifestation not of hubris but of confusion concerning the very meaning of prayer.

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The Rothschilds of the East

BY RICHARD I. COHEN

LA SPLENDEUR DES CAMONDO: DE CONSTANTINOPLE À PARIS 1806-1945

Edited by Anne Hélène Hoog

Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme and Skira

Flammarion, 160 pp., 30 €

“**T**he Splendor of the Camondos” (*La splendeur des Camondo*) opened at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme in Paris (The Museum of the Art and History of Judaism, hereafter the MAHJ) in November 2009, and by the time it closed its doors this spring, it had been seen by an estimated 45,000 visitors. *Le Figaro* described it as an exhibition that succeeded in representing the artistic tastes and inclinations of an extraordinarily diverse family over the course of five generations. *L'Express* praised it for paying much-deserved homage to a family without any heirs and therefore in danger of being forgotten.

Those few who do recognize the name Camondo most readily associate it with the Nissim de Camondo Museum, named after a member of the family who was killed fighting for France in 1917. The museum is situated in the family mansion on rue Monceau in the eighth arrondissement of Paris, which his father Moïse donated to the city in 1935 in his son's memory, together with the art they had amassed. The museum was opened to the public the following year, and remained open throughout World War II. It possesses one of the great collections of 18th-century French furniture, including such rarities as a table topped with petrified wood that was once owned by Marie Antoinette, an outstanding collection of Chinese porcelain, fine French paintings, and much else. But visitors to that museum are likely to receive only a glimpse of the evolution of the Camondo family and its Ottoman roots. This is the point of departure for the MAHJ exhibition and catalog, which draw upon the resources of a variety of museums and private collections in order to demonstrate the wide range of the Camondos' interests.

Abraham-Salomon Camondo's career set the stage for the rise of the family once known as “the Rothschilds of the East.” Born in Istanbul in 1781 into an already prominent financial family, he inherited the relatively modest banking establishment founded by his father in 1832. Abraham-Salomon had good connections at the sultan's court, due in large part to his subventions to the Ottoman regime. He became a spokesperson for the Jewish community, intervening in its favor at times of unease and oppression by local authorities, as well as for Jews in trouble elsewhere in the Empire. When Moses Montefiore came to Constantinople in 1840 to obtain the sultan's condemnation of the famous blood libel in Damascus, Abraham-Salomon was his host.

But Abraham-Salomon was more than an old-

fashioned “Court Jew,” or *shtadlan*; he was an active agent of change. He helped to persuade the Ottoman government to grant the Alliance Israélite Universelle the right to set up a network of modern Jewish schools throughout the Empire, and fought to establish other, more modern institutions for Istanbul's Jews, including hospitals and other health care facilities. Despite his modernism, Abraham-Salomon continued to wear traditional Ottoman dress throughout his life. He was described by a contemporary as having been “clothed in silks of different colors, occupying a throne furnished with cushions of purple and gold” on the Seder night in



Count Abraham-Salomon de Camondo and his grandson, Nissim de Camondo, sitting together in Paris, about 1868. (Courtesy of Archives du Musée Nissim de Camondo / Photography Jean-Marie Del Moral.)

1856. In a photograph dating from 1868 we see him still garbed in *salvar* (traditional Turkish pants) and *caftan*, sitting comfortably beside his grandson Nissim, who had by then adopted modern European dress. Abraham-Salomon stuck to his traditional language too; his business ledger from the 1840s, shown in the exhibit, is written in Ladino.

The Camondos' modernism was tinged with a certain snobbery. At the same time that they fought against traditionalists in the community who were opposed to the Alliance's activities, they lambasted the poor French of the Alsatian teachers who had come to teach in its schools. Their pronunciation, they complained, was “vicious.” In part, one assumes, to escape such insufferable provincialism, the extended family, which had a few years earlier received Italian nationality, decided to transfer en masse to Paris

in 1869-70. This move brought with it not only cultural and aesthetic advantages, which were no doubt of especial importance to the younger generation, but political and economic benefits as well.

