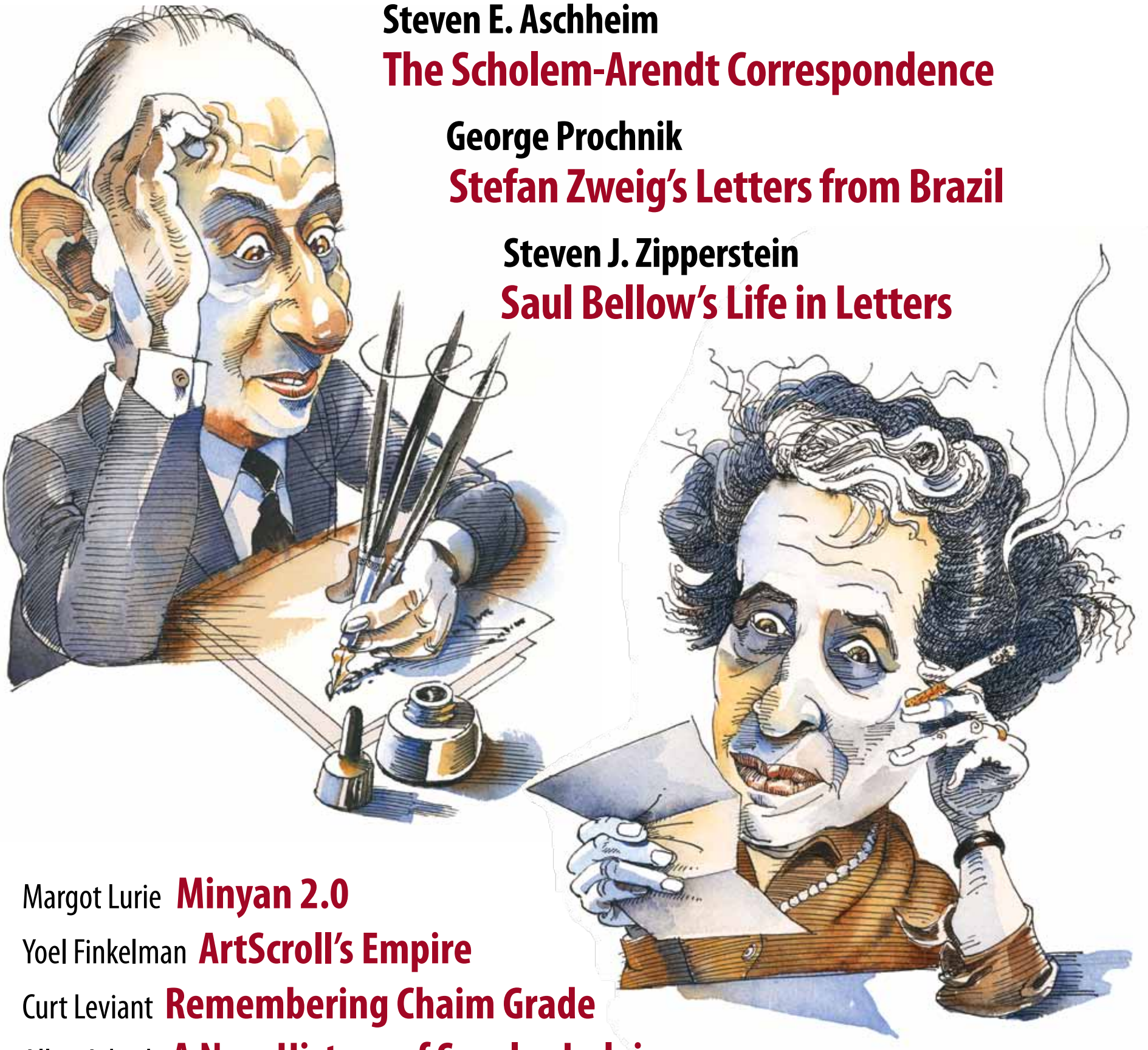
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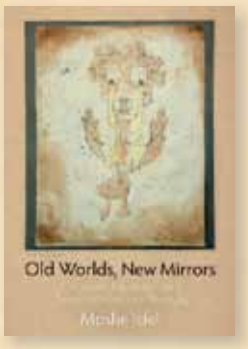
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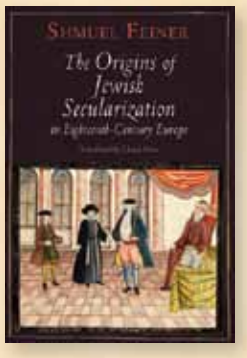
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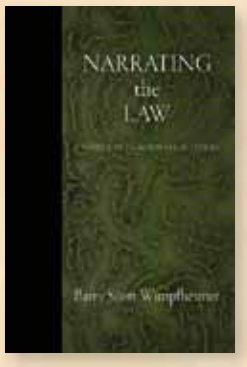
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OF BOOKS

Jewish Review of Books

Winter 2011

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On the cover: "Pen Pals," by Mark Anderson. From left: Gershom Scholem, Hannah Arendt.

God, Torah, and Israel: An Exchange

Rabbi Daniel Landes' *da' mah she-tashiv* ("Know what to answer the heretic") approach to my *Radical Judaism*, protecting innocents from "the dangers lurking in the rhetoric that Green and like-minded thinkers employ," represents a theological bankruptcy lurking in traditional Jewish circles. The forces of religion fought two great battles in the 20th century, one against evolution and the other, taken more seriously by Jews, against biblical criticism. It lost them both, quite decisively. These defeats, plus the Holocaust, are real parts of the baggage that any intellectually honest Jewish theology must confront. My book is an attempt to create a viable Judaism in the face of those realities. Landes may choose to live in a closed circle that pretends these uncomfortable facts do not exist, continuing to play by the old theological rules. For Jews living outside those circles, such an approach does not work. He should know; many of his students are among them.

Who is the "God of Israel" Landes is so proud to champion? The God of Numbers 31, telling Moses to slaughter the Midianites? The "compassionate Father" of our rabbinic prayers? Would Landes accept the God of Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* as "the God of Israel?" Or the God of the *Zohar*? The longest single chapter of my book is precisely about the evolution of our understanding of God, a process that has never ended. Landes passes over the obvious evolution and variety of Jewish views of God as though they did not exist. But a freezing of theological thought in the face of contemporary challenges is precisely what we do not need. It is just as threatening to living Judaism as is the freezing of halakha.

Indeed Mordecai Kaplan understood that much of Judaism's vigor lay in its ability to grow and evolve. But so did Rav Kook, whose theological writing has always attracted me more than Kaplan's. I am amused that Landes finds Kaplan to be my "hidden master" at this late point in my career. Where was he when I could have used him to shore up my Kaplanian credentials? While Kaplan's style may at times be trying, to dismiss his theology as simply "boring" is beneath the dignity of response. Kaplan at least tells you openly and honestly what he means by "God." I respect this and try to do the same. In some areas the divergence between us may be more in affect than in substance. But in matters of the heart that makes all the difference.

The nasty attack on Jewish Renewal is also unworthy of Landes. He picks out my comment on the seventh commandment (I say clearly that I am reading the ten as a guide for teachers) to remind his readers of the sexual misdeeds of some leaders in that movement. I suggest he beware of calling the kettle black. I have not seen that the high fences of halakha have been terribly successful of late at helping some Orthodox teachers to defeat temptation, either sexual or financial.

The high point of my annoyance is Landes' claim that I offer "no doctrine of *ahavat Yisrael* [love of the people Israel]," This book is written entirely in the spirit of love for both Judaism and Jews. Why else would I make the effort? Landes is unhappy that I admit openly my deep alienation from "the narrowly and triumphally religious" within our community.

Honesty can sting. My claim to be "a religious Jew but a secular Zionist" is also intentionally distorted for polemical purposes. I meant simply that I remain committed to the vision of a Jewish and democratic state (there—I have signed my loyalty oath!) while according it no messianic significance. Has that gotten too hard to understand?

Landes lines up with the late Sam Dresner and others in expressing an overweening fear of anything that smacks of pantheism, celebrating God within nature, or an underlying sense of universal religiosity. But it is precisely this sort of religion that



I believe humanity most urgently needs in this century, when our collective survival as a species is so threatened. I am here to teach a Jewish version of it, one relying deeply on our own sources and bearing our values, but without making an exclusive truth claim for Judaism. I rejoice that the deepest religious truths are known to men and women of many cultures, clothed in the garments of both east and west. See Malachi 1:11.

Mostly I am saddened and disappointed that Landes reads me this way. He is, after all, the director of Pardes Institute. Surely that worthy institution was so-named by its founders for the association of *pardes* (orchard) with the multiple ways in which Jewish sources can be read and interpreted. It has claimed for decades to champion intellectual pluralism under the cloak of behavioral conformity. Heresy hunting does not befit its leader.

Arthur Green
Rector and Professor
Hebrew College Rabbinical School
Boston, MA

Daniel Landes Responds:

According to Arthur Green, "the story of evolution, including the ongoing evolution of humanity, is bigger than all the distinctions between religions and their myths." But he struggles to find meaning within this cold process. In *Radical Judaism*, he writes:

> If we could learn to view our biohistory this way, the incredible grandeur of the evolutionary journey would immediately unfold before us. We Jews revere the memory of one Nahshon ben Aminadav, the first person to step into the Sea of Reeds . . . What courage! But what about the courage of the first creature *ever* to emerge from sea onto dry land? Do we appreciate the magnificence of *that* moment? [emphasis in the original]

Let's set aside the question of whether this is a sophisticated way to think about evolutionary history (it isn't), and note how quick Green is to personify nature. Perhaps it is because his God (like Mordecai Kaplan's) has been divested of all personality.

Green asks rhetorically whether I would accept the God of Maimonides' *Guide* or of the *Zohar*. They are, of course, two radically different conceptions, but both assert a divine transcendence that Green flatly denies and grapple with the problem of divine-human interaction. I understand Green's fascination with Rav Kook, a true panentheist, but underlying Rav Kook's theology is the shimmering energy of the All-existing within God. As the ground of being, God validates and uplifts nature. Kook's God is neither dead nor asleep: He is free to plunge into life and history.

In short, Green is right to point out that the tradition of Jewish thinking about God has a history, but, as he acknowledges, he has given up playing by the "old theological rules" of this tradition. Why, then, all the righteous indignation when a reviewer points out that this is precisely what he is doing? His disdain is also hard to understand. The relational God of Israel is, after all, the one affirmed by his teacher Abraham J. Heschel as well as by Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, the Gerrer Rebbe, author of the *Sefat Emet* and another key figure for Green. As for the fish, all I can say is that, given Green's neo-Hasidism, I hope that at least it was a herring or nice sable.

Green writes that the "high point of his annoyance" with me is in my contention that he presents a theology that has no doctrine of *ahavat Yisrael*, and then goes on to assert that he loves Jews and supports the State of Israel. I never asked for a loyalty oath or doubted Green's love of his fellow Jew. But neither of these adds up to a doctrine. In his book it would appear that he would replace simple Jews—if they have the wrong politics or a backward spirituality—with a member of Green's "extended faith community" ("my Israel") who is not Jewish but who shares his journey. My point was that *ahavat Yisrael* is about empirical (one might almost say carnal) Jews, an actual living community. But *ahavat Yisrael* also cuts both ways. Tradition leads me to maintain—as difficult as it might be to fathom from these exchanges—that Green and I are inextricably bound to (and stuck with) each other.

When I invited Green to lecture here at Pardes, the discussion in our *beit midrash* was frank and vigorous, but there was nothing that smacked of censure. Similarly, in my review, I argued that he was deeply, theologically wrong, but Green's letter notwithstanding I did not call him a heretic (a word I don't use). Pluralism does not preclude criticism.

Finally, I owe Green an apology. He is, of course, right that the Renewal movement is not the only one that has been beset by sexual scandal, and I did not mean to suggest otherwise. I hope that the Orthodox world has at least begun to learn that denial serves no one well, and that the "high walls of halakha" are sometimes breached by those who ought to maintain them. I suggest that the Renewal movement might learn, nonetheless, of the indispensability of law in curbing human temptation.

Between New York and Jerusalem

BY STEVEN E. ASCHHEIM

"[Scholem] is so preoccupied that he has no eyes (and not only that: no ears). Basically, he believes: The midpoint of the world is Israel; the midpoint of Israel is Jerusalem; the midpoint of Jerusalem is the university and the midpoint of the university is Scholem. And the worst of it is that he really believes the world has a central point."

—Hannah Arendt to Kurt Blumenfeld, January 9, 1957

"I knew Hannah Arendt when she was a socialist or half-communist and I knew her when she was a Zionist. I am astounded by her ability to pronounce upon movements in which she was once so deeply engaged, in terms of a distance measured in light years and from such sovereign heights."

—Gershom Scholem to Hans Paeschke, March 24, 1968

DER BRIEFWECHSEL: HANNAH ARENDT, GERSHOM SCHOLEM
(THE CORRESPONDENCE: HANNAH ARENDT, GERSHOM SCHOLEM)
edited by Marie Luise Knott in collaboration with David Heredia
Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 695 pp., €39.95

Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem, two of the most gifted, influential, and opinionated Jewish intellectuals of the 20th century, maintained an extraordinary correspondence from 1939 until 1964. Many readers will be aware of the gladiatorial exchange between these two giants during the early 1960s occasioned by Arendt's (in)famous *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. As a result, Scholem and Arendt have been typically regarded as intellectual foes, formidable ideological enemies. Those who only know of their later animosity will be considerably surprised by Scholem's enthusiastic 1941 description of Arendt (to his New York friend, Shalom Spiegel) as "a wonderful woman and an extraordinary Zionist." Now that their full correspondence has finally been published, in an edition meticulously assembled, annotated, and explicated by Marie Luise Knott, we can begin to understand the contours and dynamics of a relationship that was always complex. These letters illuminate the historical record by placing into context and documenting not only the profound differences between these powerful personalities but also their commonalities, shared activities, interests, and loyalties. (One hopes that English and Hebrew translations of this correspondence are forthcoming.)

Although for most of their correspondence, Arendt was in New York and Scholem was in Jerusalem, they most frequently wrote to each other in German (here Scholem is Gerhard not Gershom). They did so, moreover, as quintessential German-Jewish thinkers. Throughout their lives, both Arendt and Scholem remained deeply grounded in the restless intellectual culture of the Weimar Republic. They both formulated a radical critique of German-Jewish bourgeois "assimilationism"; both advocated, and were active in, the politics of collective Jewish affirmation; and they were both acutely aware of the breakdown of tradition, and of the need to grasp the past—and orient the present and future—in radical new ways.

The two had met fleetingly in the early or mid-1930s, but their real dialogue began in Paris in the autumn of 1938. Scholem was returning from New York, where he had delivered the lectures that would eventually be published as *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, and stopped in Paris to meet his great friend, the philosopher-critic Walter Benjamin. Arendt, whom Scholem described to Benjamin as having been "Heidegger's prize student," was there preparing Jewish refugee children for life in Palestine. The first letter in this volume, from Arendt to Scholem, is dated the following Spring, on May 29, 1939.

Those who only know of their later animosity will be surprised by Scholem's enthusiastic description of Arendt (to his New York friend, Shalom Spiegel) as "a wonderful woman and an extraordinary Zionist."

This is a correspondence that spanned a quarter of a century, yet Scholem and Arendt's actual meetings were few and far between. In fact, there is no known photograph of them together—the book features a picture of Arendt on the front cover and Scholem on the back—and many of their letters concern planned but never realized meetings. On September 22, 1945, Arendt noted: "It's five minutes after the end of the war and we still have not been able to arrange a meeting at the corner café." This was a reference to their frequent wistful, and eventually self-ironizing, comments upon a never-to-take-place 5 o' clock post-war reunion at the Café Westen (an allusion to Jaroslav Hašek's comic novel *The Good Soldier Schwejk*).

Given their divergent viewpoints and flammable egos, it is not surprising that on the few occasions when they found themselves together, they did so with a certain anxiety. Just before a meeting in Zurich in July 1952, Arendt wrote to Scholem: "I'm happy about us seeing each other again. Don't be argumentative. Let's have a few nice days; we both know we can do it." As it happens, Scholem subsequently wrote to Arendt how much he *had* enjoyed it.

The letters also contain innumerable expressions of reciprocal admiration and evidence of mutual assistance. "If possible, please send me all your materials; they interest me *very much*," Scholem wrote Arendt in July 1944. In March 1945, he requested that she send what he had missed in her work so that he could have a full "archive" of her writings. Included in Scholem's collection was the manuscript of Arendt's early biographical study of Rahel Varnhagen, the German-Jewish salon hostess and early Romantic. Scholem regarded it as a vital piece of scholarship, which depicted the deluded misapprehensions of post-enlightenment German Jewry. In fact, it was Scholem, who, in the chaos of wartime, proved to have been the one to save the last copy of the manuscript, enabling Arendt to finally publish the book in 1956, more than two decades after she had composed it.

For her part, in New York, Arendt acted as an advocate for Scholem. She struggled mightily, and not always successfully, to get *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* reviewed, and eventually published her own glowing piece, which he described to another correspondent as "one of the two intelligent criticisms I have seen of my book." She also sent Scholem and his wife Fania frequent food parcels during the difficult years of rationing in the Yishuv.

Although Arendt would publish in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* one of the most influential accounts of National Socialism and anti-Semitism, their wartime correspondence contains surprisingly few theoretical discussions of the crisis through which they were living. But mutual,

deeply painful, personal concerns generated by that catastrophe abound. In a letter dated October 21, 1940, Arendt delivered the shattering news of their friend Walter Benjamin's death by suicide in Catalonia while trying to escape the Nazis. "Jews are dying in Europe," she wrote, "and one buries them like dogs." Scholem, as his wife Fania reported to Arendt, was devastated. He later replied to Arendt: "Oh, we have so much to talk about and who knows when we will again have the opportunity. We have, so to speak, to eat our way through this mountain of darkness." A little later, in February 1942, he wrote that one had to go on writing, "without which we cannot fulfill our duty toward the dead." (He dedicated *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* to Benjamin.)

For all that drew the two thinkers together, their ultimate interests and goals diverged. Arendt may have been fascinated by the Jews—her analyses of the psychological machinations entailed in secular Jewish creativity and her (probably self-reflective) critique of the assimilation process remain exemplary. Judaism itself, however, hardly interested her and though early on she advocated Jewish collective political action, she grew increasingly skeptical of the Zionist project. She was trained and remained within the worldly philo-Hellenic European tradition (her philosophical diary is frighteningly full of erudite Greek quotations). Her great project was to rethink "the political"—the necessity of pluralism and the very possibility of politics—in a post-nationalist, post-totalitarian age.

These commitments affected her ideas on Jewry. Prior to and during the war, Arendt's intellectual and practical Jewish and Zionist commitments had seemed clear. Her study of Rahel Varnhagen was compatible with a Zionist critique of assimilation. She worked with Youth Aliyah, and insisted that "politically I will always speak only in the name of the Jews." Yet, even then, Arendt qualified the above statement by adding that this only applied when "circumstances force me to give my nationality." When, immediately after the war, her friend and teacher Karl Jaspers asked whether she was a German or a Jew she replied: "To be perfectly honest, it doesn't matter to me in the least on the personal and individual level." In an April 1951 entry in her philosophical diary, she provocatively declared that the Jewish idea of chosenness was both unpolitical and "always carried the germ of murder in it, simply because it is the enemy of plurality."

Scholem, on the other hand, had claimed the Judaic tradition as his world. His studies on Jewish mysticism put sects and movements previously regarded as too obscure and notorious for serious consideration at the very heart of historical Judaism. Yet it was precisely through them that he affirmed both the essential value and vitality of the Jewish nation. Mysticism, with its potentially explosive religious content, was not a fleeting construction but "an essential determining force of the inner form of Judaism."

Like Arendt, who wrote perceptively about the figure of the Jewish pariah, he was interested in fissures, conflicts, and paradoxes. He probed subversive figures such as Shabbtai Tzvi and Jacob Frank, but these investigations all took place within a foundational structure. Like Arendt, too, Scholem's early political preferences for Palestine were binationalist, and he belonged to the binationalist group, Brit Shalom. But his commitment to a collective Jewish renaissance and (an admittedly idiosyncratic) Zionism did not waver when the possibility of a binational Arab-Jewish state appeared foreclosed. This Zionist vision, cut out of organic Judaic materials, did not sit well with Arendt's more skeptical modes of identification.

It was, of course, around the question of Zionism that Arendt and Scholem's first serious conflict emerged. This was occasioned by Arendt's fierce 1945 article "Zionism Reconsidered" in *The Menorah Journal*. In the article, Arendt argued that, unlike previous resolutions, that of the American



German stamp issued in honor of Hannah Arendt on November 10, 1988.

Zionist Convention in October 1944, demanding "a free and democratic commonwealth . . . [which] shall embrace the whole of Palestine, undivided and undiminished," had entirely omitted to mention the Arabs, and simply left "them the choice between voluntary emigration or second-class citizenship . . . It is a deadly blow to those Jewish parties in Palestine that have tirelessly preached the necessity of an understanding between the Arab and the Jewish peoples."

However, the terrible catastrophes in Europe had rendered the majority of Zionists ever more narrowly nationalist and chauvinist. In so doing, she argued, Zionists had created their own "insoluble 'tragic conflict,' which can only be ended through cutting the Gordian knot." A nationalism that insisted upon one's own exclusive sovereignty and that relied only upon force and, indeed, the force of outside powers, would lead to intractable conflict. Such an emergent national state would appear to be a tool, an agent of foreign and hostile interests, a fact that—she rather presciently noted—will "inevitably lead to a new wave of Jew-hatred."

Arendt also criticized Zionism for what she regarded as its unpolitical and unhistorical notion of an "eternal" Jew-hatred leading to "utter resignation, an open acceptance of anti-Semitism as a 'fact,' and therefore a 'realistic' willingness not only to do business with the foes of the Jewish people but also to take propagandistic advantage of anti-Jewish hostility." Central to her polemic here was a withering attack on the Nazi-Zionist transfer agreement. She also attacked the kibbutz movement as a Utopia "on the moon" whose supposedly visionary elite only sought to recreate the socio-political conditions of other nations. Finally, she argued that "the Zionists shut themselves off from the destiny of the Jews all over the world," through their negation of the Diaspora and the belief that the *galut* was destined to disappear.

In a letter written on January 14, 1945, she warned Scholem of what was coming. She had been hard at work on "a principled reconsideration of Zionism, as I am of the earnest opinion that if we continue like this, everything will be lost." This formulation implied that the criticism derived from her own involvement in the movement and a sense of concerned familial identification. "On the other hand," she added, "this may cost me my last Zionist friends if they are fanatic."

As it happens, in his youthful diaries, Scholem had proudly described himself as a "fanatic." It was partly as such a self-confessed "fanatic" and partly as a pained friend and ideological relative that he couched his angry, well-wrought reply to Arendt. In a letter of January 28, 1946, a "disappointed" and "embittered" Scholem expressed his surprise that given her own Zionist affiliations, Arendt's critique was based "not on Zionist but rather extreme . . . anti-Zionist grounds." As much as the content of her arguments (each of which he sought to refute), at stake too was the question of the limits of loyal, connected criticism. Arendt, he observed, had indiscriminately combined all the old charges against Zionism (its imperialist, reactionary character, its exploitation of anti-Semitism, its narrow sectarianism, etc.). It was a jumble, he wrote, written from the standpoint of a "communist critique, transposed into an incoherent Golus-nationalism" and a universal morality that existed in practice nowhere but in the heads of disaffected Jewish intellectuals. Despite his earlier advocacy of a binational solution, Scholem told Arendt:

> I would vote with an equally heavy heart for a binational State as for partition. The Arabs have not agreed to one solution, be it federal, statist or binational, when it is connected to Jewish immigration. And I am convinced that the confrontation with the Arabs on the basis of a partition *fait accompli* will be easier than without.

Arendt's argument that members of the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine) were not interested in the fate of the Jewish people was simply absurd and though the transfer agreement raised

ethical dilemmas, Scholem's only regret was that—as this was the only possibility of rescue from the hands of fascism—they had not been able to save more Jews with it. "I confess my guilt," he replied:

> with the greatest calm to most of the sins you have attributed to Zionism. I am a nationalist and fully unmoved by apparently progressive declarations against a view that since my earliest youth has been repeatedly declared as superseded . . . I am a 'sectarian' and have never been ashamed to present my conviction of sectarianism as decisive and positive.

In her long answer of April 21, 1946, Arendt insisted that her arguments did not flow from "an anti-Palestine" complex but rather an alarmed concern for it. She had nothing against nationalism itself but rather its organization into political states that could easily transform nations "into a race-horde . . . an enduring danger in our time." For all that, she added to Scholem, "I can't stop you being a nationalist, although I can't quite see why you are so proud of it." Arendt's critique sounds almost contemporary; the basic terms of debate remain seemingly unchanged.

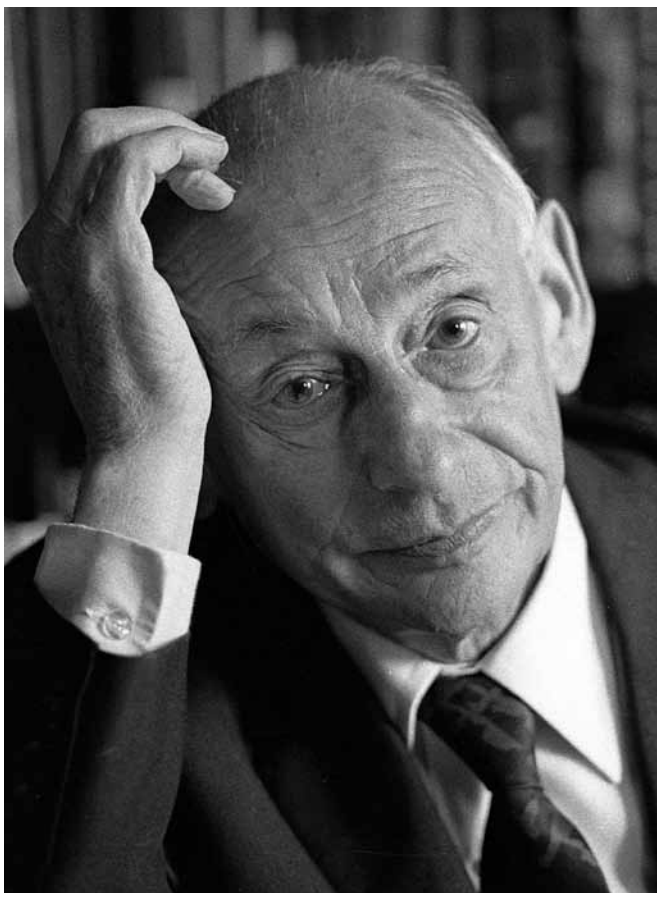
She concluded her reply by expressing a concern that their angry dialogue—an "orgy of honesty" she called it—could threaten their friendship. She herself did not feel wounded by the harsh exchange but, perhaps as "*masculini generis*," she bitingly noted, Scholem was more vulnerable. Human relations, she pleaded, were ultimately more important than differences of opinions.

Arendt was certainly right to note that Scholem was a man who did not enjoy being contradicted, but he also worked hard to maintain their friendship. Most of this time, they kept their ideological tensions under control through occasional familiar Yiddishisms like "*tachles*," witty barbs against common targets such as Scholem's "Love thy Buber as thyself," or careful silence (the name Martin Heidegger does not appear in any of the letters). Most often, however, it was their mutual commitment to the memory of Walter Benjamin that held their friendship together. Whenever disagreements arose, they reverted to Benjamin, and the ways in which they could advance his publications and good name, which was then virtually unknown. They both regarded Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the leading figures of the "Frankfurt School" of neo-Marxist critical theory, who had been Benjamin's erstwhile colleagues and patrons, as the enemies, determined to monopolize, misconstrue, or even hide Benjamin's work.

Meanwhile, in the years after World War II, Scholem and Arendt both worked independently for the Jewish Reconstruction Committee (JRC), that great project to rescue Nazi-looted Judaica. Arendt generously cooperated with Scholem to ensure that Israel's National Library received the bulk of pillaged literature recovered by the JRC. A great deal of the correspondence deals with the strategies, legal and bureaucratic difficulties, and political intrigues of this complicated, heroic enterprise. (A useful history of the JRC, by David Heredia, is included as an appendix, after the letters.)

In December 1951, when the JRC had completed its work, a dinner was held honoring Arendt, and Scholem requested that the following words be read out:

> I am proud to think how lucky JRC has been in having her serve as head of staff. I am an old friend and admirer of Miss Arendt as an engaging personality and masterly intellect, but in this latest phase of her career she has revealed even greater qualities: her sensitiveness and understanding, her energy that knew no bounds, and her devotion to the task have been of the highest value. I shall always remember with the greatest pleasure this period of our common work. We have shared the excitement of digging for the lost treasures of the Jewish cultural heritage; we have shared the hopes and disappointments involved and also the joy of discovery and recovery.



Gershom Scholem, June, 1974. (Photo © Aliza Auerbach.)

Their disagreements were more or less held in check until Arendt wrote *Eichmann in Jerusalem.* She was sent to Jerusalem by *The New Yorker* to cover Eichmann's trial, and she was coming, she flippantly wrote Scholem, to "amuse" herself. Actually, Arendt did not spend all that much time in the courtroom itself, nor, curiously, did she see Scholem. As far as I can ascertain, it appears that Scholem was not in Jerusalem at the time. In any case, they did not meet. Arendt did meet with other intellectuals, including Leni Yahil, and political figures such as Golda Meir, but their discussions did little to temper her views—(in fact, they may have made them more extreme). Given Scholem's stature and the history of their relationship, one wonders whether his presence would have changed Arendt's thinking, or at least her tone. In the end, one doubts it. Arendt later admitted to Mary McCarthy "that I wrote this book in a curious state of euphoria. And that ever since I did it, I feel light-hearted about the whole matter. Don't tell anybody; is it not proof positive that I have no 'soul'?"

Taken separately, none of Arendt's main claims in the *Eichmann* book were entirely original. Already in 1940 the young German journalist Sebastian Haffner had written of the Nazi perpetrators: "The doer does not fit the deeds. The enormity

Arendt concluded her reply by expressing a concern that their angry dialogue—an "orgy of honesty" she called it—could threaten their friendship.

is committed by extraordinarily banal, weak, and insignificant men . . . No different are their bureaucratic colleagues who sit in offices and torture their victims by methods less physical and palpable, but no less effective." Others, too, had criticized the ways in which Israel and the prosecution conducted the trial. Even her claim that the Jewish Councils were complicit in the murder of their own people was not new, although her counterfactual formulation was extraordinarily harsh:

> The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.

It was, however, the combination of these claims, the American forum in which they appeared, the international publicity they generated, the apparent callousness of their formulation, and, above all, the affiliated Jewish identity of the famous author that generated such outrage.

Scholem first answered Arendt's charges in a private letter dated June 23, 1963. While such close proximity to the catastrophe made objectivity impossible, he stated, the difficult issues must indeed be confronted. Yet Arendt's constant insistence upon Jewish weakness in the face of the Nazi assault acquired "overtones of malice." He wrote:

> The problem, I have admitted, is real enough. Why, then, should your book leave one with so strong a sensation of bitterness and shame—not for the compilation, but for the compiler?

The letter resounds with Scholem's shock that someone whom he regarded "wholly as a daughter of our people, and in no other way," could express such convictions, convictions that were so lacking in love for the Jewish people (*ahavat Yisrael*). This sense was only exacerbated for Scholem by Arendt's harsh remarks, such as that concerning Leo Baeck, "who in the eyes of both Jews and Gentiles," Arendt proclaimed, "was the Jewish *Führer.*" (She also described Eichmann as "a convert to Zionism.") As for the Jewish Councils, Scholem argued for a more forgiving view of their impossible predicament:

Some among them were swine, others were saints . . . There were among them also many people in no way different from ourselves, who were compelled to make terrible decisions in circumstances that we cannot even begin to reproduce or reconstruct. I do not know whether they were right or wrong. Nor do I presume to judge. I was not there.

The controversy became so fierce that at one point Arendt told Mary McCarthy that there was "a war between me and the Jews."

Arendt's thesis that the Nazi compulsion of the Jews to participate in their own extermination blurred the distinction between torturer and victim, Scholem proclaimed, was "wholly false and tendentious . . . What perversity! We are asked, it appears, to confess that the Jews, too, had their 'share' in these acts of genocide." To be sure, Scholem argued, if the Jews had indeed run away, "in particular to Palestine—more Jews would have remained alive. Whether, in view of the special circumstances of Jewish history and Jewish life, that would have been possible, and whether it implies a historical share of guilt in Hitler's crime, is another question."


Nicht im Handel

Ein hübsches jüdisches Theologie. Hannah empfohlen in Gershom

SONDERDRUCK AUS ERANOS-JAHRBUCH XXXI/1962

GERSHOM SCHOLEM

Tradition und Kommentar
als religiöse Kategorien im Judentum

RHEIN-VERLAG ZÜRICH
1963

Offprint of "Tradition and Commentary as Religious Categories in Judaism" inscribed by Gershom Scholem to Hannah Arendt, 1963. (Photo courtesy of the Hannah Arendt Collection, Stevenson Library at Bard College.)

In her reply to Scholem, Arendt declared that "I have always regarded my Jewishness as one of the indisputable factual data of my life, and I have never had the wish to change or disclaim facts of this kind." Yet with regard to Scholem's comment regarding "love of the Jewish people," she exclaimed: "I have never in my life 'loved' any people or collective . . . the only kind of love I know and believe in is the love of persons . . . This 'love of the Jews' would appear to me, since I am myself Jewish, as something rather suspect. I cannot love myself or anything which I know is part and parcel of my own person."

Clearly the divide between them was great, yet when Scholem suggested that these letters be published, Arendt assented adding: "The value of this controversy consists in its epistolary character, namely in the fact that it is informed by personal friendship."

But it was precisely the personal friendship that made the argument so painful. Scholem's commitment to Jewishness was unconditional; Arendt took pride in the complex, even subversive nature of her intertwined commitments. As she commented about her non-Jewish, second husband, Heinrich Blücher: "If I had wanted to become respectable I would either have had to give up my interest in Jewish affairs or not marry a non-Jewish man, either option equally inhuman and in a sense crazy."

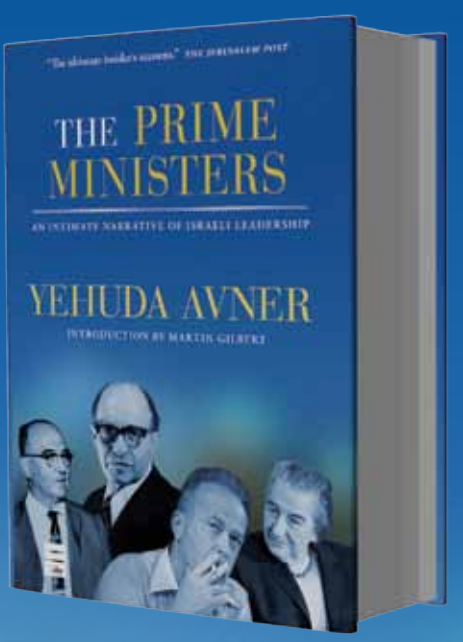
She delighted in publicly challenging collective narrative and national memory. Her defenders regarded this as a matter of intellectual principle and honesty, her critics viewed this as a kind of tactless perversity, indeed, as a kind of Jewish anti-Semitism. The controversy became so fierce that at one point Arendt told Mary McCarthy that there was "a war between me and the Jews." Scholem, it should be pointed out, specifically did not join those who accused Arendt of "self-hatred." Nevertheless, it was this controversy that brought the correspondence and their friendship to an end.

There is a final irony here. Throughout her career, Arendt reflected beautifully on the nature and critical importance of friendship. Truth, she declared in her moving essay on Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, should be sacrificed to friendship and humanity. Yet—and this is the climactic surprise of the correspondence—it was she and not Scholem who declined to continue the friendship. Intriguingly, at more or less the same time that their Eichmann controversy raged, Scholem made sure to send Arendt his inscribed article on "Tradition and Commentary." The final letter of the correspondence, dated July 27, 1964, is from Scholem. Addressed to "Dear Hannah" and closing with "Heartfelt Greetings," it informs Arendt of his forthcoming trip to New York to deliver a lecture on their friend Walter Benjamin. "In case you will be in New York," he wrote, "and if we want to see each other again, this is the given moment." That moment was never to be.

Steven E. Aschheim is Emeritus Professor of History at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the author of Scholem, Arendt, Klemperer: Intimate Chronicles in Turbulent Times *(Indiana University Press) and* Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad *(Princeton University Press).*

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Simon Wiesenthal and the Ethics of History

BY DEBORAH E. LIPSTADT

SIMON WIESENTHAL: THE LIFE AND LEGENDS
by Tom Segev
Doubleday, 496 pp., $35

If there was anything in particular that prevented Simon Wiesenthal from becoming, after S.Y. Agnon, the second Jew from Buczacz to win a Nobel Prize, it was probably his relationship with Kurt Waldheim. Back in the 1960s, when he was Austria's foreign minister, Waldheim had helped Wiesenthal to defend himself against rumors spread by Communist bloc countries that he had been a Nazi collaborator during World War II. Two decades later, after he had served as Secretary-General of the UN and was running for the presidency of Austria, Waldheim's actual Nazi past finally came to light. Grateful for his earlier support, Wiesenthal, who should have known better (and probably did), dismissed the case against Waldheim as mere "gossip" spread by his political adversaries. This landed him in a nasty public battle with the World Jewish Congress, which lobbied to have Waldheim labeled a war criminal, placed on the United States' Watch List, and banned from entering the country. In 1986, at the height of this scandal, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to fellow survivor Elie Wiesel. "It is reasonable to assume," writes Tom Segev in his new biography, "that Wiesenthal didn't get the prize" at the same time "because he was at the center of a raging controversy."

This was scarcely the only controversy that Wiesenthal sparked. Throughout his career as a Nazi hunter he had both fervent admirers and angry detractors. In the eyes of some, he was the matchless hero who inspired Frederick Forsyth's novel *The Odessa File*, a man who had dedicated himself, often at risk to his own personal safety, to tracking down Nazi war criminals, and bringing them to justice. Sitting in a modest office in Vienna, behind heavily fortified steel doors, he managed—without a state's intelligence apparatus or financial resources—to find what he called "the murderers among us." A United States Congressional Resolution lauded him as being "instrumental in the capture and conviction of more than 1,000 Nazi war criminals, including Adolf Eichmann, the architect of the Nazi plan to annihilate European Jewry." But Isser Harel, the mastermind who headed Israel's Security Services at the time of Eichmann's capture, insisted that Wiesenthal played no role in the operation. In fact, according to Harel, Wiesenthal almost sabotaged the whole effort when he shared information that had been given to him in strictest confidence. While Harel's account of this episode in *The House on Garibaldi Street* may be somewhat self-serving, he is by no means the only one to denounce Wiesenthal as a self-promoter and even a fraud. Other critics have accused him of falsely taking credit for finding criminals and repeatedly inventing information unsupported by any data.

This criticism has been echoed by government agencies. In 1986, the Canadian government's Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals submitted a 1,000-page report to the country's Governor General. While acknowledging that there were indeed Nazi war criminals in Canada and urging action against them, the report also castigated Wiesenthal for having "grossly exaggerated" their numbers. The lists he gave the Canadian government were "nearly totally useless" and he refused to turn over to the Commission information they needed for their investigation, which he claimed to have in his files. The Office of Special Investigations (OSI) of the US Department of Justice was also severely critical of him. In 1979, the OSI's director told Wiesenthal in strict confidence that it had traced one of Eichmann's accomplices to California. Wiesenthal proceeded to leak the information to the press in a way that suggested that it was he who had found the man. The OSI eventually severed all contact with him.

Was Simon Wiesenthal an intrepid hunter of mass murderers who was worthy of all the tributes he received . . . or was he in fact more of a charlatan than a hero?

Was Simon Wiesenthal an intrepid hunter of mass murderers who was worthy of all the tributes he received from such figures as Jimmy Carter and Elizabeth Taylor (who wrote to him "I love you and we all need you.")? Or was he in fact more of a charlatan than a hero? While writing a book on the Eichmann trial, I often had occasion to ask myself these questions. Upon discovering that Wiesenthal's numerous autobiographies and innumerable interviews tell a variety of different and irreconcilable stories, my suspicions of the man grew markedly. I was excited, therefore, when I heard that Tom Segev was writing his biography. Segev has made a career of slaughtering the sacred cows of contemporary Jewish and Israeli history. A newspaper columnist who is also the author of several works of history, he has more than once plunged deep into the archives. If Wiesenthal was in fact a fraud, Segev would be able to prove it—and would do so, no doubt, with relish. A little later, when I learned that Segev had actually come to the conclusion that Wiesenthal's critics were wrong, I was pleasantly surprised, albeit curious.

Segev makes his position clear from the beginning of this substantial and thoroughly researched volume. With uncharacteristic enthusiasm, he describes Wiesenthal as a man of "broad humanity," a "tireless warrior against evil and a central figure in the struggle for human rights." He even goes so far as to agree with an official at the Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles' observation that "if he had not existed, Wiesenthal would have to be invented, because people all over the world, both Jews and gentiles, needed him as an emblem and a source of hope." He not only "sparked" the imaginations of Jews and gentiles, but "enchanted them, thrilled them . . . weighed on their consciences, and"—one is surprised to hear Segev say such a thing about anyone—"granted them a consoling faith in good."



Simon Wiesenthal and Elizabeth Taylor at The Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, November 6, 1983. (Photo © Ron Galella/WireImage).

Nevertheless, despite his high regard for Wiesenthal, Segev gives due attention to the other side of the story. Indeed, he confirms many of the charges made by his critics. Consider some of the terms he uses to describe Wiesenthal's *modus operandi*: He "fabricated" evidence, "snatched"

stories out of thin air, "fantasize[d]", was "often inaccurate," "came up with things that never happened," "invented" facts, "claim[ed] credit" for things he never did. Indeed, he sometimes "wove things out of his imagination."

As Segev shows, Wiesenthal's account of his experiences during the years of the Holocaust is clearly fabricated. When he visited Auschwitz in 1994, he told a biographer who accompanied him that he had been brought to Auschwitz on a death train. Miraculously, he had been transferred a few days later. Segev acknowledges that this typified Wiesenthal's "set pattern" of "magnify[ing] his ordeal" while adding "a dash of drama." He did the same thing when he enumerated the camps and prisons in which he had been incarcerated. Immediately after liberation he said he had spent time in four camps. During the 1950s, the number grew to nine and then to eleven. By the early 1980s, it had reached twelve, including Auschwitz. Joseph Wechsberg, who co-authored Wiesenthal's autobiography, wrote in the introduction that he had been in "over a dozen."

The miraculous was also woven into his account of how he had been saved from a certain death in Janowska. On April 20, 1943, Hitler's birthday, he was among a group of prisoners who were taken outside the camp to be shot. Just as his turn came he was pulled out of line and told to return to camp to draw a birthday poster for Hitler. He was the only one in the group to survive. The main elements of this story are indeed true. On that day in 1943 a group of prisoners were taken from Janowska and shot. One was pulled from the line just before he was to be killed and told to return to the camp. But it wasn't Wiesenthal's story. The man to whom this happened was apparently Leon Wells, Wiesenthal's friend.

Wiesenthal's claims about tracking war criminals in the post-war years are likewise riddled with exaggerations, if not outright falsehoods. Let us return to the Eichmann case. In 1953, Wiesenthal learned from an Austrian stamp collector that Eichmann was in Argentina. He passed this information along to the World Jewish Congress, which in turn transmitted it to the CIA, which did nothing. Had someone acted on this information at the time or even remembered it six years later, when Eichmann was found in Argentina by others, Wiesenthal would have deserved some of the credit. But that didn't happen.