In Paris, the Camondos brought their bank into association with a local firm and settled into elegant living quarters, models of which appeared in the exhibition. It was in Paris too that several family members became passionate art collectors in ways that neither their Jewish nor their Ottoman backgrounds would have led one to expect. Newly arrived in the city and middle-aged, Nissim de Camondo, Abraham-Salomon's grandson, developed a craving for extremely elaborate jewel-encrusted tie clips, created by leading Parisian jewelers. Many of them were gifts from his American-born mistress, the countess Alice de Lancy. While he undoubtedly made use of some of them, others were clearly intended only for his collector's cabinet. One of the tie clips from the late 19th-century shows a Chinese man dressed in a traditional Chinese outfit and smoking a pipe. His face, hat, and pipe are made of gold, his body is composed entirely of pearls, and his dress is made out of emeralds and rubies encased in gold. Nissim's son Moïse, who inherited his great fortune, loved 18th-century furniture and decorative arts, and went on to build his exquisite collection through connections with dealers and visits to auctions and galleries, where he encountered a world of antiquarians, some of the leading ones of Jewish origin—the Seligmann brothers, Wildenstein, and Kraemer.

Indeed, the world of art galleries, antiquarians, and auction houses of art had become an important avenue for the acculturation of Jews into the haute bourgeoisie in the 19th-century, and a profession that came to be synonymous with Jews (and accordingly maligned) in most major cities of western and central Europe. As his collection grew, Moïse became convinced of the need to have it concentrated in one place. The mansion which he built for this purpose in 1911 eventually became the Nissim de Camondo Museum. Although the MAHJ exhibit was lavish, it could only offer a fraction of these extensive holdings, elaborately displayed in the show's catalog.

Moïse's cousin, Isaac de Camondo, neglected finance almost entirely, while discovering the beauties of the arts. His passion for music was first excited by Wagner's operas but in time he produced his own compositions of more popular orchestral and vocal music. He generously supported the development of new musical talent, musical magazines, and operatic productions in Paris. Isaac was also enthralled with the new impressionist paintings and Japanese prints, some of which appeared in the exhibition. Perhaps the fact that he was a Turkish immigrant helped Isaac ignore the conservative taste of the leading French art collectors as he assembled dozens of outstanding, and now universally acclaimed, works by Manet, Sisley, Degas, Monet, Cézanne and many others, building one of the finest private collections of Impressionist paintings. When he donated them to the Louvre, the curators described

them as “horrific,” and kept them in the storerooms under lock and key until fashions changed. One of the more famous paintings exhibited, now in the collection of the Musée d’Orsay, Degas’ *The Ironers* (1884-86), portrays two working-class women, one yawning broadly as she takes a break from her labor, and the other bent over, pressing her iron down hard on yet another shirt. As Isaac’s involvement in music and art intensified, he drew further and further away from the Jewish community and tradition. Significantly, neither he nor his cousin Moïse left any indication of having been disturbed by or engaged in the Dreyfus Affair, which roiled the Jewish community and French intellectuals in the 1890s. Their growing distance from things Jewish was clearly apparent. The heirloom Judaica they had brought with them to Paris—attractively shown in the exhibition and catalog—was dispersed in 1910 to a number of different recipients. Acculturation to the haute bourgeoisie had apparently been fully accomplished.

The MAHJ is situated in an attractive 17th-century mansion, known as the Hôtel de St. Aignan, located in the Marais district of Paris, a short walking distance from several museums, including the popular Pompidou Museum. After various alterations and divisions of the original mansion over the centuries, it served as home in the 20th-century for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, several of whom were deported during World War II. Restored sensitively, the building was eventually offered to the Jewish community of Paris by Mayor Jacques Chirac in 1986 to serve as a museum of Jewish civilization. MAHJ was inaugurated twelve years later, with several floors dedicated to a permanent collection devoted to showing the history and artistic development of the Jews in France.

Walking through the exhibition, as it winds its way from the ground floor to the upper levels, one can see through the windows an adjacent wall of the former premises emblazoned with the names of the Jews who had lived there and been deported. The less than glorious past intervenes as one encounters the Camondo “splendors.” I was struck by a small stained-glass window from 1879 showing Count Abraham-Béhor de Camondo, a grandson of Abraham-Salomon, receiving the plans for his mansion, which was to include a private synagogue, from his architect. All of the figures appear in the window dressed in Renaissance attire. It reminded me of a *fin de siècle* painting by Anton von Werner. Von Werner



Left: Ornamental Chinese figure for a 19th-century tie clip. (*Les Arts Décoratifs* / Laurent Sully Jaulmes.)
Right: Japanese print by Kitagawa Utamaro, 1793-1794. (*Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, Paris* / RMN / Harry Bréjat.)

was commissioned by the German-Jewish newspaper magnate Rudolf Mosse to paint a family banquet at which the Mosses and their guests are depicted in elaborate Renaissance clothing, enjoying a frolicsome and jovial dinner and merrily raising their goblets. Such partying was not uncommon in European high bourgeoisie circles at this time, but it has seldom been documented among Jews. Apparently, both Abraham-Béhor Camondo and the Mosse family entertained the fantasy of living in a Renaissance court.