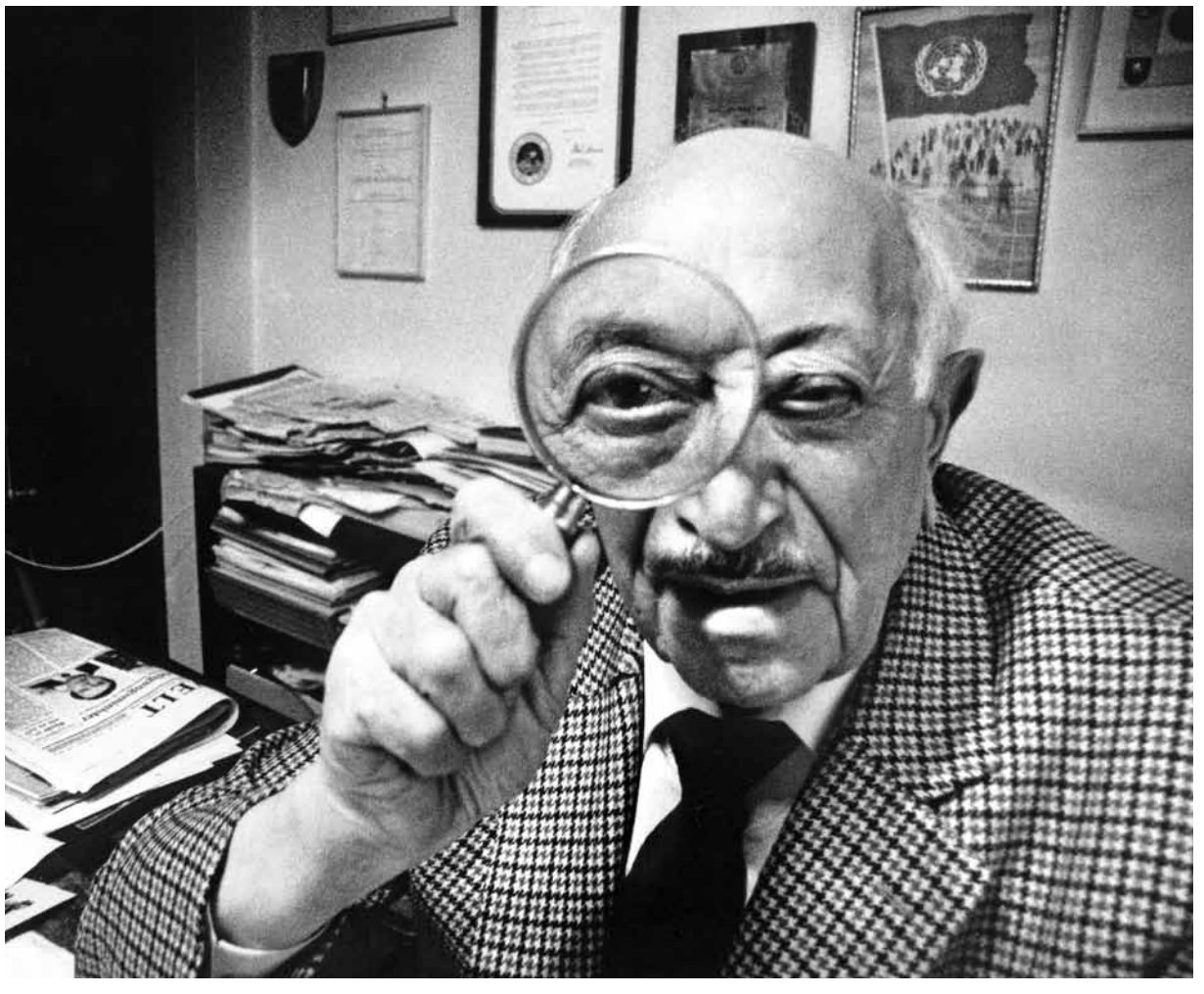
In fact, the key information that led to Eichmann's capture came from three unlikely characters: Lothar Hermann, a nearly blind, half-Jewish German immigrant to Argentina; Hermann's teenage daughter Silvia; and Fritz Bauer, a German Jew who had returned to Germany after the war and became a Federal prosecutor. It is true, as Wiesenthal claims in one of his autobiographies, that in 1959, even as preparations were being made to capture Eichmann, he shared with the Israelis his strong suspicions about Eichmann's whereabouts. But what he told them was that he was virtually certain that Eichmann was hiding in northern Germany, a hemisphere away from his actual location.

In the 1970s, Wiesenthal began to refer to "eleven million victims" of the Holocaust, six million Jews and five million non-Jews, but the latter number had no basis in historical reality.

Wiesenthal also claimed to have tracked down Dr. Josef Mengele to the Greek island of Kythnos, where he sent a reporter to find him. On Wiesenthal's account, the reporter found only two buildings on the island, an inn and a monastery. The innkeeper told him that on the preceding day a yacht had ferried away "a German and his wife." The reporter showed Mengele's picture to the innkeeper and some monks who confirmed that he had been there. However, when the reporter subsequently read Wiesenthal's account, he said that there was no monastery on the island and, more importantly, no report of a German who had recently visited the island or left the previous day. It was, simply put, "all wrong." Over the years, Wiesenthal repeatedly announced that he knew precisely where Mengele was. Most of these pronouncements, it seems, were mere guesses designed to win media attention.

Wiesenthal did indeed help to track down a number of war criminals, far fewer than the 1,000 for which he is often credited, but probably far more than anyone else. More importantly, he shone a public spotlight on the question of Nazi war criminals who had not been brought to justice. He did so despite the opposition of those who wished to push the whole matter under the rug, lest it open old wounds by calling attention to the wrongs committed by people who had been "rehabilitated" and fully integrated into post-war society. Believing that the demand for justice trumped all other considerations, Wiesenthal went wherever the trail led and sometimes, as we now know, where it did not lead. It is thus unfortunate that his fabrications and falsehoods now threaten to overshadow his real accomplishments.

Somewhat surprisingly, Tom Segev, a journalist who is usually zealous in his search for truth and contemptuous of those who distort it, is not unduly bothered by Wiesenthal's mendacity. He makes excuses for him, claiming that Wiesenthal's proclivity for "exaggerat[ing] his suffering" and spinning "fantasies about his survival" was a means of "push[ing] out of his consciousness the real atrocities he had experienced." His untrue statements emanated, Segev suggests, from a "profound sense of guilt" for having survived when his whole family had perished.



Wiesenthal in his office in Vienna, Austria, 1998. (Photo © Luigi Caputo/laif/Redux.)

Why is Segev so forgiving of Simon Wiesenthal's many lapses? Perhaps we can arrive at an answer by considering Wiesenthal's most egregious distortion of the historical record and Segev's response to it. In the 1970s, Wiesenthal began to refer to "eleven million victims" of the Holocaust, six million Jews and five million non-Jews, but the latter number had no basis in historical reality. On the one hand, the total number of non-Jewish civilians killed by the Germans in the course of World War II is far higher than

five million. On the other hand, the number of non-Jewish civilians killed for racial or ideological reasons does not come close to five million (though it no doubt would have exceeded it if the war had ended in a German victory). Nevertheless, Wiesenthal's contrived death toll, with its neat almost-symmetry, has become a widely accepted "fact." Jimmy Carter's Executive Order, which was the basis for the establishment of the US Holocaust Museum, referred to the "eleven million victims of the Holocaust." I have been to many Yom Hashoah observances—including those sponsored by synagogues and Jewish communities—where eleven candles were lit. When I tell the organizers that they are engaged in historical revisionism, their reactions range from skepticism to outrage. Strangers have taken me to task in angry letters for focusing "only" on Jewish deaths and ignoring the five million others. When I explain that this number is simply inaccurate, in fact made up, they become even more convinced of my ethnocentrism and inability to feel the pain of anyone but my own people.



A 1974 poster advertising* The Odessa File*, a film inspired by Wiesenthal's career and for which he was a consultant.

When Israeli historians Yehuda Bauer and Yisrael Gutman challenged Wiesenthal on this point, he admitted that he had invented the figure of eleven million victims in order to stimulate interest in the Holocaust among non-Jews. He chose five million because it was almost, but not quite, as large as six million. When Elie Wiesel asked Wiesenthal who these supposed five million victims were, Wiesenthal exploded and accused him of suffering from "Judeocentrism." In recent months, Wiesenthal's concoction has been further improved upon by a group of rabbis and imams who visited Auschwitz under the aegis of the US State Department. The statement they issued after their visit referred to the "twelve million victims, six million Jews and six million non-Jews." Now we have parity. One wonders what's next.

Segev, for his part, explains away Wiesenthal's invention of the "eleven million" as his means of stressing "the brotherhood of all the victims," something Jews generally fail to do. He lauds Wiesenthal for "judg[ing] people by their deeds and merits rather than by their group affiliation. This was the basis for his humanistic views and his faith in justice. It was the basis for his belief in good and his longing for conciliation."

Segev, who is deeply troubled by what he perceives as Israel's leaders' narrow, particularistic *Weltanschauung*, apparently sees Wiesenthal's broad universalist revisionism as therapeutic. He doesn't seem to grasp that it can also be quite injurious. Any falsification with respect to the Holocaust, whatever its purpose may be, gives comfort and solace, not to speak of ammunition, to Holocaust deniers. It enables them to turn the tables and to claim that the "defenders of the Holohoax" are the ones guilty of fabricating history.

However, inventions such as the figure of "eleven million" would be unjustifiable even if there were no Holocaust deniers. The best reason to stick to the truth is the one offered by the members of Oyneg Shabbes, the group that dedicated itself to documenting every aspect of life in the Warsaw ghetto. In *Who Will Write our History?* Samuel Kassow quotes Emanuel Ringelblum, the group's leader:

> We wanted the simplest most unadorned account possible of what happened in each shtetl and what happened to each Jew (and in this war each Jew is like a world in itself). Any superfluous word, any literary exaggeration grated and repelled . . . [I]t is unnecessary to add an extra sentence.

The goal, Ringelblum said, was "a photograph of life. Not literature but science." The situation was bad enough. No exaggeration was necessary.

In 1944, Ringelblum's associate, Rachel Auerbach, said much the same thing in different words: "The mass murder, the murder of millions of Jews by the Germans is a fact that speaks for itself . . . one must approach this subject with the greatest caution, in a restrained and factual manner." But the most succinct statement of this position was penned by an anonymous individual who filled out a survey distributed by Oyneg Shabbes to inhabitants of the ghetto. The respondent scrawled a single word in the margin of the questionnaire, in capital letters: FACTS.

Deborah Lipstadt is Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies at Emory University, and the author of The Eichmann Trial *(Nextbook/Schocken), coming this spring.*

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10

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ArtScroll's Empire

BY YOEL FINKELMAN

ORTHODOX BY DESIGN: JUDAISM, PRINT POLITICS, AND THE ARTSCROLL REVOLUTION
by Jeremy Stolow
University of California Press, 265 pp., $24.95

On February 9, 2005, a large crowd assembled in the foyer of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. to participate in a special dedication ceremony. Among the dignitaries in attendance were Jews from the left, like Senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey, Jews from the right, like Virginia Congressman Eric Cantor, and Jews from somewhere in between, like then-Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut. The non-Jewish politicians spanned a similar spectrum, extending from then-Senator Hillary Clinton of New York to Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas. Dr. James Billington, the Librarian of Congress, presided over the ceremony, but the real star was Rabbi Nosson Scherman, the editor who is one of the initiators of what is sometimes called the "ArtScroll Revolution."

"Tonight," Rabbi Scherman proclaimed at the Library of Congress, "the *Schottenstein Talmud* will take its place with Thomas Jefferson's Latin volume of Bava Kama."

Rabbi Scherman was there to donate to the Library of Congress a set of ArtScroll-Mesorah's newly completed *Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud*, accurately described by Jeremy Stolow in *Orthodox by Design: Judaism, Print Politics, and the ArtScroll Revolution* as "the most thorough and elaborate edition of the Talmud ever produced in the English language." The rabbi/editor had a powerful sense of the significance of the moment. He proclaimed:

> Tonight we have the great honor to present the complete *Schottenstein Talmud*, this elucidation of the Babylonian Talmud, to the Library of Congress. This library is one of the great gifts of the United States of America. Our culture, our knowledge, our aspirations for the future, are all housed in these magnificent buildings. And now, the complete Talmud, the *Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud*, will take its place with Thomas Jefferson's single Latin volume of Tractate Bava Kama.

To the Jewish historian, an event like this calls to mind and seems almost to replicate the presentation of the Septuagint, the first translation of the Bible into Greek, to Ptolemy Philadelphus' great library in Alexandria, as it is described in the *Letter of Aristeas*. To some people it may even seem like a culminating moment of what Jonathan Sarna has called the American-Jewish "cult of synthesis." But this dedication ceremony could only stir such thoughts among those who were aware of its occurrence. The great majority of American Jews are not likely to have caught wind of it or, for that matter, heard anything about the *Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud* itself. Although a stray ArtScroll publication may sit on their shelves, the "ArtScroll Revolution" has not changed their world at all.

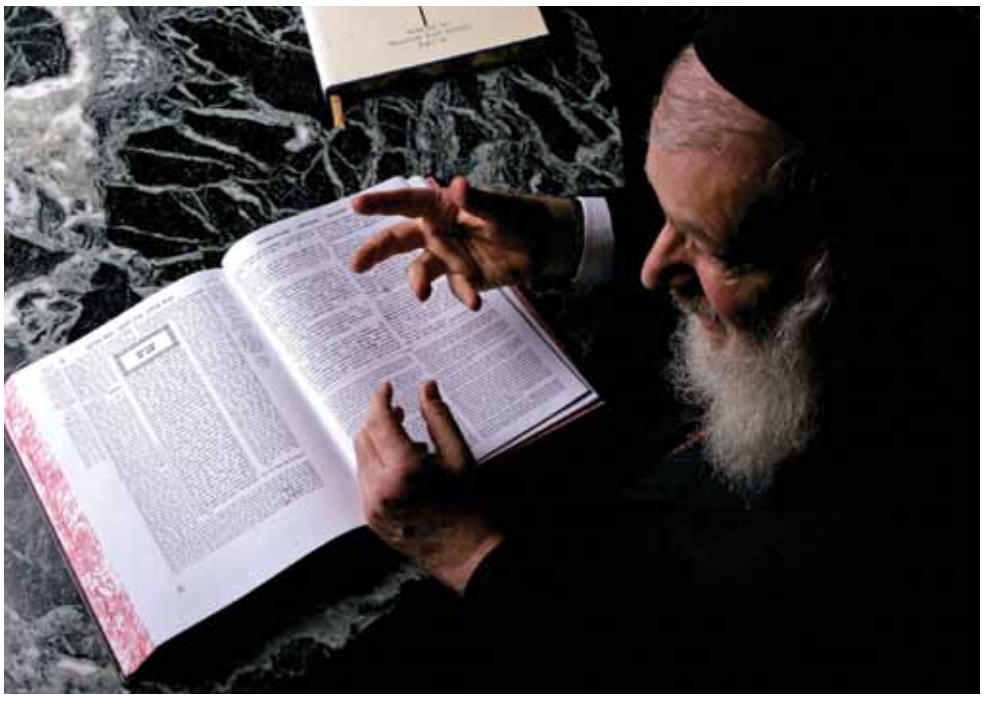
Within the realm of Orthodox Jewry, on the other hand, especially its Haredi sector, ArtScroll's traditional-minded yet simultaneously trendy publications, including the *Schottenstein Talmud*, have had a massive impact for over three decades. Since producing its first book of biblical commentary in 1976, Brooklyn-based ArtScroll has published many hundreds of books, ranging from translations of and commentaries on classical Jewish texts to works of adventure fiction and chick-lit (though the "chicks" are often married with children). ArtScroll's website lists over fifty genres—Basic Judaism, Dating and Marriage, History, Reference, Spirituality, Psalms, Self-Help among them—and advertises audio books, e-books, software, videos, and the like. These publications and products are uniformly well-crafted and user-friendly. All of this has helped to turn ArtScroll into what may be the world's largest publisher of English-language Judaica.

The admiration, however, is not universal. In the eyes of ArtScroll's numerous critics, the publisher represents all that is wrong with contemporary Jewish fundamentalism. They accuse it of presenting a narrow-minded and dogmatic version of Judaism, selectively citing sources that are compatible only with the most close-minded interpretations of the tradition. Its oversimplifications, ignorance of history, and at times outright distortions, they maintain, misrepresent Judaism's complex and nuanced legacy.

Jeremy Stolow's *Orthodox by Design*, the first book-length, academic effort to make sense of the "ArtScroll phenomenon," helps us look beyond the noisy praise and blame that have been bestowed on ArtScroll's manifold enterprises.

In an attempt to understand ArtScroll's formula for success, Stolow asks very down-to-earth questions. Who, for one thing, makes up the market for ArtScroll books? How does the publisher attempt to reach that market? What kinds of products do these consumers want and need? Making use of his training in media and culture studies (and, unfortunately, all of the academic jargon that came with it), Stolow employs ArtScroll books as a means of examining the day-to-day lives of contemporary religious people, the books that they read, and the religious objects that they own.

He describes how ArtScroll targets a Jewish audience that hungers for greater understanding of traditional Judaism but lacks the skills and knowledge base to engage its sources directly. Responding to these people's needs, ArtScroll has produced books and other consumer products that



Rabbi Nosson Scherman with a volume of the* Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud.** ***(Photo by Vincent LaForet/*The New York Times*/Redux.)

are wonderfully adept at combining authority with accessibility. Readers feel that they have access to an "authentic" Jewish tradition, and they get it in a user-friendly, easy-to-digest format.

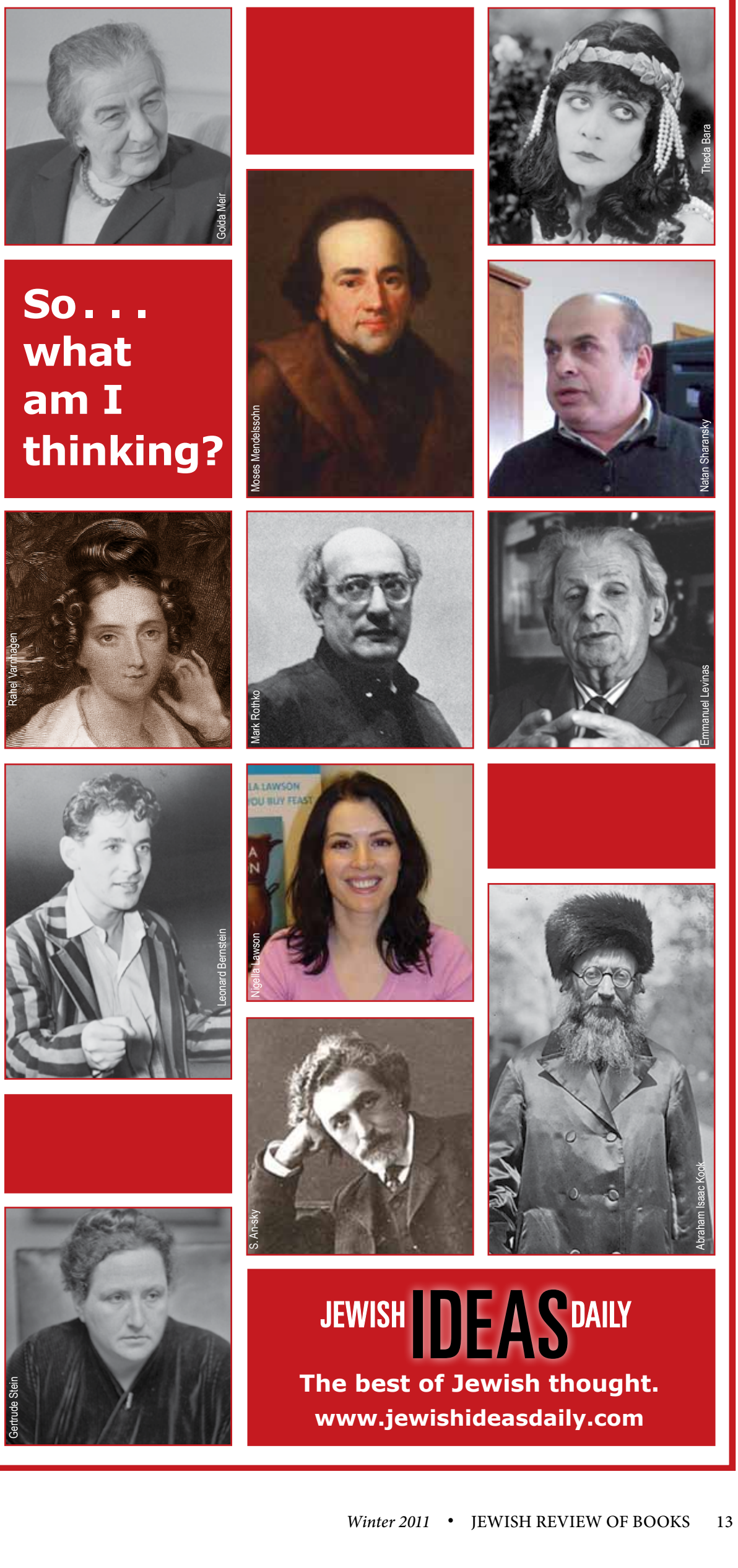
However, as Stolow makes clear, ArtScroll knows that its audience is not monolithic. Some non-observant or Jewishly less-educated readers have no intention of adopting ArtScroll's version of Orthodoxy; they merely want to learn more about their religion. But many ArtScroll books aim at *ba'alei teshuvah*, or potential *ba'alei teshuvah,* who are seeking or feeling their way to a new and different life. For many such readers, ArtScroll provides them with their first introduction to a Jewish text, holiday, or tenet. As one grateful user put it in a review of *The ArtScroll Siddur* on Amazon:

> This is a great way to learn how to *daven* (pray). Before buying this siddur, I knew nothing about praying as an observant Jew. After using this book—with its detailed instructions and explanations, perfect for the newly observant—for six months I am totally comfortable with davening, knowledgeable about prayer and its basis in Torah, and I feel so much more complete in my observance.

But readers familiar with traditional texts also make frequent use of ArtScroll's products, as a visit to just about any Orthodox school, synagogue, or home would show. Many of even the most knowledgeable Orthodox Jews prefer to get their biblical commentary or halakhic instructions from a simple, easy-to-read English book than to plow through the dense Hebrew or Aramaic prose of classical Torah literature.

ArtScroll's "ongoing effort to present simultaneously 'authoritative' and 'accessible' Jewish books" to these diverse audiences requires it to engage in a rather delicate dance. If ArtScroll is to be authoritative, its books must display the vocabulary, language, and text-skills of experts, and need to speak in the language of the ancient tradition. But to be widely accessible, they must reach readers at whatever level of knowledge and sophistication they possess, and they must do so in a contemporary idiom. In order to describe how ArtScroll produces books that achieve both of these goals, Stolow develops the notion of what he calls "design." He shows how all the different aspects of an ArtScroll book—from vocabulary to layout and binding—combine function and form, medium and message, to reinforce the publisher's intentions.

The *Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud* serves as a prime example of this. For fifteen years, ArtScroll's international team of Orthodox rabbis labored to produce an edition of the Talmud that would transform it from a book closed to all but the traditionally-trained into a text intelligible to anyone with even a minimal background in rabbinic Judaism (ironically, including women, whom the makers of this edition might well be happy to continue to exclude). Costing an estimated $21 million to produce and extending to seventy-three volumes, the *Schottenstein Talmud* seamlessly merges word-by-word translation with explanations in plain English, accompanied by clarifications of key concepts, background material, and clear diagrams and photos. To take but one example, one to which Stolow pays great attention, its rendition of Tractate Chul-



lin 59a adds a detailed illustration of a desert locust and a side-by-side representation of a horse's and cow's teeth to assist in understanding the Talmudic discussion of kosher animals. But that's only in the English translation and commentary. On the opposite page, one finds—as one does throughout the *Schottenstein Talmud*—the traditional-looking 19th-century "Vilna Talmud" edition of the text, which includes no such illustrations.

ArtScroll's bestselling siddur likewise reflects its designers' intention of both adhering to tradition and achieving a high level of user-friendliness. Its layout guides the readers' eyes toward clear and concise directions for the precise performance of rituals, instructions that masterfully anticipate the unarticulated insecurities of the "beginner" Jew. The awkward but earnest synagogue-goer can learn a lot, for instance, from Rabbi Goldwurm's commentary about how to recite the most basic Jewish prayer:

> During the *Shemoneh Esrei* one's eyes should be directed downward (*Orach Chaim* 95:2). His eyes should either be closed or reading from the *Siddur* and not looking around (*Mishnah Berurah* 95:5). One should not look up during the *Shemoneh Esrei,* but when he feels his concentration failing he should raise his eyes heavenward to renew his inspiration (*Mishnah Berurah* 90:8).

The simple prose of this passage appeals to the beginner. Its detailed instructions ensure that the worshipper does things just right, while the parenthetical references to classical texts of Jewish law exude traditional authority.

Among ArtScroll's biggest moneymakers, however, are volumes much less weighty than the Talmud or the siddur, such as Susie Fishbein's series of cookbooks, *Kosher by Design* (from which Stolow derives the title of his own book). These cookbooks combine short religious messages about Shabbat, Jewish holidays, or the Jewish home, with easy-to-follow instructions for making gourmet food quickly and easily in one's own kitchen. Like a Jewish Martha Stewart, Fishbein makes classy kosher cooking look easy, but she also projects images of how Jewish women *should* celebrate holidays, decorate their homes, and imagine their roles as mothers and homemakers.



A sampling of popular ArtScroll books. (Photo by Eli Mernit.)

ArtScroll's books, as Stolow correctly observes, from its Talmud to its cookbooks, do not simply convey the tradition; they adapt it to meet contemporary conditions. "The most rigorous defenses of tradition thus often turn out to be radical reworkings of the customary practices, received texts, and historical modes of social, political, and economic organization that are said to identify that very tradition." Consider, for instance, the case of Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski, who has published more than thirty books with ArtScroll, including *Self-Improvement? I'm Jewish!* and most recently, *The Sun Will Shine Again: Coping, Persevering and Winning in Troubled Economic Times*. In these books Twerski is not simply preserving the centuries-old Jewish tradition of *musar*; he is modifying it as well. Exactly how he does so, however, is something that Stolow does not make sufficiently clear. Essentially, Twerski replaces old-style *musar*, which emphasizes self-restraint as the key to sanctity, with the idea of self-acceptance as the key to happiness. Out go the pietistic preaching and austere moralism, the pessimistic anthropology and the emphatic hortatory style, of so much of the classical Jewish *musar* literature. In comes an optimistic, encouraging, and friendly style, one that urges people to reach therapeutic equilibrium and personal happiness.

Here and elsewhere, Stolow focuses too exclusively on the extent to which ArtScroll books constitute objects and commodities and not enough on what these books actually say and the Jewish tradition of which they are part. When he does venture into the world of the Jewish canon, he is not always reliable. He is simply mistaken, for instance, when he argues that ArtScroll's user-friendly prayerbooks represent a break with a tradition that has not put much emphasis on whether Jews understand their prayers or Torah study. Stolow attempts to back up this indefensible claim by quoting a late-20th-century popular English summary of Jewish law out of context. He goes on to misidentify this source as Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried's 19th-century *Kitzur Shulchan Arukh*, which Stolow then mistakenly describes as an abridgment of Rabbi Joseph Karo's 16th-century *Shulchan Arukh.* Even if we overlook such errors, the book's discussion of Judaism as a religious and textual tradition remains far too thin.



Susie Fishbein, author of the* Kosher by Design *series. (Photo courtesy of ArtScroll Publications.)

Why spend so much energy on diagrams and photos in the *Schottenstein Talmud* without saying very much about the commentary itself? As someone who has been teaching Talmud to beginners for most of my adult life, I cannot help but marvel at ArtScroll's ability to anticipate just the sort of problems such students typically face and to handle them brilliantly. How does it do this? What kinds of conceptual tools does it employ? How does it smooth over rough patches in the text? How does ArtScroll build upon the tradition of Talmudic commentary? These questions bear directly on Stolow's key claims about how ArtScroll books make the tradition accessible, but he pays them inadequate attention.

Stolow certainly deserves credit for opening up new lines of inquiry into contemporary Orthodox Jewish life and its print culture. But his almost exclusive focus on the means by which ArtScroll publications have achieved their ends is of limited use in the absence of a serious consideration of those very ends.

Yoel Finkelman is a lecturer in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Contemporary Jewry at Bar-Ilan University and teaches Talmud and Jewish Thought at various venues in Jerusalem. His book, Strictly Kosher Reading: Popular Literature and the Condition of Contemporary Orthodoxy *(Academic Studies Press), will appear in 2011.*

Jocasta Speaks

BY OLGA LITVAK

MEMOIRS OF A GRANDMOTHER: SCENES FROM THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF RUSSIA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, VOLUME ONE
by Pauline Wengeroff, translated with notes, an introduction, and commentary by Shulamit S. Magnus
Stanford University Press, 384 pp., $55

For all of the talk about Jewish mothers, the Oedipal script of Jewish modernity assigns the most important parts to fathers and sons. Mothers appear chiefly as objects of filial guilt and condescension; Jewish literature, from *Tevye the Dairyman* to *Portnoy's Complaint* is largely an exercise in maternal containment. Jewish autobiography rarely speaks in the voice of Jocasta, the tragic queen-mother, doubly betrayed by her husband-son. But in the memoirs of Pauline Wengeroff, the self-appointed grandmother of modern Russian Jewry, Jocasta gets her say at last.

Written at the turn of the 20th century, Wengeroff's *Memoirs of a Grandmother* infiltrated Russian-Jewish scholarship as a primary source on the ordinary life of traditional Jewry, a world that Wengeroff claimed to have remembered and reproduced with unimpeachable and loving accuracy. Indeed, the "scenes from the cultural history of the Jews of Russia" depict a Jewish domestic Utopia intended to move the hearts of wayward and ungrateful children. Undeterred by the pathos of her narrative, historians have generally been content to defer to Wengeroff's self-conferred authority as a dispassionate ethnographer.

Wengeroff wrote her book in German and until recently it had been available only in the original and in Russian translation. (After publication it was serialized in the Russian-Jewish literary weekly *Voskhod*.) Lucy Dawidowicz included a short but tantalizing excerpt in her 1967 anthology *The Golden Tradition*. Readers of Dawidowicz encountered Wengeroff's autobiography as an astringent indictment of her husband and his contemporaries, swept up by the tide of secularization:

> Young Jewish men had no sense of moderation . . . The woman, the mother was cruelly brushed aside . . . She wanted to transmit the great treasure of Jewish tradition along with the new currents of Western European culture. But the husbands had the same answer to all pleas: 'The children need no religion.' [. . .] They demanded not only assent from their wives but also submission. They preached freedom, equality, fraternity in public, but at home they were despots.

A shortened and emotionally attenuated version, entitled *Rememberings*, translated by Henny Wenkart and edited by Bernard Dov Cooperman, appeared in 2000. Now, thanks to Shulamit S. Magnus, Wengeroff's latest and most devoted editor and translator, English speakers have an opportunity to read a faithful and complete translation, and to assess Wengeroff's credibility as a torchbearer for a world that she described as "very peaceful, pleasant, earnest, and sensible." Wengeroff is a seductive narrator; and Magnus is understandably seduced. But anyone looking for a beloved bubbie in the figure of Pauline Wengeroff is likely to be disappointed. Intent on memorializing the innocence of her Jewish childhood in an age of unbelief, Wengeroff instead offers up a record of female Jewish rage.

Wengeroff's memoir is hardly a ringing endorsement of a return to an ideal time when women ruled the roost and men pored over the Talmud.

For all of the attention she lavishes on Jewish faith and practice, Wengeroff's memoir is hardly a ringing endorsement of a return to an ideal time when women ruled the roost and men pored over the Talmud. Wengeroff reclaims female Jewish virtue not out of guilt and sentiment but out of a profound sense of social and intellectual entitlement, devastated by her own exclusion from the modern Jewish project.

Born in the 1830s in close cultural and familial proximity to the Lithuanian center of Jewish wealth and learning, Wengeroff came of age during the transition from the reign of Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855) to the reign of Alexander II (r. 1855-1916), known as the "Tsar Liberator." Jewish history remembers Nicholas chiefly as the author of "official enlightenment" and the notorious conscription law, which swept 70,000 Jewish minors into the ranks of the pre-reform army, where two-thirds of them converted to Russian Orthodoxy. Alexander II scrapped Nicholas' "cantonist battalions," emancipated the serfs, and attempted through a wide-ranging series of measures to encourage the creation of Russian

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civil society. Alexander's Jewish subjects had every reason to greet the demise of "Nicholas, the Stick" with jubilation. For Wengeroff, writing fifty years later, the memory of Nicholas represented the lost youth of Russian Jewry. The end of the Nicholaevan period spelled the demise of the patriarchal Jewish Utopia, embodied in Wengeroff's own severe and distant father whom she idolized. Rewriting the contrast between Nicholas and his heir, she carped on the difference between the "strapping military bearing" of the old emperor and the notable lack of "self-confidence" of his "affable" son. This contrast between the regal authority of the father and the amiable fecklessness of the crown prince anticipates Wengeroff's eventual disillusionment with the smiling promise of liberation. In her own modern marriage, Wengeroff experienced the transition to the era of the Great Reforms as a form of intimate tyranny. Wengeroff's sense of grievance, ultimately aimed at her husband and children, is not fully articulated until the second volume of her memoir (yet to be released by Stanford University Press), but it underlies the romantic picture of the Nicholaevan past, which she paints in the first volume.

Wengeroff's cultural history of Russian Jewry unfolds against the background of her relationship with her father, Yudl Epstein, a successful businessman and graduate of the prestigious Volozhin yeshiva, who was well known for his learning. Although she spent most of her time in the female domestic orbit, Wengeroff does not see fit even to tell us her mother's first name. Her father absorbs most of her thoughts, despite the fact that until she was old enough to do his laundry and cook for him, he hardly noticed her. The distance apparently made him all that much easier to worship. Even when she finally managed to attract his attention, their relationship seems to have been limited to his injunctions that she put more pepper in the fish. "Most of the time," Wengeroff says, "he was pleased" with her efforts.

Should the reader wish to know what Yudl Epstein was like on those occasions when he was not "pleased," Wengeroff provides a telling anecdote. The first and only time we witness Epstein in actual conversation with his bright and imaginative daughter has him threatening to "thrash her soundly" for the transgression of crying over a lost toy. The spectacle of harsh punishment for a barely discernible infraction does not exhaust the full horror of the experience. Young "Pessele" protests the beating by pleading that her father has mistaken his most winsome, deserving child for one of his other, less forgivable daughters. We are left to wonder what was worse for the girls in Yudl Epstein's household: to be ignored by their father or to be noticed by him.

Wengeroff, the adult memoirist, actively seeks to exonerate her father; she refuses to see him as a cold and withholding narcissist and instead characterizes him as a victim, "impotent" against the depredations of modernity, stealthily brought into his house by his sons-in-law. Another such son-in-law will take Wengeroff herself away from her father's roof and, ironically, rehearse the bitter disillusionment of her original filial romance almost exactly. Wengeroff's identification with her father shapes her perception of Jewish emancipation under Alexander II not as a release from autocratic discipline but as a tragic derailment of patriarchal authority. Tellingly, she evades the most infamous example of Nicholaevan paternalism: the state's adoption of Jewish children into the military. To miss the sense of grievance that drives Wengeroff's autobiography is also to miss its contrarian politics. *Memoirs of a Jewish Grandmother* presents a conservative defense of Jewish tradition as a cover story for a radical polemic against modern marriage worthy of Betty Friedan.

In her elaborate introduction, Magnus attributes Wengeroff's "gushing" over Nicholas I to the "confusion and complexity" implicit in the "modern dilemma." But Wengeroff's refractory, finger-wagging style shows no evidence of "confusion" and no trace of modern guilt. Wengeroff is not confused. She is angry. Every inch her father's child, heir to his personal force, his name and reputation for learning, his public stature, and his capacious, mordant intellect, she is forced to live out her mother's anonymous domestic enserfment in a middle-class Jewish home. The "impotence" of Wengeroff's father in the face of modernity mirrors the daughter's disempowerment by her liberated husband and children, all of them complicit in the "silencing" of the mother who refuses to sit quietly by, knitting and watching her spoiled and selfish offspring "speak about their [own] lives and ideals."



Pauline Epstein Wengeroff, c. 1913. (Photo courtesy of Elektra Yourke.)

It is unfortunate that Magnus and Stanford University Press have made the decision to follow the original publication history of this extraordinary book; the first volume was published in 1908, the second, two years later. Like Wengeroff's first readers, we have only the beginning of a single-minded, carefully sustained argument about the betrayal of women by the "affable" Jewish husbands who apparently embraced the ideals of the Tsar Liberator, but who actually ruled their bourgeois homes with an iron fist. In the absence of the second volume, an embittered account of Wengeroff's life as a wife and a mother, we are left with Magnus' affirmative defense of Wengeroff's Nicholaevan Utopia as a "creative response" to the male-centered nature of Jewish ritual life. But the second volume makes clear that the last thing that Wengeroff wanted to do was affirm the joys of Jewish domesticity.

Wengeroff's post-emancipation critique of the modern Jewish family brings me to the problem of historical context. *Memoirs of a Grandmother* is a 20th-century Russian text. But you wouldn't know it reading Magnus' introduction and her endnotes (in which she expends inordinate energy explaining words like *tefillin* and *rosh chodesh* but has nothing to say about the striking quotation from *Dead Souls* that Gustav Karpeles used to introduce Wengeroff to her original German-speaking readers). Wengeroff's revolutionary claim on the Russian-Jewish public sphere challenges Magnus' presentation of her book as a defense of female domesticity. Her sense of thwarted ambition evolved against the background of widespread political disillusionment with the Great Reforms, characteristic of Russian high culture at the turn of the 20th century.

Instead of situating Wengeroff's irremediable pessimism in the Russian Silver Age where it belongs, Magnus seeks to reclaim her for a non-existent genealogy of female Jewish autobiography exemplified chiefly by the early 18th-century memoir of Glüeckel of Hameln. As a result, we learn nothing about actual women's writing in turn-of-the-century Russia. Yet the flood of reminiscence and recrimination involved in the *fin de siècle* battle for childhood directly inspired Wengeroff's striking appropriation of her past.

The comparison with Glüeckel is overdrawn and seems beside the point, especially since more informative analogies might have been found closer to home, among the highly articulate middle-class women who shared Wengeroff's cultural ambitions and social frustrations. Despite her own acknowledgement that Wengeroff "loved books and was herself a gifted and conscious writer," Magnus has nothing to say about the connection between Wengeroff's literary ambition and her prodigious reading in Russian, German, and English. Most blatantly, Magnus takes for granted Wengeroff's counter-intuitive decision to write in German rather than her native Russian and to seek support among Western European scholars and rabbis rather than in her Russian circle.

On the whole, Magnus tends to treat Wengeroff as if she were a fellow Jewish historian, trying to chart a course between the demands of scholarly objectivity and the pull of ethnic loyalty. Magnus herself does not seem entirely comfortable in Wengeroff's imaginative world. For instance, she describes Alexander Pushkin as "a man who composed Byron-like verse," which is, in a sense, true, but hardly helpful. One wishes, perhaps, that Magnus had spent more of her time actually reading Pushkin, as well as other books that Wengeroff "loved" and less time trying to wedge her into the straitjacket of current scholarly wisdom about what constitutes "Jewish women's history." But Wengeroff's unorthodox intractable fury requires no academic apology and no Jewish justification. Jocasta's rage stuns her modern children into silence.

Olga Litvak holds the Michael and Lisa Leffell Chair in Modern Jewish History at Clark University. She is currently working on a book about Marc Chagall.

Seeds of Subversion

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

NOT IN THE HEAVENS: THE TRADITION OF JEWISH SECULAR THOUGHT
by David Biale
Princeton University Press, 272 pp., $35

More than fifty years ago, in a famous lecture entitled "The Non-Jewish Jew," Isaac Deutscher acclaimed the sort of Jewish intellectual who relinquished his or her heritage and proceeded to make vital contributions to the improvement of the world at large. A Polish-born Talmudic prodigy who exchanged Judaism for Marxism in his youth and ultimately attained renown as a biographer of Trotsky and Stalin, Deutscher singled out individual Communists as well as non-Communists as representative figures. Before mentioning any of them, however, he reflected briefly on the significance of the heretic he had known about since his childhood, the 1st-century renegade from rabbinic Judaism, Elisha ben Abuyah (the student of Rabbi Meir also known as "Akher," or Other):

> The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition. You may, if you like, view Akher as a prototype of those great revolutionaries of modern thought about whom I am going to speak this evening—you may do so, if you necessarily wish to place them within any Jewish tradition.

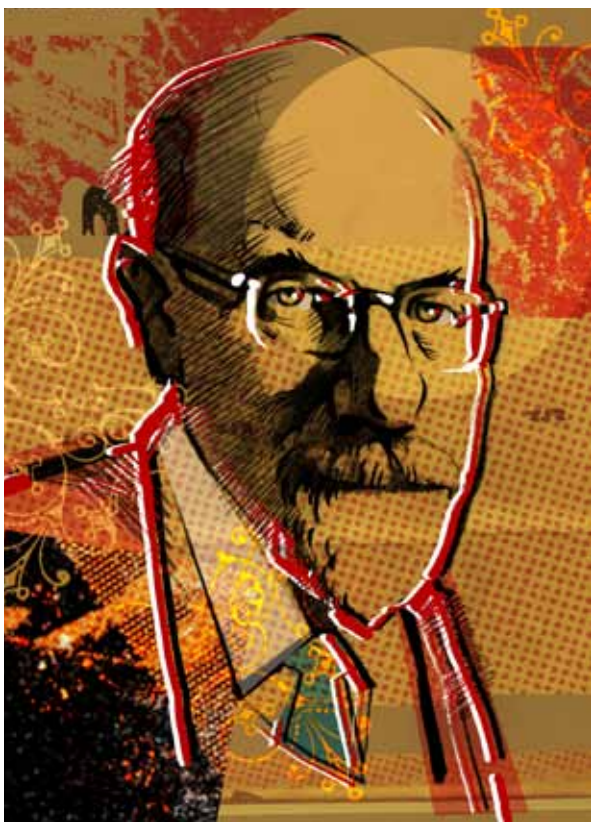
In his introduction to *Not in the Heavens*, David Biale analyzes what Deutscher says and eagerly accepts his invitation:

> By raising the question of the relationship of the orthodox Rabbi Meir and the heretic Elisha, Deutscher implied that even the heretic remains somehow connected to that which he rejects, for the source of his heresy may lie within that tradition. For Deutscher, Elisha was the prototype of "those great revolutionaries of modern thought: Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky and Freud." They were all heretics, yet their heresy might be understood as a rejection that grew out of the Jewish tradition itself.

Biale may or may not be right about Deutscher's assessment of Elisha ben Abuya's relationship to Jewish tradition, but he is probably reading too much into what he says about that of the other people on his list. There is, in fact, next to nothing in Deutscher's lecture that links the substance of Jewish tradition with the welcome heresies of his modern "non-Jewish Jews." The closest he comes to espousing the views that Biale attributes to him is an acknowledgment that "Spinoza's God and ethics were still Jewish, only that his was the Jewish monotheism carried to its logical conclusion and the Jewish universal God thought out to the end . . ." But this is a rather isolated statement in a lecture that makes no other connection between the substance of Jewish tradition and the grand ideas of Deutscher's heroes.

The modern tradition, Biale takes pains to demonstrate, may be heretical but it is nonetheless closely tied to the tradition that came before it.

Deutscher does indeed say that the "non-Jewish Jews" had "in themselves something of the quintessence of Jewish life and of the Jewish intellect." But by this he means only that they "lived in the borderlines of various civilizations," and "in the nooks and crannies of their respective nations." Not some residue of their distinctive Jewish heritage but the experience of marginality is what "enabled them to rise in thought above their societies . . . and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future." Biale may believe that he is emulating Deutscher when he argues "that Jewish secularism was a revolt grounded in the tradition it rejected," but he is really making a rather different type of claim.



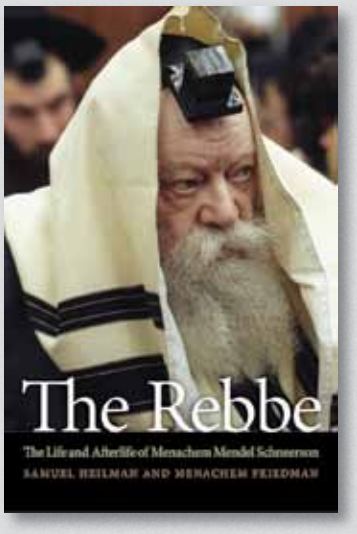
Isaac Deutscher. (Illustration by Val Bochkov, ©Val Bochkov.)

Biale himself, to be sure, stresses the dissimilarity between his enterprise and Deutscher's much more than the resemblance. The intellectual tradition he wishes to construct in his book "is distinctively different from Deutscher's 'Non-Jewish Jews,'" he tells us, "since it rests on those whose writings engage with the metaphysical, textual, political and cultural dimensions of the Jewish experience." Whether they intended to do so or not, the authors of these works created "a tradition of secular Jewish thought counter to the religious tradition called 'Judaism.'"

Biale is of course far from the first to describe such a secular tradition or stream of Jewish thought. Among those who have preceded him in this endeavor is Yaakov Malkin, a professor emeritus at Tel Aviv University. The author of such works as *Judaism Without God?: Judaism as Culture, Bible as Literature*, Malkin is connected with the Posen Foundation, an organization that, as its website reports, "works internationally as a service provider to support secular Jewish education and educational initiatives on modern Jewish culture and the process of Jewish secularization." Biale too is actively involved with this foundation, which he thanks in his preface for having provided the grant that set his book in motion. Unlike Malkin, however, Biale—in this book, at least—writes as an analyst, not an advocate, of the secular Jewish tradition. Anyone who doubts the validity of this distinction need only compare this book to those of Malkin, whose name is not mentioned anywhere in *Not in the Heavens*.