Such 19th-century fantasies could not stand the harsh realities of the century to come. Nissim, who appears in several photographs proudly attired in his military uniform, was killed in battle in 1917. Other photographs depict his sister Beatrice, a passionate equestrian, dressed in riding apparel. Married to Léon Reinach, a scion of the distinguished family of financiers, politicians, and scholars, she converted to Catholicism in 1942, but was still sent to her death at Auschwitz, together with her husband and two children. Since Beatrice’s uncle Isaac had no legitimate offspring, the family’s name—and the

family itself—disappeared. Its legacy and “splendor” remained only in those French museums that benefited years earlier from the munificence of the Camondos, and, of course, in the museum named after Nissim. The “Rothschilds of the East” failed to emulate the actual Rothschilds, whose descendants in various countries continue to pursue many of the goals and projects undertaken by their forefathers, both financial and philanthropic.

Splendor is the hallmark of the catalog. Bound in a gaudy gold cover, it offers helpful essays, pages and pages of excellent images of works by Manet, Monet, Degas, and many others, Japanese prints, Judaica, and exquisite French decorative arts and paintings, often with still more gold coloring in the background. What this volume cannot recreate, however, is the experience undergone by the museum visitor as he views the originals of the works it reproduces in a building where one is within sight of reminders of the Holocaust.

Holding this exhibition of “splendor” in such a building and bearing in mind the last, tragic stage of the Camondo family’s history, the curatorial staff of the museum had to decide how to incorporate the Holocaust. Wisely, the curators accorded it its due in the chronological evolution of the family’s saga, without allowing it to overtake the exhibition. Upon exiting, we see two large photographs of the Nissim de Camondo Museum. There, we are tacitly informed, lies the memory and true legacy



The Ironers, c.1884, by Edgar Degas (1834-1917). (*Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France* / Giraudon / The Bridgeman Art Library.)

of the Camondo family. Indeed, it also lies in the Louvre and several other museums.

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Swept Up

BY ELLA TAYLOR

LEAP OF FAITH

Directed by Antony Benjamin and Stephen Z. Friedman
Ruth Diskin, 95 minutes, \$29.90

In my early twenties in London, I married a man who was not halakhically Jewish, though he had had a mostly secular-Jewish upbringing similar to my own. My parents refused to attend a civil wedding. I sulked in my callow, who-needs-this-bourgeois-rubbish way, then marveled at the zeal and genuine joy with which my beloved applied himself to the equivalent of an American Conservative conversion that would receive him into a tribe of which he was already an active member.

Given the more rigorous hurdles they must clear to achieve an Orthodox conversion, how much more amazing is the staying power of some of the gentile candidates whose rites of passage we follow in *Leap of Faith*, a sharply observed, yet admirably open-minded documentary produced and directed by Antony Benjamin and Stephen Friedman.

It is often said that Jews don't proselytize—we do, but mostly to reel in lapsed members of the tribe. Gentile converts to Orthodox Judaism must go through an obstacle course—including adult circumcision and either remarriage to a spouse to whom one has been married for many years or abstention from dating during the conversion process—that must sometimes feel more like a series of invitations to fail. As one rabbi in the film explains with evident satisfaction, “Most people cannot withstand the test.”

Leap of Faith—which played at the New York Jewish Film Festival and will come out on DVD in July—is, with one exception, the story of several individuals and families who pass the test. And what they're ready to sacrifice for the privilege of observing 613 mitzvot, day in and day out, is astonishing. Perhaps more remarkable still is the fact that none were atheists or even agnostics going in. Indeed, almost all come from strict Christian backgrounds and are trading one religious life for another. Leslie, a young beauty from Trinidad whose family are devout members of a charismatic sect, works as a nanny for an Orthodox Jewish family in Teaneck, New Jersey. Bob Shurtleff, an amiable Colorado Christian, uprooted his family from the fancy house they'd built for themselves and occupied for just over a year, to join an Orthodox community in Denver. Alana de Silva, a single mother and career army captain, strives to juggle her conversion with a job that's frequently incompatible with her spiritual obligations, not to mention an ex-husband who's so appalled at the idea that his son is being schooled as a Jew that he resumes his lapsed Christian observance and makes sure to serve his visiting child bacon for breakfast.