Among the names that do occur are half of the ones on Deutscher's short list. Karl Marx drops out of the picture, since he "was not really interested in the Jews as real people." But Spinoza, Heine, and Freud, all of whom are exempted by Biale from the category of "non-Jewish Jew," receive ample attention, along with a host of unmistakably Jewish Jews, ranging from Simon Dubnow to Gershom Scholem to David Ben-Gurion. A versatile and prolific scholar, Biale has dealt with many of these thinkers before, usually in a much more thoroughgoing way. In this book, his intention is not to present comprehensive new readings of their work but to sketch their general outlooks and to show how they fit together in a counter-tradition. This modern tradition, Biale takes pains to demonstrate, may be heretical but it is nonetheless closely tied to the tradition that came before it. "Jewish secularism is a tradition that has its own unique characteristics grounded in part in its premodern sources."

Biale is somewhat inclined, it seems to me, to go even further and to depict the secular Jewish tradition as one toward which the pre-modern tradition had been tending all along. He is very impressed by what he describes as the "challenging" and "magisterial" work of Marcel Gauchet, who sought to show how the monotheistic religions inevitably



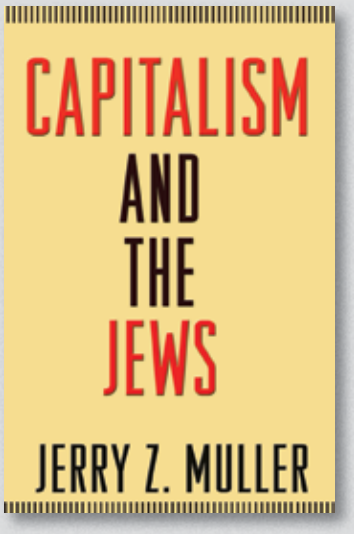
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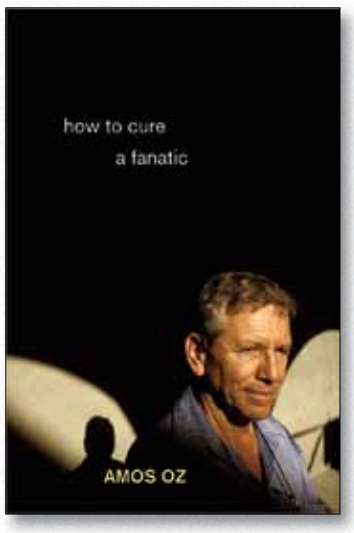


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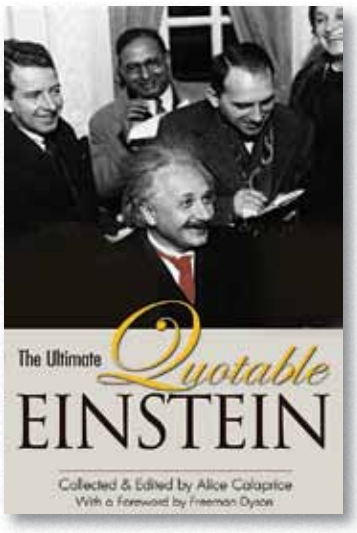
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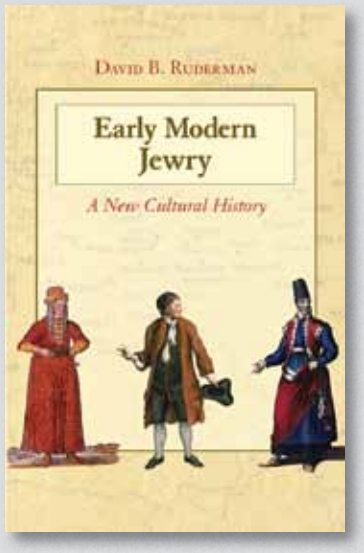


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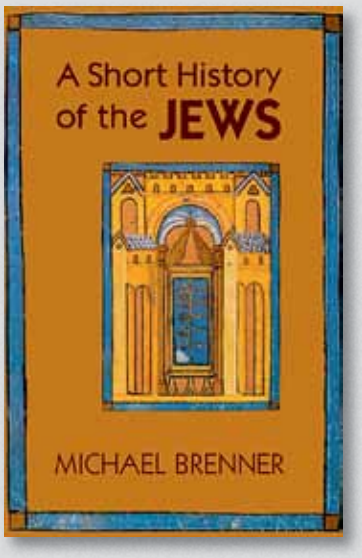
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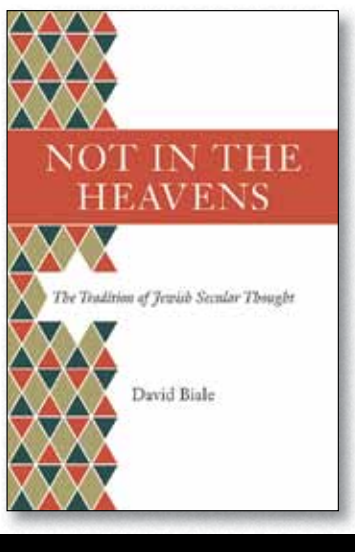
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Not in the Heavens

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David Biale

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"produced their own secular subversions." Biale himself is ready to contend that "the Bible contains the seeds of its own subversion," and that medieval Jewish philosophy "prepared the ground for the radical subversion of the biblical God." In the end, however, he stops short of arguing that Jewish secularism is essentially an indigenous product. "It was specifically where the Jews had contact with European modernization," he writes, "that Jewish secularism developed. The historical tradition may have provided the kindling, but the European Enlightenment lit the match."

If secular Jewish thought in different shapes and sizes remains alive in Israel, its condition in North America is more ambiguous.

Biale's survey of the ensuing conflagration is not exhaustive but it is a highly judicious one, informed by a lifetime of learning as well as close familiarity with the best of the most recent scholarship on a host of different thinkers. Like all of Biale's many books, it is very clearly written and renders its subject accessible to the general reader and, for that matter, the undergraduate. It will no doubt become a mainstay of many of the courses on Jewish secularism funded by the Posen Foundation at dozens of American universities and other academic programs as well.

Biale is particularly good at describing how Spinoza transformed Maimonides' negative theology "into its precise opposite," and thus "radical transcendence begat pure immanence." With equal adeptness he traces the impact of Spinoza's philosophy on late 18th- and 19th-century Jewish luminaries as diverse as Solomon Maimon, Heinrich Heine, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, and Leo Strauss. Biale does not confine himself to rationalists, but also describes the ways in which mystical strains of medieval Judaism reverberated in the writings of Franz Kafka and Gershom Scholem. More controversially, he proceeds to depict even the revolt against the biblical God in the name of ancient pagan gods launched by the Eastern European writers Micha Yosef Berdichevsky and Saul Tchernikovsky as yet another manifestation of the way in which modern Jewish secularists revamped "traditional theology so as to bring the divine down to earth."

Less radical re-readings of the Bible also receive Biale's attention. He follows up a detailed analysis of Spinoza's secular debunking of the Bible with a review of the way in which diverse Jewish thinkers sought to make a de-theologized Bible the basis for a godless Jewish culture. One of them is Ahad Ha'am, who was primarily interested in a secular appropriation of "the ethical spirit of the Bible." But Biale also focuses on David Ben-Gurion, who, "like Spinoza," saw the Bible as "primarily a *nationalist* book," one "that gave a political identity to the ancient nation of Israel, an identity that transcended mere religion." He shows how Israel's first prime minister fostered "a kind of 'bibliomania,'" and thereby "played a major role in the elevation of the Bible to the status of national myth" in the new State of Israel.

As determined as Biale is to highlight the dialectical relationship between ancient and medieval Judaism and developments in modern times, he recognizes that some important modern Jewish secularists wanted to turn their backs on the past and to make as fresh a start as possible. Berdichevsky's famous call to his contemporaries to choose to be either the last Jews or the first Hebrews was still bound up with the resuscitation of what he conceived to be the biblical "religion of nature and martial vitality preceding Moses' antinatural Torah," but others, as Biale shows, went much further afield. The early 20th-century Hebrew writer Joseph Hayim Brenner, for instance, took "to heart Spinoza's teaching" and reduced "the Bible to *biblia*, books like any other—and not necessarily the best of them." The "new Hebrew culture he struggled to create had to be founded on the modern condition of the Jews and not on their ancient literature." For the political theorist Hannah Arendt, what was of lasting significance was not Jewish religion or culture in any sense but the mere fact of "*Jewishness*, the identity into which one was irreducibly born."

Biale's vast cast of characters includes many people whose names I have not cited here, including such predictable figures as Theodore Herzl and Mordecai Kaplan, as well as nearly forgotten men like Chaim Zhitlowsky. In a book of only three hundred pages it would be impossible to do justice to all of them. If Biale has in any respect fallen short of doing so, he cannot be faulted on this score but should rather be congratulated for having done no major injustice to any of them while providing his readers with a richly informative panoramic overview of one of the most significant dimensions of modern Jewish thought. Even readers who know a great deal about the subject are likely to learn a lot from *Not in the Heavens*.

Considered solely in the light of the goals he has set himself, Biale's book is a notable success. He has demonstrated the heavy dependency of the secular Jewish thinkers of modern times on premodern Jewish sources and has also shown how these thinkers have over the centuries constructed a tradition of their own, encompassing a wide variety of redefinitions of Jewish identity on the basis of non-religious foundations. But he has not restricted himself to these tasks alone. At the very end of his last chapter, he asks a critically important question which he devotes his epilogue to answering.

> Over the twentieth century, Jewish secularism mutated in response to the differing environments of Jewish life. What can we say about the legacy of these varied forms of the secular in the early twenty-first century and what future directions might they take?

It would not be too much to say that it is concern with these issues that accounts for the very existence of this book. *Not in the Heavens* is, as I noted at the outset, a work of analysis, not advocacy, but it clearly owes its origins at least in part to the interest of the Posen Foundation not merely in documenting but above all in sustaining Jewish secularism through education. How, then, does the author of this book size up the overall situation that it is meant to affect both in the Diaspora, through its English-language edition, and in Israel, where it has been simultaneously published in Hebrew translation?

Curiously enough, Biale has very little to say in the main body of his book about how things have developed in Israel since the state's early years. What became of the "bibliomania," for instance, that Ben-Gurion so carefully nurtured in the 1950s is something his readers can only wonder about—unless they consult an essay like the one that he cites in the footnotes, Anita Shapira's "The Bible and Israeli Identity." After describing how "the Bible exerted a palpable presence" in Israeli cultural life in the Ben-Gurion era, Shapira relates at length how the "combination of religious-nationalism's appropriation of the Bible, the teaching of the Bible as a religious text, and the end of the ideological era together tolled the knell for the Bible's centrality in Israeli identity." Biale's story would have been more complete if he had made it clear that Ben-Gurion's vision, powerful as it was for a time, was merely ephemeral.

Biale does note that contemporary "Israeli culture still owes much to Brenner and his secularist colleagues." In the epilogue, he adduces the godless celebration of the everyday and the individual in Yehuda Amichai's work as evidence that this poet "has realized the promise for Hebrew culture set forth by Brenner." Yet Amichai, like Brenner before him, "cannot divorce himself from the religious tradition that gives his secularity its language." After discussing Amichai, Biale provides us with an example of someone who seems, at first glance, as if he is capable of effecting a more complete separation from the past, the leading light of post-Zionism, Adi Ophir. Ophir severely criticizes secular Zionists for having, as Biale puts it, "unconsciously taken over cardinal categories from Judaism" such as hatred of the *goy,* "and dressed them in secular, nationalist garb." His consequent rejection of both Judaism and Zionism seems strong enough to land him in the same camp as the "non-Jewish Jews." But Biale sees reason to consider him as someone who, unlike, say, Karl Marx, still belongs within the secular Jewish fold. One "might say that just as the Jew requires the existence of the *goy*, so Ophir's secularism requires the existence of Judaism, either in its religious or secular Zionist forms." This is a debatable assertion, but it in any case shows that Biale's definition of secular Jewishness is broad enough to encompass someone whose Jewish identity is essentially negative. "Exactly what positive content it has on its own," Biale acknowledges, "remains unclear."

But "secularism in Israel," Biale goes on to observe, "is not always driven by Brenner's renunciation of anything smacking of the religious tradition." Since the 1990s, increasing numbers of young Israelis, he tells us, have been engaging in the study of traditional texts in secular houses of study. Although this is "a relatively small phenomenon," it is evidence that not everyone is ready to cede the Bible and the rest of Jewish tradition to the rabbis.

If secular Jewish thought in different shapes and sizes remains alive in Israel, its condition in North America is more ambiguous. In chapter four, Biale relates how secular and often socialist Yiddish culture once flourished in the United States but eventually came to be perceived by a new generation of

Jews as a roadblock on the way to the attainment of a fully American identity. This did not prevent the "dominant secularism incubated in Yiddish" from being "continued in new forms among American Jews." These new forms include American Jews' generally liberal political orientation as well as their "ethnically inflected" English, which "may therefore be said to be a Jewish language."

In the epilogue, Biale identifies other important manifestations of secular Jewishness in 21st-century America, including literary works that mine the historical associations of the religious tradition for non-religious ends and the strong presence of Jewish studies in the academic world. He does not, however, mention the name of even a single living American Jew worthy of being regarded as an heir and upholder of the tradition of secular Jewish thought that his book is devoted to documenting. This is not surprising, for he holds that "the secularism of American Jews today is not ideological" like that of the previous century. As a consequence, "it is writers of fiction and memoirists rather than ideologues who are giving it expression."

American Jewish secularism not only lacks theorists; it lacks independence. In an era like ours, Biale says, "the old categories of 'religious' and 'secular' are . . . no longer fixed." The "fine line between religion and secularism . . . has often become fuzzy in the recent history of American Jewish culture," and it has become increasingly difficult to tell secular and religious expressions of Jewish culture apart. Where, then, are we headed? All that one can say is that in the future things will certainly look very different than they did in the past. "Secularism can make no promise of continuity or survival, but it does guarantee the freedom to experiment without which neither continuity nor survival is possible."

Irving Howe was convinced at the end of his life that "those of us committed to a secular Jewish outlook must admit that we are reaching a dead-end."

This is certainly not the note on which one would expect a book like Biale's to end. In a volume on the history of secular Jewishness underwritten at least in part by the Posen Foundation and composed by someone closely associated with its activities, one has reason to anticipate a heartier defense of secularism as the wave of the Jewish future. Viewed in the appropriate context, however, Biale does not seem overly pessimistic.

Irving Howe, the author of *World of our Fathers* and a staunchly secular Jew, was convinced by the end of his life that "those of us committed to the secular Jewish outlook must admit that we are reaching a dead-end." Similarly, Stephen Whitfield, a prominent historian of American Jewish culture, has written (in *Cultures of the Jews*, a series edited by David Biale) that it is now "closing time" for a viable secular Jewish identity in the United States. Lawrence Bush, the editor of *Jewish Currents*, one of the oldest secular Jewish periodicals in the US, strikes a similar note. "Certainly," he writes, "there are some thriving pockets of secular Jewish life and even new ventures (most notably, the growth of secular Jewish studies programs at college and universities, thanks to funding by the Posen Foundation through the Center for Cultural Judaism)." Nevertheless, "overall," the "challenge of generational continuity has not been well met by Jewish secularists in America."

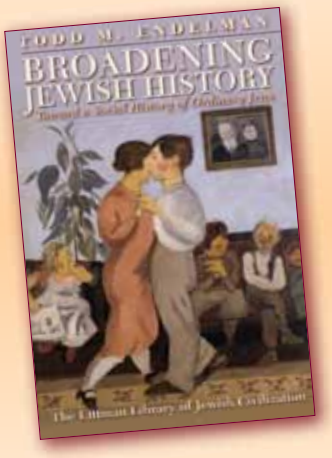
Looking back at Biale again, after considering these other perspectives, he seems like a relatively optimistic observer, or rather observer-participant. He does not, to be sure, mention all the bright spots noted by the others (and modestly refrains from referring to the above-mentioned programs that Biale himself helps to coordinate and in which I too have been happy to participate). But neither does he sound as demoralized as they do.

This is mostly, I think, because he does not draw the lines in the same place that they draw them. By collapsing the barrier between religious phenomena and secular ones, Biale expands the range of territory within view and provides himself with ample justification for not falling into despair. For however well or poorly the Jewish religion is now doing in this country, it is on the whole in far better shape than secular Jewishness. Biale recognizes, it seems to me, that only through the continued association with religious Jews can secularists hope to sustain their enterprise in the future. If this is the case, he is, I believe, correct.

I say this not as a religious person, but because I have a healthy appreciation of religion's strengths,

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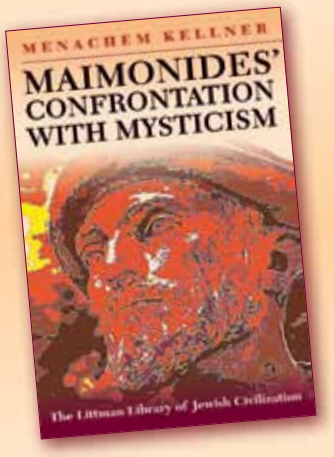
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especially its unparalleled capacity—even in its more attenuated versions—to endow its adherents with a sense of purpose and to inspire them to transmit their beliefs to their descendants. It has its weaknesses too, of course. As Biale has shown, the Jewish religion has long carried within itself many "seeds of its own subversion." But as he has not made equally clear, this is even truer of secular Jewishness. The transfer of the rationale for remaining Jewish from the heavenly realm to the earthly one is a very risky business. This may not be so apparent when there are external pressures that hold the Jews together, whatever they believe or think. It may not be fully clear in a Jewish state surrounded by countries that are more or less inimical, even if they are not at the moment enemies. But in a hospitable, liberal democratic society like that of the United States, the (almost always) humanistic and ethical core of modern secular Jewishness is liable to break through and shatter its parochial shell.

This point was recently made quite well by Jonathan Sarna, a prominent professor of American Jewish history and, one might note, an observant Jew, in an article published in *Contemplate*, a magazine put out by the Posen-sponsored Center for Cultural Judaism. After acknowledging that "Jewish secularist culture" had collapsed in the United States in the second half of the 20th century, Sarna points to the many signs that it is now making "something of a comeback." But even though he is prepared to go so far as to label this development "a rebirth of Jewish secularism," Sarna remains dubious about its prospects:

> I, for one, wonder: In the absence of a collective Jewish language, a shared Jewish neighborhood, and a common antisemitic enemy, will Jewish secularism prove viable in the long term? Can Jewish secularism, with its universalistic ethic, meet the challenge of intermarriage and keep Jews Jewish? Will secular Jews and religious Jews remain tethered to one another, each continuing to view the other as part of the totality of the Jewish people?

No committed secular Jew can take such questions lightly. Far from having proved itself as an ideology and a way of life in the Diaspora, secular Jewishness has since its inception shown itself to be poorly equipped to withstand the processes of erosion endemic to liberal democratic societies. Things are very different in Israel, of course—but not for secular Jews born there who have subsequently chosen to live elsewhere. In this case, too, the evidence is discouraging. Some of it is on display in *Krovim Rekhokim,* a new book about Israeli parenting in America by Udi Sommer, an Israeli-born academic teaching at SUNY-Albany. Sommer reports on the pathetic, often clueless efforts of secular Israeli émigrés to transmit something of what makes them Jewish or even Israeli to their American-born children , and in some cases, to their halakhically non-Jewish grandchildren.

David Biale, for his part, is no doubt aware of the dangers confronting secular Jewishness in America and elsewhere in the Diaspora. One of the most notable things about his admirable history of secular Jewish thought is his reluctance to venture a confident answer to the question of what the future holds in store. Another is the conciliatory stance that he takes toward religion at the end of his book. It seems reasonable to conclude that the former is in some measure the cause of the latter.

But maybe I am reading too much into this book. *Not in the Heavens* is meant, after all, to be a celebration of secular Jewish thought, not an obituary for it. Rather than see his narrative as one that concludes with something like a secularist's confession of defeat, one should perhaps simply regard it as yet another phenomenon that contains within itself the seeds of its own subversion.

Allan Arkush is a professor of Judaic studies and history at Binghamton University, and the Senior Contributing Editor of the Jewish Review of Books.

Sole Searcher

BY ALICE NAKHIMOVSKY

WANDERING SOUL: THE DYBBUK'S CREATOR, S. AN-SKY
by Gabriella Safran
Harvard University Press, 392 pp., $29.95

What do we make of S. An-sky, this towering public intellectual—this Russian-Yiddish writer, pioneering ethnographer, champion of lost causes—a century and a half after his birth? When he died in 1920, escaping the Bolsheviks, his play *The Dybbuk* had not been staged in any language. His three-volume account of Jewish catastrophe in World War I remained in manuscript, and the artifacts he had collected for his Jewish museum in Petrograd were threatened with confiscation. In time, of course, a lot changed. *The Dybbuk*, in Bialik's Hebrew rendering, became the foundational play of Israel's Habima National Theatre, and continues to be staged in many languages. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the basement of the St. Petersburg Ethnographic Museum yielded objects from his collections. Photographs from his expeditions turned up in someone's apartment. And now his life has become the subject of a marvelously detailed biography by Gabriella Safran. Watching An-sky in context, we can start to understand what he was and what he meant.

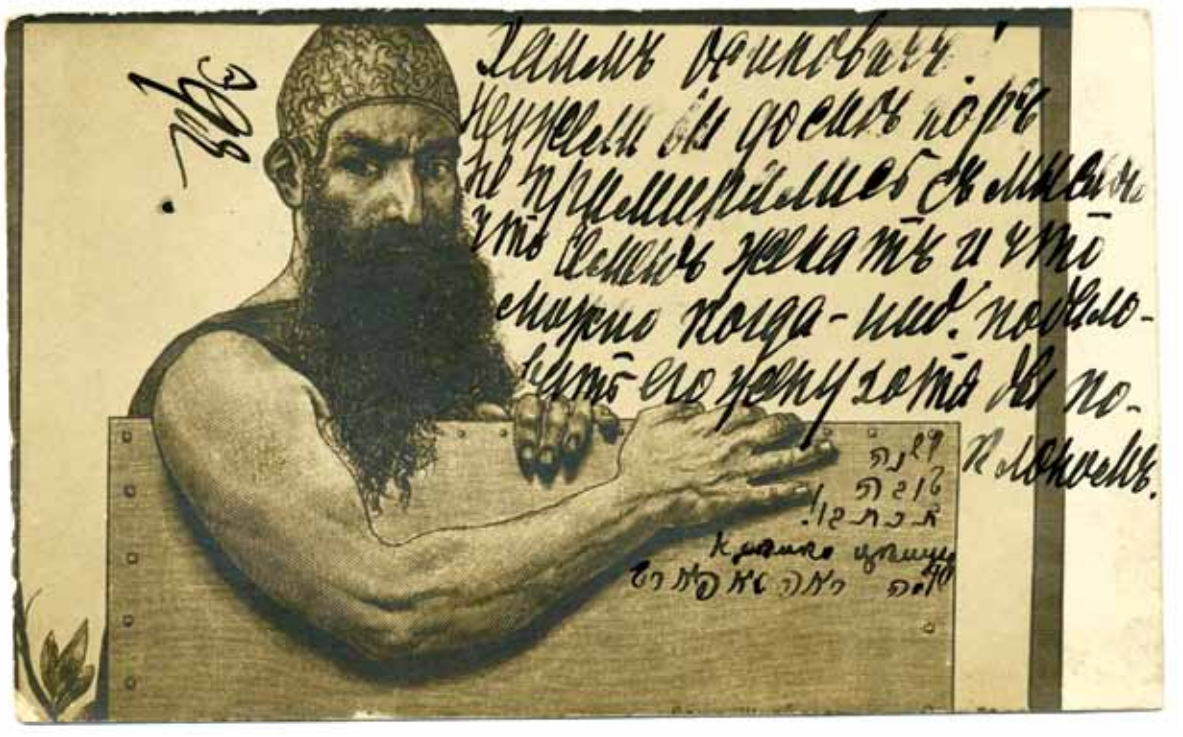
An-sky (originally Shloyme-Zanvl Rappoport) was born in 1864 in a shtetl outside of Vitebsk. That he chose a pseudonym for public life is hardly surprising; even Russians did it. But Russian family names aren't bisected by dashes, unless they appear in novels whose authors want to obscure something: "In the provincial town of N—, a certain N—sky . . ." An-sky obscured a great deal. For a biographer, the biggest gap concerns his private life. He married twice, briefly and unhappily, and eventually came to define himself as a man alone. It could be, as Safran suggests, that he was homosexual; it could be that he was following a model of the Russian radical as ascetic. Whatever private choices he made, he acted in public precisely as he later confessed: "I have neither a wife, nor children, nor a house, nor even an apartment, nor belongings, nor even any settled habits . . . the only thing that connects me firmly to these dimensions is my nation." An-sky's devotion to his nation was intense and even courageous. But it took a while to mature.

In Vitebsk, he met Chaim Zhitlowsky, another future champion of Diaspora Jewry. They read rebellious books in Hebrew and Russian and smoked cigarettes on Shabbat.

An-sky's upbringing was poor; his father was an itinerant businessman, his mother kept a tavern. In Vitebsk, he met Chaim Zhitlowsky, another future champion of Diaspora Jewry. The young Zhitlowsky had what An-sky did not: a privileged background, with the education that seamlessly followed. The two of them read rebellious books in Hebrew and Russian and smoked cigarettes on Shabbat. At 17, An-sky left for nearby Liozno, a small, mostly Jewish town, where he gave private lessons in Russian. For a time, he succeeded in concealing his modern views from parents while enlightening their children, but he was eventually unmasked. What did him in was not his scorn for the world around him ("the shul was like a stable where there are horses," he wrote Zhitlowsky), but the discovery of a copy of Moses Leib Lilienblum's incendiary *Chataot Neurim* (Sins of Youth) in the hands of one of his pupils. Expelled from Liozno, he took a turn at blacksmithing and bookbinding, and wrote a Yiddish novel reflecting ideas about Jewish transformation through labor and self-assertion. The novel was translated into Russian and appeared (anonymously) in the Russian-Jewish

monthly *Voskhod*. The other half of the equation, labor, led him to a job in a salt mine where he was the only Jew among Russian peasants. The mine was his first raw experience with peasants, albeit peasants who had left the land for non-agricultural work. As a reader of Russian literature, An-sky was primed to sympathize with them. And they in turn accepted him; they never saw him as a Jew, and gave him a Russian name and patronymic, Semyon Akimovich, that he used until the end of his life. In a pattern that would repeat itself many times, An-sky became both activist and ethnographer. He read to the miners, wrote letters for them, and collected their songs—something no one else had ever done before.

An-sky's immersion in these people's world was the practical side of his political and philosophical association with the radical, socialist (though not Marxist) Russian populist movement. Like An-sky, populists saw folk traditions as virtuous and authentic. A darker side of their agenda was violence: both the late 19th-century People's Will party and the early 20th-century Social Revolutionaries (SRs) engaged in political assassinations, which they called "terrorism." An-sky, an SR for many years, by and large endorsed political terror as an anti-tsarist act.



Postcard from An-sky to Zhitlowsky with Rosh Hashanah greetings, September, 1908. (Photo © YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.)

In the decades before the Revolution of 1905, An-sky was absorbed in Russian affairs. He found a mentor in the writer Vladimir Uspensky, who invited him to St. Petersburg without thinking of where a Jew without a residence permit would spend the night. Out for a stroll hours after dispatching his guest, the insomniac Uspensky discovered him walking the streets. He brought An-sky back to his house, and eventually introduced him to the populist intelligentsia. An-sky began writing for Uspensky's journal *Russkoe Bogatsvo*. He had arrived.

When Uspensky had to be hospitalized, An-sky decamped for Europe. In Paris he attained the position for which he remains best known among Russians: private secretary to the populist theoretician Pyotr Lavrov. But in Bern later that year, he grew close enough to the Bund—despite that movement's Marxism—to write two Yiddish poems, "In the Salty Sea of Human Tears" and a new version of the already familiar poem "The Oath" that were set to music and became party anthems. He also began to write Jewish fiction. For *Voskhod*, he wrote the story "Pioneers," about young men poised between Jewish texts and the Russian intellectual world they

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want to join. For the Yiddish daily *Der Freynd*, he wrote a long poem about a girl who, repenting after her abduction by a demon, is rejected by both the modern world and the traditional one.

The Revolution of 1905 brought him back to Russia, eager to play a part in the inauguration of a new era. But the events of 1906 and 1907 and above all the pogroms—the broken lives, the "spineless" response of revolutionary parties, and the indifference or collusion of the government—induced him to retreat both from the idea of political terror and from politics. He recovered from "the trauma of the failed revolution," as Safran puts it, by devoting his energy to research and writing on Jewish folklore. Nevertheless, she stresses, "when he devoted himself to Jewish literature and ethnography, he was not turning away from his older revolutionary convictions or his loyalty to Russian intelligentsia values . . . An-sky was motivated, as he had always been, by the need to find soil where he could feel that he was accomplishing something and improving people's lives." An-sky saw folk tradition as embodying Jewish ethics, notably the elevation of the spiritual over the physical. Involvement in Jewish culture was, for him, Safran suggests, "primarily the choice of a more effective means to continue his struggle for justice." But it also afforded him "the opportunity to see himself as heroically devoting himself to those who needed him, and the self-forgetting ecstasy he found in connections with other people."

For his groundbreaking ethnographic expedition through the Pale of Settlement in 1909 he made careful plans, developing questionnaires and detailing the kinds of oral texts he sought, along with "customs, beliefs, charms, superstitions, remedies" and material objects. A wealthy Kiev businessman, Baron Vladimir Gintsburg, gave him seed money, and An-sky, in thoroughly modern fashion, named the project after the Baron's famous father, who had just died.

An-sky set out with the musicologist Yuly Engel and a young relative, the photographer Solomon Iudovin. Despite some problems—they discovered, for example, that children who were paid five kopecks per song were making songs up on the spot—they collected thousands of texts on the verge of disappearance and put Jewish ethnography on a serious scholarly footing. In 1914, objects from the expedition went on display in a St. Petersburg Jewish almshouse: Russia's first Jewish museum.

In *The Dybbuk*, a lost soul possesses a young bride, and a rabbinical court judges the living and the dead.

An-sky's goal of revitalizing Jewish culture by fusing folklore with high art was realized in his play *The Dybbuk*, which unites the conventions of romantic tragedy with Jewish folk exotica: a lost soul that possesses a young bride, and a rabbinical court that judges both the living and the dead. It's not surprising that the director Konstantin Stanislavsky compared the play favorably to those of the then-fashionable symbolist Maeterlinck, or that the Russian symbolist Fedor Sologub declared it "true and unique." But the play was not staged in An-sky's lifetime. Both author and audience fell victim to a larger historical drama: a world war and two revolutions.

Within six months of the outbreak of war, reports of the destruction of Jewish communities in the war zone began to reach the capital. The Jewish Committee to Help War Victims was already in existence, and An-sky drafted himself as an aid worker. Now, as Safran relates, he faced daily evidence that the violence against the Jews was the work of Russian soldiers. He sought to understand what corrupted them, only to hear the rationalizations about Jewish treachery from liberal intellectuals. Along with I. L. Peretz and Yankev Dinezon, he put out an appeal to Jews to make a record of the catastrophe. He himself collected over a thousand documents.



From left: Yankev Dinezon, I. L. Peretz, and S. An-sky, c. 1910. (Photo © YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.)

In February 1917, the tsar abdicated. Among the groups now jockeying for political power were An-sky's own SRs, plus the centrist-liberal Kadets with whom he had worked in war relief. He knew Alexander Kerensky and the other leaders of the Provisional Government personally and was himself elected to the Petrograd City Duma as an SR. But his engagement in Russian politics did not mean disengagement from Jews. He began raising money for a forty-volume collection of materials from his expedition and assembled subscriptions for a volume of Jewish art. He arranged for the Hebrew publication of *The Destruction of Galicia*, which was his own account of the misery he had witnessed. But again, history swept away his plans. The night of the Bolshevik Revolution found him at the Tsarsko-Selsky railway station, on his way back from Mogilev. He raced to the City Duma, and became part of a committee to negotiate power-sharing with the Bolsheviks. That came to nothing, as did his election to the Constituent Assembly, the parliament famously dissolved by Lenin during its opening session.

On August 30, 1918, the SR Fanya Kaplan made an attempt on Lenin's life. The Cheka started arresting SRs, indiscriminately and in massive numbers. An-sky fled Moscow, leaving behind a manuscript of *The Dybbuk* and his wartime diaries. He settled in Vilna, where he became a founding member of its Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society, and a new branch of the Jewish Committee to Help War Victims. But Vilna itself became embroiled in conflict, with pogroms inflicted by Poles, Whites, and, though to a lesser degree, Bolsheviks. Ill with diabetes and suffering from the heart condition that would take his life, An-sky left for Warsaw.

Safran doesn't want An-sky's story to be a narrative of return. But even as we accept his multiple loyalties, and even as we weigh the harrowing pressures of his final years in war and revolution, a story of return is what it seems to be. He starts out as an adolescent *maskil* surrounded by "pigs." Captivated by Russian populism, he lives with miners and becomes a revolutionary. Gradually, he rethinks his loyalties to Jews, becoming a Jewish writer in Yiddish and Russian, a profoundly committed ethnographer, an aid worker in wartime, and a documenter of Jewish catastrophe. In the end, as Safran observes, "he acknowledged the limits of the dream of radical change that had motivated him for so long." But even during the very last days of his life, in November 1920, he could still write letters in which he happily notified his friends of the founding of a new Jewish Historical-Ethnographic society in Warsaw.

Alice Nakhimovsky, professor of Russian and Jewish studies at Colgate University, is working with Roberta Newman on a book about Yiddish letter writing manuals called How to Live a Paper Life *(Indiana University Press), coming in 2012.*

The Novelist and the Physicist

BY BEN BIRNBAUM

THE LANGUAGE GOD TALKS: ON SCIENCE AND RELIGION
by Herman Wouk
Little, Brown & Co., 192 pp., $23.99

Whatever one thinks of Herman Wouk as a fiction writer—and professional views have generally tilted against him—his fecundity and popularity are unassailable: twelve novels over sixty-three years (four of them emerging since he turned 69), two apologias for Judaism, four plays, and some fictional trifles. All told, he has sold nearly forty million books, and virtually all of his works are in print.

In the 1950s, Wouk produced the three works that made his reputation. The Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Caine Mutiny* sat atop the *Times*' list for nearly two years and took on the charged Cold War issue of the rights of authority vs. those of personal conscience, finding for authority. *Marjorie Morningstar*, another commercial blockbuster, loosed Dickens on the Jewish Upper West Side of the mid-1930s and established that bourgeois ways and mores were darkly amusing but more conducive to the good life than those of Bohemia. The novel was also the first, as Norman Podhoretz pointed out in an otherwise scorching review in *Commentary*, "to treat American Jews intimately as Jews without making them seem exotic." And, finally, with the somewhat pugnacious *This Is My God: The Jewish Way of Life*, Wouk entered into the lists of Judaism's post-war explicators.

Among his many other works, the World War II novels of the 1970s stand out. *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance* comprise a 2,000-page, million-plus word apprehension of World War II, brimming, like their avowed model *War and Peace*, with reverently reconstructed battles, madly intersecting fates, and scores of characters, historic and imagined, who witness all that requires witnessing. Wouk's next four novels—the last of which appeared in 2004—did not enjoy the extraordinary commercial success of his earlier work (or the serious attention of critics, which Wouk may have counted a good thing), but they sold well enough, while continuing to take on big topics: the Nixon White House; the place of Jews in a pluralistic democracy; the history of the State of Israel; and the science and politics (and romance) of particle physics. And now, in his mid-90's, Wouk has published *The Language God Talks*, which aims to elucidate the complex and fraught question of whether religious faith and science can live in peace.

Although it has recently been rendered current by crusading school boards, cable television's best minds, and opportunists of all varieties, the question is not new, dating back at least to Philo's 1st-century attempt to conjoin Genesis and Plato. The question bloomed in a public way, of course, in early modern times, in the literal and figurative trials faced by Copernicus, Darwin, and John Thomas Scopes, and it flourishes today in conference proceedings, campaign speeches, and yards of trade books. One opens *The Language God Talks*, therefore, wondering what Wouk, certainly a prodigious explicator and street-corner moralist, but no scientist or theologian, could contribute to a discussion already so ripe.

The core of the book is made up of Wouk's recollections of his friendship with the brilliant, charmingly caustic atheist-Jewish physics laureate Richard Feynman.

From a structural perspective, the answer turns out to be a charming, if rambling, and occasionally disjointed, essay. *The Language God Talks* is a personal and literary memoir, but it also includes nimble explications of cosmology, astrophysics, and Jewish learning, along with sharply-drawn miniatures of some of the great and odd beings upon whom science seems to depend for its progress. These include the superstar physicist and legendary know-it-all Murray Gell-Mann, whom Wouk at one point tries to engage in conversation on science, and whose "responses, while not impolite, hinted that an orangutan was getting a bit too familiar."



Herman Wouk in Times Square, March, 1962. (Photo by Carl Mydans/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.)

The core of the book is made up of Wouk's recollections of his meandering intellectual friendship with the brilliant, charmingly caustic atheist-Jewish physics laureate Richard Feynman, and their stop-and-start debate as to the purpose, or lack thereof, of the universe. This brings us to the book's modest but welcome contribution to the 2,000-year-old discussion: a convincing depiction of a sharp quarrel on a matter of infinite cultural and personal importance between two men who never sacrifice the respect due to an honest interlocutor. The argument between Wouk and Feynman was triggered when Wouk, doing research for *War and Remembrance*, interviewed Feynman about the Manhattan Project. At the conclusion of the interview Feynman chided him, "You had better learn [calculus]. It's the language God talks."

Though he had long expressed more traditional views regarding the Holy One's locutions, Wouk found Feynman impressive. Eventually, he took up calculus, first with the aid of a self-help book, then with a tutor, and finally in a high school class that proved too demanding. Offering a few lame words of encouragement to his teenage classmates, the "defeated, departing old codger," Wouk writes, exited the classroom to "a sympathy hand."

Wouk never returned to calculus, but he met Feynman again at the Aspen Institute in the summer of 1973, where the two men walked the moun-

tain trails. They talked about science, Talmud, literature, history, and other matters that brought pleasure to both of them, if not agreement. Wouk took notes, as he seems to do on almost every occasion, and considered writing a book about their conversations. But he put it off, and in fact never saw Feynman again. *The Language God Talks* ends, in what reads like an act of longing, with one last fictional meeting set in Washington, D.C., where Wouk lived for many years, and where Feynman has come for medical treatment shortly before his death of cancer in 1988. They walk the city together while reprising some of the themes they had taken up in Aspen, in particular the matter of faith and science.

Wouk, who has been rightly charged with thumbing scales to get his fictions to come out right—Isaac Rosenfeld said that he wrote like "a man [playing] chess against himself"—engages in no such cheating here. Though weakened by illness, "Feynman" remains Feynman, interested in Wouk's religious views, but convinced as ever that, as he once said in a television interview: "It doesn't seem to me that this fantastically marvelous universe, this tremendous range of time and space and different kinds of animals, and all the different planets, and all these atoms with all their motions, and so on, all this complicated thing can merely be a stage so that God can watch human beings struggle for good and evil—which is the view religion has. The stage is too big for the drama."

At the conclusion of their imagined conversation, as they near the steps of the Georgetown University Medical Center, Wouk plays his final hand, pressing Feynman on the anthropic principle. This is the principle some physicists have invoked to explain why the constants of nature seem uniquely calibrated to evolve and foster life. What is this if not precisely the possibility, even the probability, of a God-constructed stage? Feynman counters impatiently: "Yes, yes, I know that flight of fancy. It completely loses me." And a moment later the argument is over, with Wouk calling out "*Teiku!*"—an Aramaic word that, as Wouk explains, the Talmud uses to end irresoluble disputes. "I've enjoyed myself," Feynman responds, and the reader, who has shared in the enjoyment, believes him.

Nonagenarian authors are certainly entitled to sympathy hands, but this slight book's agile prose and good humor justify real respect. Wouk, however, doesn't seem to be hanging around for the notices. The book's publicity kit pointedly notes that he is currently at work on a novel. A recent videotape of him during a rare public appearance at the 2010 Los Angeles Times Festival of Books offers every indication of vitality. Wouk remains the relaxed, broad-browed, gravelly-voiced Bronx sage—Uncle Herman at the family table—telling practiced tales and deftly cracking wise about large topics to the delight of his audience, and his own considerable pleasure.

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

Minyan 2.0

BY MARGOT LURIE

EMPOWERED JUDAISM: WHAT INDEPENDENT MINYANIM CAN TEACH US ABOUT BUILDING VIBRANT JEWISH COMMUNITIES
by Elie Kaunfer
Jewish Lights, 161 pp., $18.99

In 1953, Abraham Joshua Heschel delivered an impassioned address to the annual convention of Conservative rabbis, asking: "Who knows how to pray, how to inspire others to pray? . . . Who knows how to kindle a spark in the darkness of the soul? . . . People take their precious time off to attend services. Some even arrive with profound expectations. But what do they get? . . . Sometimes even the rabbi sits in his chair wondering: 'Why did all these people flock together?'"

Between the year 2000 and the present, over sixty separate independent minyanim (prayer communities) have sprung up in the United States and Israel, providing a means for young Jews disaffected from large synagogues to flock together. These minyanim are, in some ways, descendants of the "havurot" (fellowships) of the 1960s and '70s for which the *Jewish Catalog* served as a guide. Those participatory communities were marked by a countercultural, anti-institutional, Do-It-Yourself aesthetic, of which the new minyanim, to some extent, partake.

Of course, Orthodoxy has always had minyanim; *shtiblekh* and other lay-led prayer groups are the historical norm, and maximum-capacity suburban synagogues the American anomaly. As with the members of havurot, many members of my generation of under-30 Jews say they feel excluded from religious life. Justifiably so: the suburban mausoleum that is the liberal synagogue was, at best, built for a sociological reality decades out of date. A friend of mine reports that when she goes to the synagogue of her childhood, "No one can remember if I'm in college or grad school, if I'm me or my sister—and everyone is either 15 years older or 15 years younger than me."

In *Empowered Judaism,* Elie Kaunfer defines an independent minyan as a prayer community that has been organized and led by volunteers, has no paid clergy or denominational affiliation, and meets at least once a month. It is important to distinguish further between two types of independent minyan, which, while often possessing overlapping sets of congregants, have very different motivating impulses. First, there are "partnership minyanim" like Minyan Tehillah of Cambridge, Massachusetts; Darkhei Noam of New York City; and Minyan Urim of New Haven, Connecticut. Fundamentally a response to the difficult question of women's roles in the Orthodox world, they rely on a controversial halakhic responsum of Rabbi Mendel Shapiro allowing women to lead non-obligatory parts of the prayer service. (Elitzur and Michal Bar-Asher Siegal's online "Guide for the 'Halachic Minyan'" is a good resource for such communities.)

The second type of minyan is not an outgrowth of halakhic re-interpretations within Orthodoxy or a response to segregated gender roles, but an effort to meet a "crisis in spirituality," the crisis that Heschel had already articulated to the Conservative rabbis assembled in 1953. These minyanim, such as Harlem's Techiyah and Washington, D.C.'s Tikkun Leil Shabbat, presuppose the permanence of innovations made by the Reform and Conservative movements in having women lead all parts of services, men and women sit together, and both count in the prayer quorum. Instead, their aim is to provide an egalitarian prayer service, usually with the full liturgy, but with *feeling.*

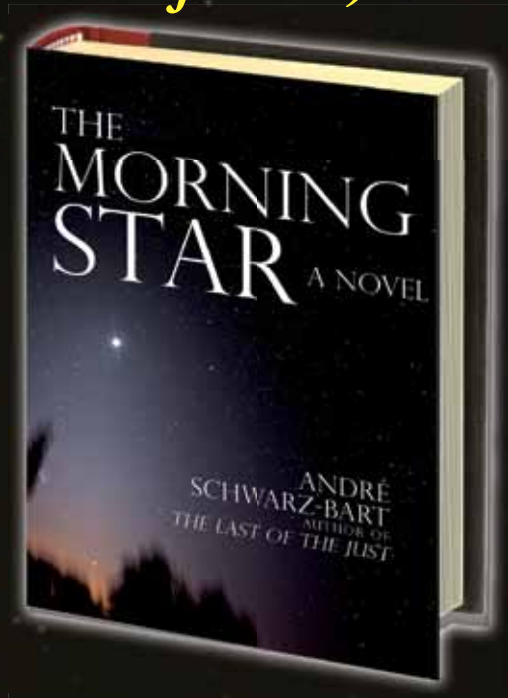
Kaunfer's Kehilat Hadar is a minyan of the second type, one that has expanded into a non-profit institute (Mechon Hadar) and a yeshiva (Yeshivat Hadar). His *Empowered Judaism* argues that the reforms introduced by Hadar, and the independent-minyan movement more broadly, can transform Jewish life across, and around, the denominations. And his book arrives on a raft of praise. Hosts of rabbis and Jewish leaders laud it as "remarkable," "incisive," "inspiring," "a passionate and brilliant manifesto," "a call to revolution," "a 'must read,'" "essential reading," "a prophecy of hope and new vision," and a "testimony to the vitality of Jewish life."