If the willingness of these converts to make

huge sacrifices is clear, their reasons for doing so remain frustratingly opaque. Why we do what we do for any goal is a complex tangle for most of us, and spiritual longing in particular is difficult enough to articulate in private, let alone in front of a camera. As it turns out, some motives grow clearer than others as their stories unfold. Despite a rabbi's request “to hold off dating for a while,”

One wonders whether converts who flee from their pasts rather than to their futures won't find themselves disappointed when the euphoria wears off.

Leslie already has a Jewish boyfriend hovering in the wings. Bob Shurtleff admits that his horrible childhood made him yearn for a close-knit community, while Alana seeks shelter from “the madness of the world.”

These reasons are common and understandable enough, though one wonders whether converts who flee from their pasts rather than to their futures won't find themselves disappointed when the euphoria of their new lives wears off and the terrors of living remain. But why would the Bowers, a gentle, elderly couple who were already members of a church, leave their children and their community and exhaust themselves physically and financially to set up a new home in the vicinity of their synagogue in an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Denver?

Of the doctrinal appeal of Judaism over Christianity they say next to nothing. Did they perhaps find themselves longing for the everyday warmth and inclusive jollity that is said to attract many converts to Jewish communal life? Certainly that's part of it—they cite with gratitude the “kindness and helpfulness” of their adoptive community and seem bewildered by the “deafening silence” that greeted the letter they wrote to Christian family and friends, explaining what they were about to do.

For the most part, Benjamin and Friedman stay out of the speculation business, yet their occasional pertinent questions suggest that the warm welcome extended by Jewish leaders may not be universal. Asked how he would feel if one of his children wanted to marry a convert, a young rabbi who has hitherto been precise about what it takes to become a Jew if you're not born one, is suddenly at a loss for words.

Less is more in this fascinating film, which is only a little weakened by the recurring *shtick* of stand-up comedian Yisrael (formerly Christopher) Campbell in *yarmulke* and *payos*, whose Broadway show, *Circumcise Me*, is apparently popular in

some quarters but whose laborious one-liners add little to the conversation. In the end, it may be the process, rather than the goal, of spiritual struggle that builds character. For my money, the indisputable star of *Leap of Faith* is a sweet-faced little boy caught between two estranged parents, two incompatible lifestyles, and two religions—all of which, in combination perhaps with a generous endowment of the gene for resilience, have turned him into a precociously wise and wonderful little man, whether he ends up a Jew or not.

Ella Taylor is a free-lance arts writer whose film reviews appear regularly at NPR.org, and who has also contributed to The New York Times, and the Los Angeles Times.

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Rashi and the Crusader: A Legend

BY MATT GOLDISH

This anecdote is taken from *Shalshet ha-Kabbalah (The Chain of Tradition)* by Gedaliah ibn Yahya (1526-1587), who came from an illustrious Sephardic rabbinical family, and lived most of his life in Italy. Ibn Yahya's book was first published in Venice in 1587 (this translation is from an edition printed in Lvov in 1862). It is one of a number of Hebrew chronicles penned by Spanish and Italian Jews after 1492, which the late historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi considered to be indicative of a new interest in the writing of history in the wake of the Spanish Expulsion.

Shalshet ha-Kabbalah is divided into three parts. The first deals with Jewish history; the second with matters of technology, science, and magic; and the third with world history. The author is particularly interested in the advent of the Messiah and the lives and works of earlier rabbis. While he was a distinguished rabbinic scholar and was no stranger to the Renaissance, the following story suggests that ibn Yahya was not a critical historian in even the early modern sense of the term.

It is doubtful that Godfrey of Bouillon (ca. 1060-1100), a leader of the First Crusade in 1096 and the first Crusader ruler of Jerusalem, ever met the great commentator Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes, 1040-1105), though he did travel through the Rhineland on his way to Jerusalem. Rashi lost relatives

and friends in the Crusade, but his own community was not attacked and he seems never to have written directly about the events. He certainly did not predict them. This is one version of a legend that prefers to imagine not only that they met but that Rashi was, in a sense, the victor in their confrontation.

Isaw it written that there was a certain noble in France named Godfrey in the Greek tongue [Godfrey of Bouillon]. He was a brave soldier, cruel, and a man of destruction. The wisdom of Rashi was known even among the nations, for all nations came to seek him out. [Godfrey] sent for him from the city of Lemrina [Le Mans?], but Rashi refused to go, for he knew about the man. The noble was furious, and he rode with his entire guard to the house of Rashi. He arrived at his study hall and found all the gates open, and all the books open, but nobody was to be seen. He called out loudly, "Solomon! Solomon!" Rashi answered, "What does my master wish?" The noble responded, "Where are you?" Rashi answered, "Here I am!" and they went through this several times. By then the noble was quite amazed. He left the study hall and asked, "Has there been a Jew here?" One of the students appeared before him, and the noble said to him, "Tell your master that he should come to me, and I guarantee him by my head that he will suffer no hurt."

With this Rashi came down to the noble and bowed before him. The noble bid him rise and said to him, "Now I have seen your wisdom. It is therefore my desire that you advise me concerning a great matter that I must undertake, and it is this. I have prepared 100,000 knights and 200 great ships, for it is my desire to capture Jerusalem. I also have 7,000 other knights in the city of Acre, and I have faith in God that I will overcome the Ishmaelites [Muslims] who live there, for they do not possess



Godfrey of Bouillon, 1060-1100. Engraving on copper. (De Agostini Picture Library/De Agostini/Getty Images.)

the knowledge of military technique. Therefore, tell me what you think and do not fear."

Then Rashi responded with only a few words. "You will go and capture Jerusalem, and you will rule over it for three days, but on the fourth day the Ishmaelites will evict you, and you will run away. You will return to this city with three horses." The noble was very bitter. He responded, "What you say may come true, but if I return with even four horses, I will feed your flesh to the dogs and kill every Jew in France."

... [Godfrey] returned with three horses in addition to his own, following the many wars that he conducted—for it continued four years. He remembered the words of Rashi, and he intended to harm him. God, however, thwarted his plan, for when he entered the gate of the city, a stone fell from the gate's lintel and killed one of his companions together with the horse on which he rode. The noble was deeply shocked and admitted that the words of the Jew had come true. He came to Rashi to bow before him before he returned to his home, but he discovered that [Rashi] had passed away. He mourned over him very much.

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Moses Mendelssohn Street

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

Eliezer Ben Yehuda's lifelong efforts to re-fit the classical language of Jewish literature for everyday use helped to create a Hebrew-speaking society in which the memory of his own extraordinary labors would grow dim. Suspecting that the ordinary Israeli in the street could no longer identify the hero of his recent book, *Resurrecting Hebrew*, Ilan Stavans asked a Tel Aviv shop clerk who Ben Yehuda was.

She was an artificial blonde, wearing an Adidas tracksuit that emphasized her hips and protruding belly. Her initial response was a smile, followed by a silence, behind which I detected hesitation. "Ben Yehuda? It's a street," she replied.

"But who is it named after?"

"How should I know? Am I an encyclopedia?"

This did not lead Stavans to any sweeping conclusions, but it did make me wonder. Has Ben Yehuda really been forgotten after only a century? And what about other more or less famous Jews who also have streets named after them in Israel? Sa'adia Gaon or Yehuda Halevi, for instance, or Leon Pinsker, or Menachem Ussishkin? Have Israelis walking down Moses Mendelssohn Street in, say, Jerusalem, forgotten who Moses Mendelssohn was?

I asked myself this because I have spent a lot of time translating and studying the works of this 18th-century German-Jewish philosopher, who was a pioneer of modern Jewish thought as well as one of the first battlers for Jewish emancipation. But I have just learned that it's not a good question. For, as the historian Michael Brenner has recently observed, "not even the smallest street is named today after Mendelssohn in the capital of the Jewish state." There is, actually, a tiny Mendelssohn Street on the outskirts of Jerusalem, but it honors the influential architect Erich Mendelssohn. In fact, it bears less of a relationship to the Jewish philosopher than a street in Binghamton, New York, where I have taught for many years. This one is named after Moses' Christian grandson, the composer Felix Mendelssohn, and intersects with Schubert and Beethoven. It is also missing an "s."

If there is no such street in Jerusalem today, not even one mangling Moses Mendelssohn's name, most of the blame can be placed on the shoulders of one person: Peretz Smolenskin. Smolenskin was a Russian-born novelist and journalist who debuted as a Jewish nationalist in the 1870s with a ferocious attack on Mendelssohn as the originator of a craven sort of assimilationism. This charge stuck, as the historian Christian Schulte has shown, prejudicing later generations of Zionists against the philosopher. Smolenskin himself, I should note, has a street in Jerusalem named after him. Just to round out the picture, I should also note that Smolenskin was not only one of Eliezer Ben Yehuda's inspirations but also one of his targets. Just before he marched off to Palestine, Ben Yehuda chastised Smolenskin for failing to recognize

that the resurrection of the Jewish nation could only take place in the Jews' ancestral land.