Kaunfer introduces the book by telling about his own youthful experience. The son of a Conservative rabbi, he attended a Conservative day school, was active in Harvard Hillel, had a challenging relationship with a religiously skeptical girlfriend, worked as an investment banker, spent time in Israel, started a minyan in New York, became a rabbi, and married a woman he met at the minyan he founded. Proceeding from this bit of autobiography, Kaunfer then narrates the story of the creation of Kehilat Hadar, his "model of empowered Judaism."

"If you could design your own prayer community from scratch, what would it look like?" In 2001, Kaunfer sat down with two friends on New York's Upper West Side and drafted a template: "a fully traditional liturgy and Torah reading; a commitment to full gender egalitarianism; a short (five-minute) *dvar Torah* [piece of homiletics]; a

The Morning Star

By the author of the classic novel *The Last of the Just*, "a celebration of life in all its transience" *(The Jewish Review of Books)*



"It would take no less than a poet with an evolved spirit and keen sense of history to add new insights on the Holocaust. Andre Schwarz-Bart (1928-2006), a Polish Jew whose parents and brothers were victims of the Nazis, was just such a man. His best-selling, widely translated Holocaust novel, ***The Last of the Just***, earned him the Prix Goncourt in 1959. ***The Morning Star***, written in his last days, is perhaps unfinished.... but as a statement and work of art, the work is complete."

–Foreword Reviews

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lay-led ethos with high standards of excellence; a service that doesn't drag and engages the daveners [worshippers] through music." He goes on to explore the movement, devoting a chapter to various minyan leaders talking about a particular aspect of their institutional lives: children's services (DC Minyan); membership (Brookline's Washington Square Minyan); community (Jerusalem's Shira Hadasha); environmentalism (Washington, D.C.'s Tikkun Leil Shabbat). The book ends with a chapter on "how empowered Jews pray" and, finally, a disquisition on "the real crisis in American Judaism"—for Kaunfer, not the red herring of assimilation and intermarriage, but the "crisis of meaning."

Questions of meaning, however, are difficult terrain for any author to navigate. As Heschel asked: "Who knows how to kindle a spark in the darkness of the soul?" So perhaps one shouldn't be surprised that in *Empowered Judaism*, Kaunfer is mostly concerned with brass-tack suggestions for facilitating prayer and community: keep *divrei Torah* short; set up seating in rows instead of in a circle, to safeguard prayer from the feeling of being watched; send out announcements of forthcoming events via e-mail instead of spending live time reading them aloud at services; start a collection of crocheted or suede yarmulkes for newcomers, so they aren't stuck in the "outsider garb" of souvenir bar-mitzvah *kippot* and scarf *tallitot*.

All sensible ideas, even wise, but nothing to nail to the door of Wittenberg. As Kaunfer himself writes: "instead of focusing on new ideas, the Jewish community would be better served by connecting to the original 'big ideas' of our heritage: Torah, *avodah* [worship], and *gemilut hasadim* [charitable deeds] . . . There is no new 'big idea'; there is just investment in the old, but in a serious, meaningful, and thoughtful way."

Part how-to and part paean, the packaging of *Empowered Judaism* inevitably subverts the product. Kaunfer's investment in the old gives way to the *serious*, *meaningful*, and *thoughtful* ambitions that he shares with his *committed*, *engaged*, *intelligent*, *humble*, *devoted* peers and their *vibrant*, *energized*, *prayerful*, *sensitive*, *passionate*, *affirming* communities.

Kaunfer dispenses much professional-sounding lore about building community by, for example, naming minyan councils "teams" rather than "committees" ("After all, no one likes committee meetings, but everyone wants to be part of the team!") and cultivating a "culture of appreciation" whereby those who arrive early for shul are greeted with "Good Shabbos. My name is Elie. Welcome! Would you like an *aliyah* this morning?" This is certainly better than "Good Shabbos, you're in my seat," or the brusque sizing-up of "*kohen* or *levi*?" Nonetheless, here and elsewhere in *Empowered Judaism*, one hears the tones of a corporate memo. The hands may be the hands of *chaverim,* but the voice is the voice of the e-bankers, lawyers, and bright-eyed young professionals who form a core segment of the minyan: stockbrokers in Birkenstocks. As the anthropologist Riv-Ellen Prell has written, "corporate terms like 'quality control'" as applied to prayer "would have horrified" the egalitarians who created the havurot of the '60s and '70s.

There is an open secret about Hadar: like many other minyanim, it is funded by lots of organized community money, offered by institutions eager to keep young Jews connected to their heritage. (This may explain why Kaunfer writes like someone who has devoted a big chunk of his life to writing grant applications.) Through this, Jewish organizations, while creating opportunities for young Jews to worship and study—and they do create these opportunities, and these opportunities are valuable—also prop up a not-very-impressive aspect of elite American culture: the long-extended enabled adolescence. In an interview with *Tablet,* Kaunfer called this period the slacker-sounding "post-college, pre-whatever." It has also been described by Jeffrey Arnett, a psychology professor, as "emerging adulthood," and in David Brooks' more august term as "the odyssey years."

In a faith that initiates its 12- and 13-year-olds into adult responsibility, the concept of 30-year-olds as "emerging adults" should be, at the least, suspicious.

On the ground, what this looks like is upper middle class Americans spending the ten to fifteen years after college messing around and "figuring out their lives" while postponing marriage, children, and responsibilities. One way or another, the bill for this eclectic adventurousness is footed by parents, or, for the best and brightest, by various institutions and sinecures. Certainly, in opting out of synagogue life, most young Jews become unaccustomed to supporting Jewish institutions financially. ("We can feel connected to a particular religious community without attending, paying money, or even living in the city where the community is located" is Kaunfer's explication of a survey result showing minyan-goers reporting an *average* of five different community affiliations.) One should naturally allow for the loops and lapses of individual human lives, but what proponents of this experimental period see as an odyssey is often just a layover in the land of the lotus-eaters. In a faith that initiates its 12- and 13-year-olds into adult responsibility, the concept of thirty-year-olds as "emerging adults" should be, at the least, suspicious.

After their minyan had been meeting for five months, Kaunfer and his co-founders, Ethan Tucker and Mara Benjamin, named it Kehilat Hadar, citing as one reason for the name the Talmudic explication of the *etrog* as *pri etz hadar*, fruit of the beautiful tree, or beautiful fruit of the tree—that is, a tree on which "well-ripened fruit from years past coexist[s] with newly budding fruit from the current year." They go on:

> We see this as a metaphor for an ideal internal relationship: we all bring to the community our ripened fruit, the experiences and ideas we have developed in our lives, the patterns and rhythms that define us. The challenge is to be open to new ideas and experiences (budding fruit) without rejecting the ripened fruit of our past. We hope to make our prayer community

a space where people strive for that internal integration.

Now that independent minyanim have been through several crop cycles, it is reasonable to speculate about their future. "When people ask what will happen to the minyan as it ages, my experience suggests that it simply won't [age]," writes Kaunfer. "Most people past their mid-thirties leave the urban area, and a new crop of college graduates moves in . . . The institution itself is actually quite stable, because it caters to a demographic that is constantly replenishing itself."

This vision of a Shaker-like revolving-door community might be fine if it were true, but is it? As a



Members of the DC Minyan light Hanukkah candles.

generation grows up in the minyan, some who get married and have kids will move out of the community—but some won't. Pretty soon, those who stay will need Hebrew school, they will need bar/bat mitzvah training, and before you can say *egalitarianism*, bang, they're a shul. Hadar already has an affiliated nonprofit institute and a yeshiva ("one of the oldest forms of Jewish empowerment education"). The Havurah movement had a necessarily different relationship to institutions (part of their function, in the early years, was to earn 4D draft exemptions for those participants who were studying for ordination), but even they could not resist the institutional pull: in 1979, the National Havurah Committee was founded.

Without a doubt, core minyan-goers have a more serious commitment to community and to prayer than does the average synagogue member, who can rely on institutional staff to look after logistics and lead prayers. There are, however, ragged edges to these commitments. Most minyanim that stress prayer over other forms of Jewish communal life do not meet weekly (Hadar is now an exception). To one parent of a minyan-goer, this signals the unseriousness and "lack of commitment of a generation—they can't even commit to coming to shul every week." Steven M. Cohen finds, in "Highly Engaged Young American Jews: Contrasts in Generational Ethos" (published in 2010), that while Jews under forty are animated by "Jewish purpose"—creating minyanim and study opportunities, involving themselves in cultural and social-justice endeavors—they resist what they view as "coercive expectations": that is, such "once widely accepted normative standards . . . as in-marriage and support of Israel." To cite one statistic from the Spiritual Communities Study (2007), conducted by the S3K Synagogue Studies Institute in collaboration with Mechon Hadar: 58 percent of minyan-goers have had a romance with a non-Jew, 24 percent in the past year. Kaunfer stops short of endorsing the practice, but he does call this "integration with the non-Jewish world" an indication of the open-mindedness and cosmopolitanism of young minyan-goers. To those who think of these young Jews as the most committed of their generation, such numbers may indicate something altogether different.

In what is perhaps the most disturbing result of this antiauthoritarian impulse, independent minyanim have encouraged the growth of communities without rabbis, and sometimes without anyone above the threshold of don't-trust-anyone-over *x* (adjusted for my generation's protracted youth). Ironically, the word "*hadar*" is used in Leviticus (19:32) as an injunction: *Ve-hadarta p'nei zaken* ("Show respect for the elderly"). The tradition is full of instructions to align oneself with a rabbi, a mentor, a sage from the previous generation. On a more practical level, what does it mean, in an age of rabbinic unemployment, to value rabbis as teachers but not as *poskim* (halakhic jurists), spiritual guides, communal leaders, mentors, or models of integrated Torah learning?

It is true that independent minyanim have not dispensed with one particular role of the traditional rabbi: that of teacher (also the least well-remunerated role, it should be said). Hadar in particular was wise to realize that any prayer group will stagnate if not accompanied by a serious educational component. Judaism is a text-based tradition, and the texts—in different languages, ancient, legalistic—are not easy to understand. But here, too, Hadar is an exception.

Where, finally, do the minyanim stand in the rough spectrum of practicing American Judaism? The preference for Hebrew prayer and traditional liturgy is one indicator, and likely stems as much from the upbringing of most minyan-goers as it does from first principles. In maintaining the traditional Hebrew liturgy, Hadar and other communities are to be praised for appealing to the Orthodox, which the havurot never managed to do. Certainly the right wing of Hadar is left-wing Orthodox in observance. But still: Kaunfer is a dyed-in-the-wool, Cradle Conservative Jew, as are 46 percent of all independent-minyan-goers. It is no accident that of the three leaders of Yeshivat Hadar, both Kaunfer and Ethan Tucker are the sons of prominent Conservative rabbis, and Shai Held is the son of a late professor at the (Conservative) Jewish Theological Seminary.

Although none of them owes the Conservative movement lifelong fealty, Kaunfer's posture of disaffiliation from nothing-in-particular does feel disingenuous. As Riv-Ellen Prell writes, "no one has fully explained why the Conservative movement has been so successful at socializing Jews

ZERO to TEN

FIRST DECADES / NEW CENTURIES

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE COLLECTIONS AT THE CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY



Letter from Thomas Jefferson to Mordecai Manuel Noah, 1818, collection of Yeshiva University Museum

To mark the first decade of the Center for Jewish History, this exhibition draws on the collections of all five Partners — American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardi Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and Yeshiva University Museum — to reveal the historical impact and experiences of the first decades of centuries in the modern era. Works from the beginnings of the 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st centuries provide a window into changing technology, political activity and all aspects of Jewish heritage.

This exhibition also features some of the rarest items from the collections housed at the Center, including treasures such as Thomas Jefferson's historic letter denouncing anti-semitism and advocating religious freedom; a handwritten copy of Emma Lazarus' famous poem, "The New Colossus", which adorns the base of the Statue of Liberty; and a Torah scroll from the 18th century said to belong to the Ba'al Shem Tov.

ZERO TO 10:
FIRST DECADES/NEW CENTURIES
is a celebration of the Center's first ten years and is a testament to the strength of the partnership that has made this unique institution thrive. This exhibition is curated by Yeshiva University Museum and presented by the Center for Jewish History and its partners.

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who are interested in alternatives to the Conservative synagogue and advocates of transdenominationalism." The 2007 study found that minyan participants are "groomed, not bloomed Jews." Their renegade independence from the denominational label has been made possible by years of communal education, involvement, and training in denominational institutions, training for which the Conservative movement as a movement has reaped little reward.

If the independent-minyan movement is, at heart, a Conservative critique of Conservative synagogue life, does it not follow that the phenomenon is much less expansive, and less important, than is claimed? Furthermore, the innovations of independent minyanim are fully compatible with Conservative Judaism itself. Unlike the case of partnership minyanim, whose halakhic interpretations, when introduced institutionally, have led to discord within the Orthodox world, Conservative synagogues would like nothing more than to welcome independent minyanim, and their young members, into the fold. But the minyan movement has taken on a life of its own, abandoning rather than revitalizing the Conservative world.

But that is to suggest that the minyan movement also replicates certain core characteristics of Conservative (and Reform) Judaism, characteristics that, for many Jews—young, old, and in-between—are deeply troublesome in themselves. Here is Kaunfer:

> Questions like "Can you play musical instruments on Shabbat?" do not have a simple yes-or-no answer. Rather, the values you might assign to either outcome ("music enhances Shabbat" or "loud music is detrimental to Shabbat") find expression in the halakhic literature.

Such a non-normative concept of halakha is empowering mostly in the sense that it empowers people to think that they are keeping halakha whether or not they really are. The regnant ethos of our time is taken for Torah.

Heschel was himself in his 40's—just a few years older than Kaunfer—when he articulated the problem of prayer and the crisis of Jewish meaning to the leaders of the Conservative rabbinate. Kaunfer may think he has solved the problem, but really he has just re-articulated it.

Margot Lurie, a recent graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, is associate editor of Jewish Ideas Daily.

The Man's Learning Moves Me

BY JEFFREY SHOULSON

"I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED THE HOLY TONGUE": ISAAC CASAUBON, THE JEWS, AND A FORGOTTEN CHAPTER IN RENAISSANCE SCHOLARSHIP
by Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg
Harvard University Press, 368 pp., $35

Early in the introduction to their fascinating new study of the 16th-century French Huguenot classicist, Isaac Casaubon, Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg offer a characteristically witty account of their subject's astonishing fertility. "Casaubon produced seventeen children," they write, "as well as a vast stream of learned works, some of which he wrote while using one foot to rock the current infant's cradle." The picture they paint is both humanizing and reminiscent of a description I once heard of a young Anthony Grafton pacing the streets of Princeton, head down, reading a hefty tome, with a small child tucked under his beard in a sling strapped to his chest.

Grafton and Weinberg have both made essential contributions to the intellectual history of Isaac Casaubon's period. They are also the leading experts on two early modern scholars in whom Casaubon himself took an abiding interest: Grafton having written the authoritative treatment of Joseph Scaliger, and Weinberg having almost single-handedly recovered the crucial importance of Azariah de' Rossi. In fact, Grafton and Weinberg are not unlike Casaubon, using textual traces and literary records—books, letters, and especially marginalia—to reconstruct interior thinking, relationships, and habits of mind through exquisite and precise attention to detail coupled with a sympathetic imagination—identification, really—with their subject. What Grafton and Weinberg appear to have found in Isaac Casaubon is a kindred spirit, a humanist whose scholarly pursuits might have occasionally bordered on the obsessive, but who never immersed himself so deeply in that world that he stopped rocking the cradle.



Portrait of Isaac Casaubon by an unknown artist, late 16th or early 17th century. (Photo © National Portrait Gallery, London.)

This is not the first book-length treatment of Isaac Casaubon's life and work. Mark Pattison's biography of Casaubon, which first appeared in 1875, offered a portrait of a compulsive, ascetic, and intellectually (not to mention physically) desiccated scholar who very nearly read and wrote himself to death, poring over thousands of pages of classical materials that chained him to the past. Pattison's Casaubon sounded like his famous fictional namesake, the Reverend Edward Casaubon, whose obsessive search for the "key to all mythologies" in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (published a year before Pattison's biography) produced one of the most unsatisfying and loveless marriages in Victorian literature. Grafton and Weinberg are generous with their praise for Pattison's biography, even as they are critical of its view of their subject.

Grafton and Weinberg position their book in one of Pattison's blind spots, visible only now thanks to more recent developments in Renaissance intellectual history. They brilliantly build upon the many rich new studies of the last several decades that have uncovered the essential role played by Christian Hebraism—the study of Hebrew and Jewish texts by Christian scholars—in early modern philology, philosophy, historiography, theology, comparative religion, and even the natural sciences. Clearly indebted to the important recent scholarship on figures like Johann Buxtorf, the explicator of Jewish customs; Sebastian Münster, the Hebrew philologist; John Selden, the legal scholar; and others, what distinguishes Grafton and Weinberg's assessment of Casaubon's scholarly projects—and what marks it as the beginning of a new phase in the study of Christian Hebraism—is that Casaubon was very clearly *not* of the same caliber in the area of Hebrew study as these scholars. His knowledge of Hebraica was secondary and instrumental to his real expertise in Latin and Greek, particularly the Greek of the early Christian era.

What Casaubon knew of the Hebrew language and of Jewish writings he picked up intermittently, as opportunities presented themselves. To be sure, Casaubon's Hebrew was far superior to that of the vast majority of his Christian contemporaries. But

he conducted nothing like the systematic study of Jewish practices and rituals that Buxtorf had compiled, of the Hebrew language that Münster had produced, or of Jewish civil or marriage laws that Selden had assembled. Grafton and Weinberg's reconstruction of Casaubon's Hebrew and Judaic library reveals an idiosyncratic collection of texts, ranging from the essential, like Elijah Levita's *Grammatica Hebraica* or Buxtorf's *Synagoga Iudaica*, to the unusual, like several different Sephardic *siddurim* and *machzorim*. But there are also noteworthy gaps. He possessed no complete rabbinic Bible, very few midrashic or Talmudic books, and no Kabbalistic texts.

It is precisely *because* Casaubon was a second-tier Hebraist that Grafton and Weinberg's recovery of his study of Hebraica, and its role in his larger intellectual project, is so important. If the last several decades have left little doubt that Christian Hebraism was a central feature of Renaissance thought, Grafton and Weinberg have now begun to show how this helps to illuminate and enlarge our appreciation of scholars and divines beyond the core group of specialists. It is certainly not the key to all mythologies, but Casaubon's interest in Hebraic studies becomes, in the expert hands of Grafton and Weinberg, a means for appreciating how Hebraism shaped the philological, theological, and historiographical endeavors for which Casaubon was celebrated.

"I *Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue*"—the title taken from one of Casaubon's letters to Buxtorf in 1610—is a gorgeously produced volume; more importantly, it is accessibly written. I confess a combination of admiration and envy for the astonishing textual detective work on display. Casaubon and his scholarly peers in the Republic of Letters lived in the rarified polyglot atmosphere of Latin epistolography and Greek marginalia, but Grafton and Weinberg do not expect such linguistic expertise from their readers. They provide lucid, even lively, translations of all of their texts (with the originals down below in the footnotes for ambitious readers). The inclusion of a generous sampling of manuscript pages and annotated printed pages makes the discussions all the more tantalizing and alive, even as they frustrate the reader who lacks the capacity to make sense of what so often looks like the proverbial chicken scrawl. As we read his letters and notes with their help, we watch Casaubon, and by extension, Grafton and Weinberg, "thinking in a richly historical way about . . . ancient book[s]." Writing and reading seem to be how he connected with others, not just those in the past, but even in the present. Grafton and Weinberg repeatedly and plausibly refer to Joseph Scaliger, for example, as Casaubon's best friend, even though the two appear never to have met in person.

It was his historical imagination, rooted in textual encounter, that was Casaubon's great strength; but it also led to some particularly intriguing relationships with living Jews, two of whom are the subject of the book's final chapter. Here Grafton and Weinberg undertake perhaps the most speculative task for any intellectual historian. It is one thing to reconstruct the development of an idea. It is yet another matter to use textual traces to reconstruct a set of human relations. Such a reconstruction is, however, especially important since it offers the reader a glimpse into how interdependent and integrated Casaubon's religious beliefs, intellectual passions, and feelings for his subjects were. In a word, Grafton and Weinberg recover some of the human in this important humanist. Out of the texts and textures of correspondences and marginalia, they weave a pair of compelling stories. The first is about Casaubon's relationship with a Jewish convert to Christianity, Julius Conradus Otto, who served as professor of Hebrew, Syriac, and Aramaic at the Altdorf Academy in Nuremberg. The exchange of letters between Casaubon and Otto, all composed in a stylized, formal, and formulaic Hebrew and written in strikingly beautiful, painstakingly printed, vocalized Hebrew letters, reveal a touching picture of a scholar hungry for access to new books and for instruction in Hebraica. Casaubon went out of his way to give the benefit of the doubt to Otto despite having been warned repeatedly by others who knew the convert better than he that his trust in Otto's scholarly capacity to perform all the work he promised might not have been so well-founded.

Jewish learning moved him as a scholar, a rigorous thinker who could see a human face across a religious divide and feel a sense of empathy, even compassion.



Letter from Isaac Casaubon to Julius Conradus Otto, 1606. (Photo courtesy of the British Library.)

The disappointment Casaubon surely felt when Otto failed to live up to his promises of greater insight into Jewish mysticism (a subject about which Casaubon had persistent doubts) or improvements to the Hebrew version of the New Testament was scant, however, compared to the sense of betrayal he must have felt in his relationship with another Jew, Jacob Barnet. What we have known until now about Barnet has come primarily from accounts written by Englishmen, all of whom described a Jew of considerable erudition and charisma who had led his English hosts and sponsors to believe that he wished to convert to Christianity but who, at the last minute (celebratory sermons had even been prepared for the festive occasion), reneged on that promise and fled the scene. He was eventually caught and spent the next two months in prison before being released and exiled from England.

Late in life, Casaubon, the embattled Huguenot, appears to have found a church that followed his own sense of the middle path when he arrived in England in 1610 and became acquainted with King James I and representatives of the Church of England, including Lancelot Andrewes, with whom he developed a strong intellectual friendship. Casaubon, we now learn from Grafton and Weinberg, took more than a passing interest in Barnet during his sojourn in England, having hosted him personally for a period of time and having studied rabbinic texts rather intensively, if briefly, with him. Though they had parted ways some months before, Casaubon continued to follow Barnet's career with considerable attention and was distressed, like most of his fellow Protestants, at the news of Barnet's "apostasy." Yet Casaubon's disappointment took a different form than that of most, whose attacks on the general mendacity of Jews were as vitriolic as they were predictable. Although he could not sanction Barnet's stubborn unwillingness to accept providential Christian salvation, Casaubon nevertheless saw in Barnet a man after his own heart, dedicated to a life of books and study. In one of several pleas he offered on Barnet's behalf, Casaubon wrote directly of his sympathy for a fellow scholar: *movet me tamen hominis eruditio* (the man's learning moves me).