Smolenskin, to be sure, was much more unkind to Mendelssohn than Ben Yehuda was to Smolenskin. And it was not only Mendelssohn that Smolenskin raked over the coals. What had triggered his attack in the first place was the great historian Heinrich Graetz's far too laudatory treatment of Mendelssohn in the eleventh volume of his *History of the Jews*, for which he upbraided the author. Nothing that Smolenskin went on to say against Graetz, however, could prevent him from having a street named after him in Jerusalem. For no one could plausibly accuse Graetz of having too little Jewish national

differed so much from his own? And to get to the bottom of the matter, was Mendelssohn really guilty of the things of which Smolenskin accused him?

Smolenskin railed against Graetz even before he began to tear into Mendelssohn. How, he asked,

Smolenskin debuted as a Jewish nationalist in the 1870s with a ferocious attack on Mendelssohn.

could such a great nationalist historian credit a mediocre, withdrawn, and quickly forgotten philosopher with resuscitating the Jewish people? How could he fail to recognize the degree to which Mendelssohn was responsible for promoting the pernicious idea that the Jews were not a nation at all but merely a religious group? Mendelssohn was not the father of this idea, Smolenskin admitted, but by personal example, he taught it to his children and disciples. He adhered rigorously to Jewish law at a time when he must have seen how necessary it was to distinguish between the essential and the inessential and discard outmoded practices. If he had seen his people for what it really was, "a nation among the nations," he would have done more to nurse it back to health.

This was not a fair indictment. On the basis of Graetz's work alone, one could mount a powerful defense against it. Graetz showed how Mendelssohn's translation of the Bible into German had initiated the "inner liberation" of thousands of young Jews by opening up to them the road to Western culture. He likewise showed how Mendelssohn had furthered their "external liberation" by making the case for their acquisition of full and equal citizenship. Graetz commends him, in fact, for having done so without losing any of his "Jewish-patriotic feeling."

In an earlier essay entitled "The Structure of Jewish History," Graetz gave Mendelssohn even more credit for Jewish patriotism. Paraphrasing a passage from Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, Graetz summarized one aspect of his philosophy of Judaism as follows:

In Judaism, state and religion are rooted in the same soil, or more correctly, they are one. God, the Creator of the world, is likewise the Lawgiver and King of the nation: the civil component is at the same time religious and holy, while the religious is also a civil obligation. Serving the state is serving God.

On the strength of this evidence, he proclaimed Mendelssohn's conception of Judaism to be far superior to that of the medieval philosopher Sa'adia Gaon because of "its historical, national point of departure." But he then went on to say that at the end of the 18th-century the Jews were not yet ready for such a thing. What Mendelssohn could do in his own day to advance this national defini-



Intersection of Mendelssohn and Beethoven Streets in Binghamton, NY. (Photo by Randy L. Friedman.)

sentiment. In fact, the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke famously charged him with Jewish chauvinism and too little willingness to assimilate.

Something like these old accusations against Graetz have just resurfaced in a new setting, in a book by an anti-Zionist Israeli writer. In his *The Invention of the Jewish People*, Shlomo Sand of Tel Aviv University has branded Graetz's *History* as the root of much evil, "the first work that strove, with consistency and feeling, to invent the Jewish people." Sand's book is a factual mess, but his characterization of the tenor of Graetz's work is not too far from the truth. Graetz didn't "invent" the Jewish people, but he did denounce Reform and other Jews' dilution of the old idea of Jewish peoplehood.

So why did Peretz Smolenskin give Graetz such a hard time? And why did Graetz write such a glowing description of Mendelssohn, a man whose outlook

tion of Judaism was quite limited due to the fact that "Judaism had first to recover from the state of exhaustion to which it had been subjected for seventeen hundred years." Before it could progress any further "it needed to be retaught the Bible." And it had to regain its self-esteem.

In this early essay, Graetz did not acclaim Moses Mendelssohn for actively steering Judaism toward these two goals, but he did so a quarter of a century later, in his *History*. However, he did not argue on this occasion that Mendelssohn thereby helped to advance the Jewish nationalist idea. Perhaps he did not wish to upset German-Jewish readers for whom Mendelssohn had become a symbol of their successful integration. If so, this is unfortunate. If Graetz had been more forthright, Smolenskin might not have gone on the warpath, and we might have a Moses Mendelssohn Street in Jerusalem that we could all walk down today.

But does Mendelssohn really deserve such an honor? I certainly don't begrudge it to him, but I don't think he does. Graetz's proto-nationalist Mendelssohn is just not the real one. The very book that he praises and, indeed, the very passages in *Jerusalem* to which he refers, provide evidence not of an effort to revive the national definition of Judaism but of an attempt to dilute it. Graetz was correct to point out that Mendelssohn's philosophy of Judaism proceeded from a "national point of departure." But rather than reaffirm it, Mendelssohn left it behind. In *Jerusalem*, he strove to uphold the ideas of liberty of conscience and the separation of religion and state. Judaism, he acknowledged, has not

known such a separation in the past, but now, after the Jews' loss of their independence, it has come to terms with it, and is therefore completely in accordance with his own, liberal principles.

His Jerusalem betrays no trace of a longing to return to the earthly Jerusalem.

Mendelssohn, to be sure, did not, like Reform leaders in Germany a little bit later, explicitly repudiate peoplehood and abandon the hope for the Jews' restoration to the Land of Israel. But he did reiterate rather vigorously the old rabbinic notion that the Jews were forbidden even to think about returning to their land without direct divine assistance. He reassured suspicious gentiles that the Jews' messianic hopes in no way interfered with their ability to be good citizens of non-Jewish states. And it is very hard to believe that he truly yearned to see them become anything else. His *Jerusalem* betrays no trace of a longing to return to the earthly Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, if I were sitting on Jerusalem's city council and I had to vote on the matter, I wouldn't be opposed to according special recognition to the man once known as the Socrates of Berlin. If the German capital where he spent most of his life now contains a street named after him, why shouldn't the very city after which he named his most enduring

work on Judaism? Mendelssohn's role in Jewish history was surely as great or greater than that of any number of Diaspora worthies who have made the grade in the Holy City. And it might even be helpful to have a street in Jerusalem named after a religiously observant opponent of religious coercion. But, given Stavans' experience with the shop clerk in Tel Aviv, would this really do any good? Perhaps, in the end, Moses Mendelssohn's reputation will be no worse off if his name is kept off the streets of Jerusalem and confined to books and even, as far as most people are concerned, to the encyclopedia.

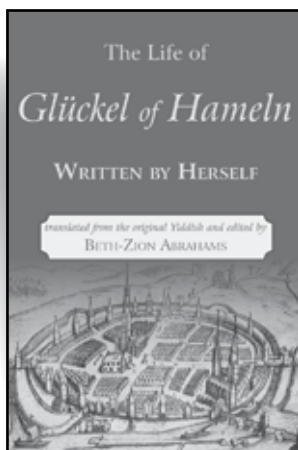
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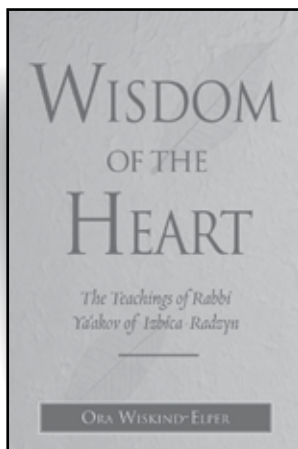
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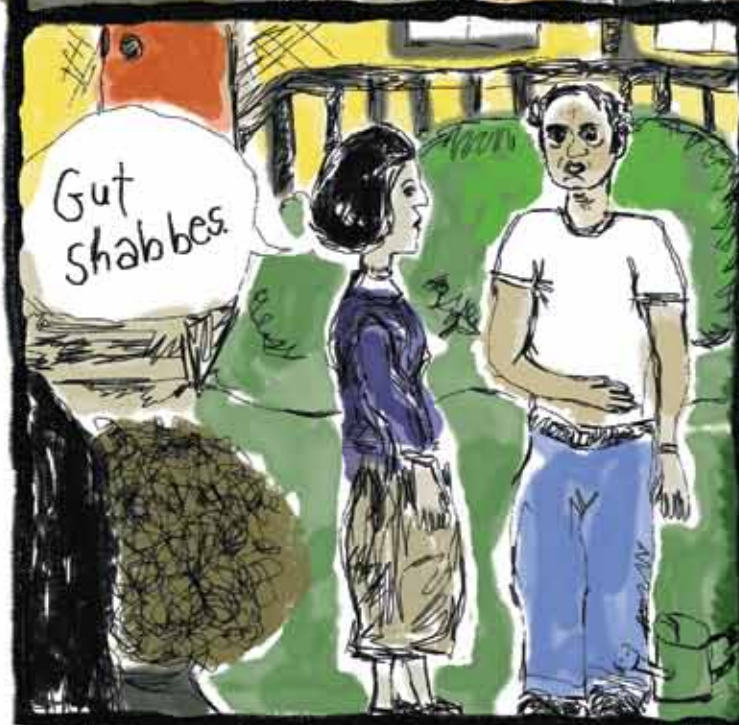
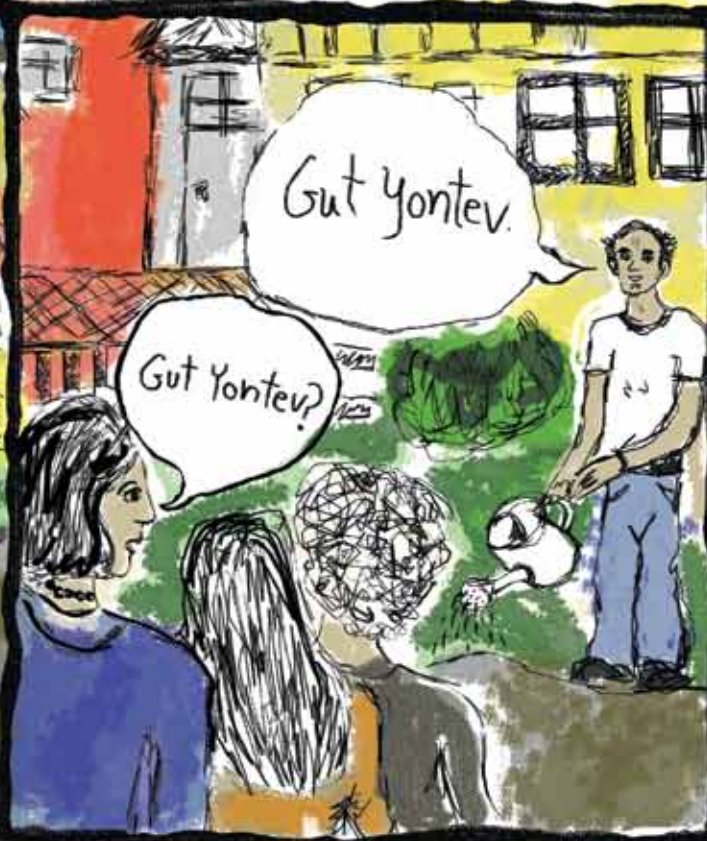
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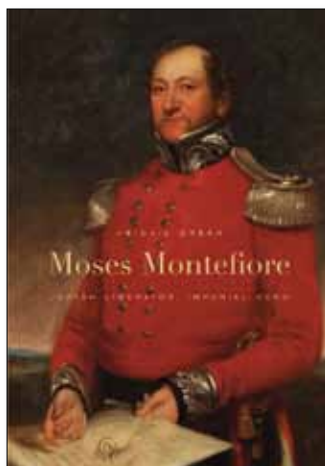
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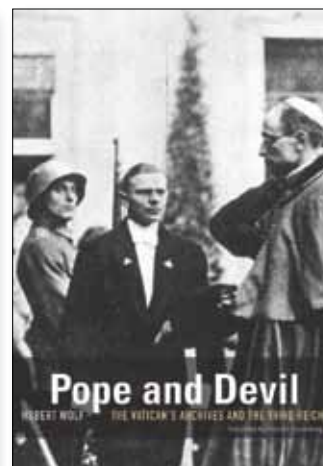
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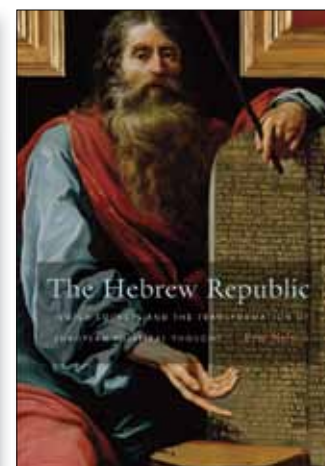
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