Grafton and Weinberg's final chapter vividly shows how Casaubon's own readings, which were clearly undertaken with polemical and theological targets in mind, were informed by his encounters with these Jews, who tipped him off about useful passages in Jewish writings and how best to read them. Their learning did indeed move him in new directions. Among other things, they provided him with ammunition in what Grafton and Weinberg wryly characterize as "the longest book review, and one of the most negative, written in a polemical age," his extended and unfinished critique of Cardinal Cesare Baronio's tendentiously Catholic history of the church, *Annales Ecclesiastici*. But Jewish learning also moved him as a scholar, a rigorous thinker who could see a human face across a religious divide and feel a sense of empathy, even compassion.

Grafton and Weinberg have clearly been moved by their subject, too. They have been driven to important new insights into the role of Hebraic study in early modernity; and they have been moved by the commitment to learning, and a republic of humane letters, that they have recovered in Casaubon's life and writings.

Jeffrey Shoulson teaches English and Judaic Studies at the University of Miami. He is completing a book on representations of conversion in early modern England.

No Joke

BY MICHAEL KIMMAGE

NEMESIS
by Philip Roth
Houghton Mifflin, 304 pp., $26

Nemesis is unlike anything that Philip Roth has ever written. Humor is an absence and God a presence. American history, which normally captivates Roth when writing about Newark, the central setting in *Nemesis*, goes unexplored. The historical rhythms are there, but they are grim and inscrutable, hardly the melody of post-war progress and plenty that fascinated Roth in his literary youth. The splendid self-making documented in such later novels as *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist,* and *The Human Stain* has given way to "the force of circumstance," to the unjust, unknowable dictates of fate. The novel's protagonist, Bucky Cantor, does not pursue a new self. Only reluctantly does he pursue self-gratification; he is neo-Victorian in his attachment to duty and very much the aspiring Jewish hero. For all of this he is punished by his heartless God the way a pleasure-seeking rake might be punished in a morality play.

Roth has not returned to the place of his famous debut *Goodbye, Columbus* because, as a novelist, he has never really left Newark, New Jersey. One section of *American Pastoral* is titled "Paradise Remembered" and another "Paradise Lost." The paradise in question is Newark before 1967, where immigrants made their homes and survived the Great Depression. In the 1940s, their children struggled to win a just war, and then devoted themselves to the wholesome labor of success. In *Nemesis*, the streets are the familiar Newark streets; Weequahic the familiar Newark neighborhood. Even the patriotic wartime ambiance is familiar from the opening pages of *American Pastoral*. Yet the city itself is strangely terrifying.

Nor is the Jewish-American world of *Nemesis* the same world that Roth has previously chronicled. The novels after *Goodbye, Columbus* can be read as meditations on Jewish-American freedom. Never before in the history of the Diaspora had Jews been as free as these post-war American citizens—the Patimkins, the Portnoys, the Zuckermans. The Zuckerman novels, from *The Ghost Writer* through *The Human Stain*, portray Newark progeny breaking free from Newark, breaking free, really, from the limiting dictates of Jewish history. Mickey Sabbath, in *Sabbath's Theater*, takes this freedom to its logical extreme. As a youth, he leaves Newark for the open seas, rather like Melville's Ishmael; but he is an Ishmael without tact or piety, tasting every pleasure, risking every joke, and pursuing every infidelity.

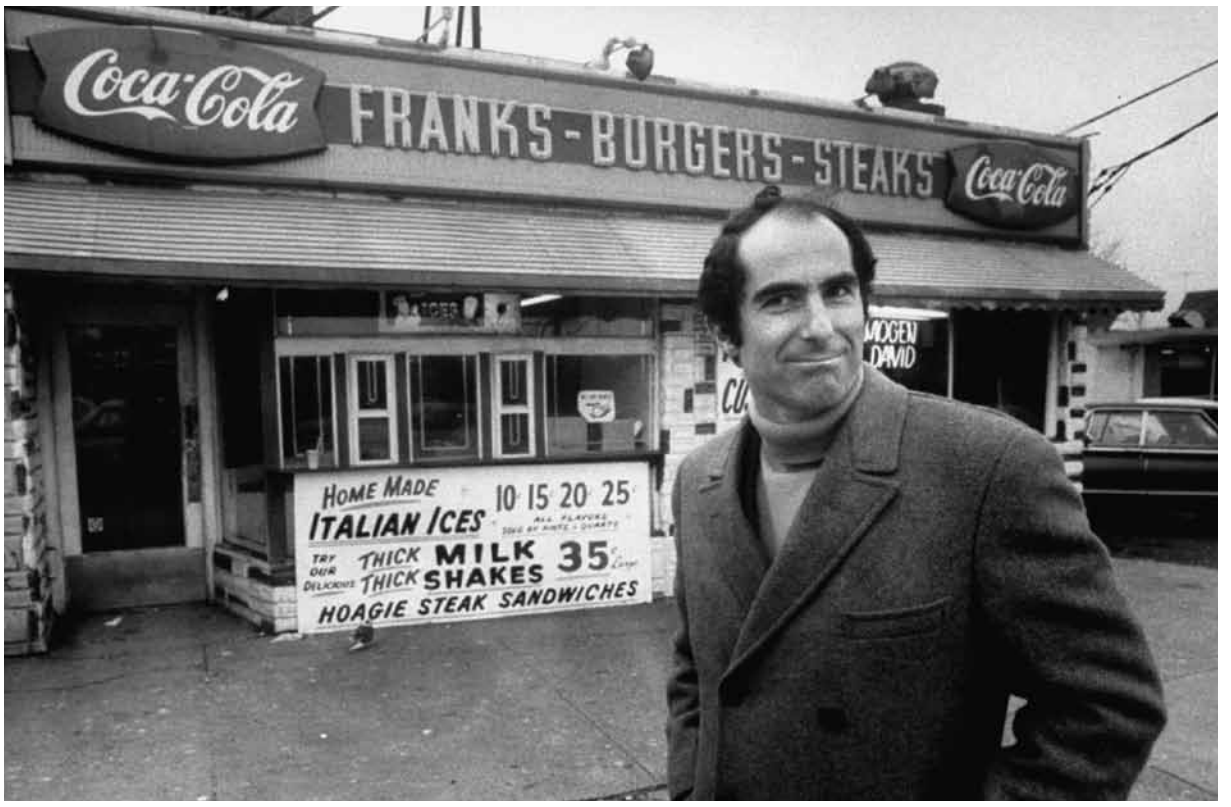
The Plot Against America, a counterfactual novel of an America approaching fascism, was Roth's first step in the direction of Jewish fear, back in the direction of "Europe." *Nemesis* is even less conciliatory, and its fears are more vividly pictured. Roth describes a mother worrying about her children's safety, "a small, dark woman laden with fear, her face contorted with emotion." At the height of a polio epidemic, a radical quarantine is discussed for Newark, with rumors that the Weequahic Jews will be restricted to a ghetto.

In *Nemesis*, Bucky Cantor is an American with the mentality and physique of a mid-century Zionist. His grandfather had endured anti-Semitism in Newark: "the violent aggression against Jews that was commonplace in the city during his boyhood did much to form his view of life and his grandson's in turn." Bucky is a strong, athletic man whose dream is to teach physical education at Newark's Weequahic High School. He wants to teach the students there "what his grandfather had taught him: toughness and determination, to be physically brave and physically fit and never to allow themselves to be pushed around or, just because they knew how to use their brains, to be defamed as Jewish weaklings or sissies." This dream compensates for what Bucky cannot do on Europe's battlefields, due to his poor eyesight.

Exiled from World War II, Bucky finds himself imperiled in peaceful America. Occasional air-raid sirens merge with the more frequent "sound of the ambulance sirens crisscrossing Newark in the night." The polio virus terrifies Newark, and it devastates Bucky. First it murders the children at the local playground for which he is responsible, then it strikes at a summer camp where he is working. Finally, Bucky himself contracts the virus, suggesting that he has been its carrier all along. Polio disfigures Bucky's body and so inundates him with guilt that he separates from his fiancée, growing into an embittered, isolated adulthood. In the verdict of the novel's narrator—a Newark boy who contracted polio in 1944—Bucky is "one of those people taken to pieces by his times."

Roth's previous four novels—*The Dying Animal*, *Everyman*, *Indignation*, and *The Humbling*—are each novella-length essays on mortality, and, though here the protagonist does not die, so is *Nemesis*. As in these other late works, the prose of *Nemesis* is sparse, but it also contains moments of great lyric beauty. When Bucky, his mind filled with death, goes from overheated Newark to a summer camp in the Poconos, he is overwhelmed with joy. It is the basic joy of being outdoors, of being young, and of being engaged to a beautiful woman. For the first time he feels "that commingling of warmth and coolness that is a July mountain morning." Amid nature's bounty, he lives "the rapturous intoxication of renewal."

The conclusion of the novel, set in 1971, outlines Bucky's barren spiritual life. Beneath the Maccabean athlete and the boyish nickname is a man who resembles Kafka's K., disempowered and despairing, and, as with K., part of Bucky's predicament lies within him. Even when healthy, Bucky "was sure he would come down with polio and lose everything." Guilty of nothing, he is inclined "to convert tragedy into guilt." The burden of suffering without crime leaves him a "maniac of



Philip Roth visiting Newark, 1968. (Photo © Bob Peterson/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.)

the why." In sum, "such a person is condemned."

Medically speaking, the polio epidemic begins in obscurity. As far as *Nemesis* is concerned, however, the epidemic begins when a carload of Italian-Americans visit a playground in a Jewish neighborhood and deliberately spit on the ground, intending to spread the virus. The ironic parallels between polio and the war, between good fortune and bad luck, between Europe and America develop apace. Bucky's bad eyesight saves him from the war but leaves him vulnerable to infection in Newark. He cannot fathom the contingencies of fate, why some children died "because they'd spent the summer in Newark" and why others "were flourishing because they were spending the summer in Indian Hill," a bucolic summer camp. When one of his friends dies in the war, he cannot grasp this either. Gradually, the polio epidemic and the war merge, provoking Bucky into a theological rage.

Roth's previous four novels are each novella-length essays on mortality, and, though here the protagonist does not die, so is *Nemesis*.

Bucky's abiding relationship to God has no precedent in Roth's fiction. Usually Roth's heroes swim in a sea of atheism; they may be robustly Jewish, obsessed with Jewish questions, trailed by Jewish families, mired in a Jewish milieu, or sensitive to the thrill of being Jewish, but Neil Klugman, David Kepesh, and Coleman Silk are not obsessed with God. They know that he is dead and live securely within that knowledge. Bucky is different, though his theology consists of "hating God." He hates God for a cruelty that includes the "cold-blooded murder of children."

Nemesis is a sternly serious book with only a few moments of humor. Roth lingers over an Indian-themed summer camp, where East Coast Jewish kids cover themselves in feathers, invoke tribal spirits, and chant around the campfire. The boys "carried deer antlers before them, made of crooked tree limbs bound together . . . [and] set out by the light of the fire to hunt Mishi-Mokwa, the Big Bear. Mishi-Mokwa was impersonated by the largest boy in camp, Jerome Hochberger . . . wrapped in somebody's mother's old fur coat that he'd pulled up over his head." Even here, the humor is subdued. It is as if Roth lets his protagonist's punishing sobriety set the tone for *Nemesis*:

> He was largely a humorless person, articulate enough but with barely a trace of wit, who never in his life had spoken satirically or with irony, who rarely cracked a joke or spoke in jest—someone instead haunted by an exacerbated sense of duty but endowed with little force of mind, and for that he had paid a high price in assigning the gravest meaning to his story, one that, intensifying over time, perniciously magnified his misfortune.

The unsmiling author of *Nemesis*, one of America's greatest comic writers, cannot have given up on humor. In the 1960s, after publishing *Goodbye, Columbus* at the age of 26 and introducing his readers to the comedy of Jewish suburbia, Roth wrote two sternly serious (and not very well received) novels, *Letting Go* and *When She Was Good*. The work that gave Roth his unshakeable reputation as a "sit-down comedian"—a phrase Roth has used to describe Kafka—was *Portnoy's Complaint,* to which *Nemesis* is an unlikely companion volume.

Like Bucky, Alexander Portnoy antagonizes himself. His suffering is his guilt, his guilt his suffering. From suffering, as from guilt, there is no relief and no exit for either of these two Newark sons. Alexander Portnoy's suffering is also ridiculous, and it is here that *Portnoy's Complaint* and *Nemesis* diverge. Portnoy is successful, intelligent, and handsome. He is at ease in the American paradise, just as Americans are at ease with him, and this makes him miserable. "I am the son in the Jewish joke," he famously observes to his analyst, "only it ain't no joke!" Bucky does not tolerate or inhabit jokes; he is a tragedy uncomplicated by laughter.

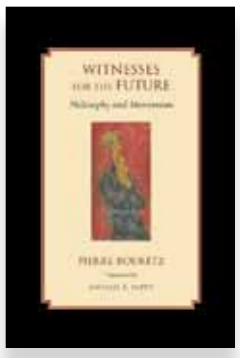
Michael Kimmage, an associate professor of history at the Catholic University of America, is the author of The Conservative Turn: Lionel Trilling, Whittaker Chambers and the Lessons of Anti-Communism. *He is currently working on a book about Philip Roth and the city of Newark.*

Witnesses for the Future

Philosophy and Messianism

Pierre Bouretz

translated by Michael B. Smith



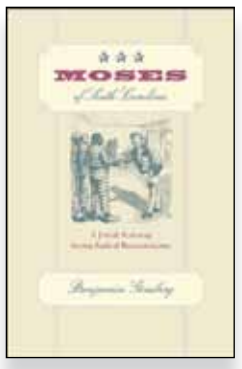
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Benjamin Ginsberg

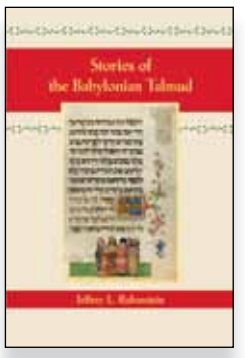


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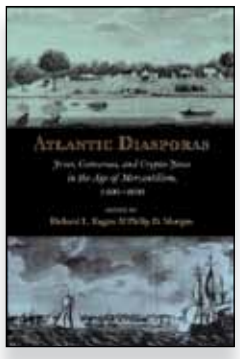
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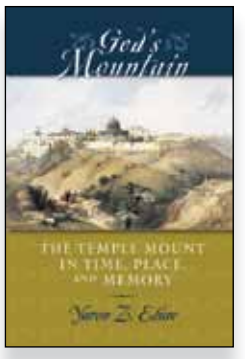
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The Language of Tradition

BY ISRAEL BELFER
TRANSLATED BY RUTHIE BLUM LEIBOWITZ

SAFAH LA-NE'EMANIM: MAHSHAVOT 'AL HA-MASORET (A LANGUAGE FOR THE FAITHFUL: REFLECTIONS ON TRADITION)
by Meir Buzaglo
Mandel Foundation and Keter Books, 231 pp., 89 NIS

Throughout its history, the secular State of Israel has been notoriously inhospitable to non-Orthodox branches of Judaism. Despite decades of strenuous efforts on the Israeli scene, the outposts of Reform and Conservative Judaism consequently have very little to show. From a distance, Israel may thus seem to be a predominantly irreligious country with a vigorous Orthodox minority. But in reality the situation is not so simple. As a host of social-scientific studies have demonstrated, there are as many as two million people, more than a third of the total Jewish population, who define themselves as neither secular nor Orthodox but *masorti,* or traditional.

Both secular and Orthodox Israelis tend to disparage this rather amorphous brand of Judaism. It can certainly seem to be a kind of social way station between Orthodoxy and secularism, lacking the cohesion of a bona fide belief system or an ideology. (The modest Conservative movement in Israel is often subjected to similar criticism.) Meir Buzaglo sees things differently. His new book, *Safah la-ne'emanim: Mahshavot 'al ha-masoret* (A Language for the Faithful: Reflections on Tradition), is an argument for the spiritual and intellectual integrity of moderate traditionalism. Drawing on his own Moroccan heritage no less than on the resources of late 20th-century philosophy, he seeks to show that it is precisely this looser mode of allegiance to tradition, a quasi-organic tethering to the past, that can both mediate between seemingly irreconcilable camps and hold its own.

Buzaglo's brief for tradition reverses the usual mode of procedure: Instead of treating tradition as a set of arguments (philosophical, legal, theological) to be examined, Buzaglo approaches it as a set of lived practices that one can attempt to understand, but not dissect. It is a form of life (to invoke Wittgenstein, whose name comes up several times in the book) with its own internal logic. Buzaglo opposes any characterization of tradition as resistance to change or as the antithesis of modernity, but sees it rather as the embodiment of loyalty, which is "the necessary condition for every revolution in the Jewish world."

The loyalty that Buzaglo affirms is directed less immediately to the God of Israel than to the generations of Jews who have testified to His existence and endeavored to live in accordance with His will. Their faith that this God revealed the Torah to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai is, he maintains, one that can no longer be fortified by means of the historical claims that Yehuda Halevi or even Samson Raphael Hirsch considered to be irrefutable or, indeed, by any other rational argument. But this is not a crucial loss, according to Buzaglo, who writes, "the loyal believer does not need to be certain that the revelation at Sinai actually took place. It is enough for him that it is not impossible and that there is no decisive refutation of it on the horizon."

What is of vital importance to the traditional Jew is not some past event or its mere transmission in the form of information but the age-old conveyance (*mesirah*) of tradition, the construction of the chain of which he himself is just the latest link. "The world of one's parents is the key to Judaism," a key that opens the door to things that are of great value not solely because they are inherited from one's ancestors. "Figures like Rabbi Akiva, Rashi, Maimonides, and Yehuda Halevi are the central pillars of Judaism, and it is hard to refuse the invitation to join in such

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company." And who knows what will happen when one does so? The traditionalist's readiness to serve as a link in the chain connecting his forebears with the future is an expression of the ancient Israelite response to revelation, *na'asseh ve-nishmah* ("we will do and we will listen"). His loyalty, the actions that he performs, and the spiritual elevation that he attains may grant meaningful insights "almost circumstantially," as a result of which the dramatic "question of what actually happened at Mount Sinai fades away."

Instead of treating tradition as a set of arguments to be examined, Buzaglo approaches it as a set of lived practices that one can attempt to understand, but not dissect.

Buzaglo's allegiance to tradition does not come at the expense of openness to the outside world. In one chapter, he constructs a dialogue between Isaiah and Jeremiah's prophetic calls for *tikkun*, societal reform, and the ontological inquiry of Parmenides and Plato. In another, he reads the book of Ecclesiastes in conjunction with the Bhagavad Gita in order to understand what kind of actions produce happiness. The lesson Buzaglo draws from these encounters of Jewish sources with various foreign traditions is that Judaism is fully capable of negotiating with others. Moreover, those who undertake such negotiations need not worry that their uniquely Jewish obligations are being "crowded out."

Buzaglo himself takes these obligations very seriously, and not only in theory. A professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University, he is no ivory tower academic. Born in Morocco, he immigrated as a young child to Israel, where he grew up in the working-class Haifa suburb of Kiryat Yam. He is actively involved in Ma'ayanot, an organization focused on the education of underprivileged Israelis, and the Education Ministry's National Task Force for the Advancement of Education in Israel. In 2002 he was a signer of the Kinneret Covenant, an important step in the ongoing effort to build a broad Israeli consensus on fundamental questions of identity and politics. In the cultural sphere, he is, among other things, a member of the academic advisory committee of the website Hazmanah le-Piyut (An Invitation to Piyut), an attempt to revive interest in medieval liturgical poetry. It comes as no surprise, then, that the third and final section of his book applies the results of the preceding discussions to several aspects of the modern Jewish situation, among them: the Holocaust and national revival, political independence, ethnic tension in Israel, and "Judaism vs. Israelism."

Buzaglo does not portray the present state of traditionalism as ideal, but he does sketch an ideal type: the person who is settled in his tradition and heeds what it says, neither imposing his own judgment on it nor surrendering his own individuality. Tradition, according to Buzaglo, requires a common framework that can sustain the weight of disagreement, allowing its members to hold opposing opinions.

The book does not include a recipe for solving the conundrum of Israeliness and Judaism through tradition. Rather, it proposes a way to situate oneself in the intricate web of fundamental problems in the Israeli-Jewish sphere. It offers a language for self-expression that is not bound by the chains of philosophical or religious dogma—a language that mediates between the old and the new, and between loyalty and innovation. Such traditionalism can, moreover, restore the relevance of language, poetry and learning in an age succeeding the one that discarded the Torah in favor of a socialist and Zionist ethos.

Buzaglo practices what he preaches. He presents a liturgical poem composed in Safed in the 16th century by Israel Najara (remembered today, if at all, as the author of the familiar Sabbath hymn "Ya Ribon"). In this poem ("Be Happy and Rejoice") and the soft and brooding melody to which it has traditionally been sung by Morrocan Jews, Buzaglo detects, its joyous words notwithstanding, a deep, unsatisfied longing for deliverance. "For hundreds of years," Buzaglo writes, this 16th-century poem "remained suspended," calling out for a response, until another poet, the last in a long line of Moroccan *paytanim*, our author's own father David Buzaglo, didn't simply interpret it but completed it in his own way—with another poem, one in which yearning is tempered and restrained by humility. "His addition became part of the tradition, and thus the tradition is built upon tradition that is built upon tradition." And, as he doesn't have to say, Buzaglo's own reflections on these two complicated poems constitute yet another link in the tradition. In an age in which excessive liberalism and religious extremism have joined forces and effectively negated genuine open-mindedness, when many people increasingly feel suffocated by the polarized state of affairs in Israel, Buzaglo thus demonstrates that loyalty to tradition as a tangible possibility for the individual and the community is a refreshing option.

This is an important book, deeply felt and deeply argued, but one wonders whether it will have the cultural impact to which Buzaglo clearly aspires. There are certainly aspects of this book that could stand in the way of its success. On the one hand, Buzaglo's interesting philosophical arguments are liable to be perceived as too abstract and theoretical to illustrate the naturalness of loyalty. On the other hand, his description of Jewish tradition's porous borders may be perceived by some as far too open-ended. The eclectic range of articles and subjects contained in the book also leaves it vulnerable to the criticism that he hasn't provided a conventionally structured argument. However, the author's personal example, together with his positive approach to the thorniest questions of Jewish and Israeli identity, might overcome such a critique by means of a different method, born of tradition and not an academic discipline.

Israel Belfer is a Ph.D. candidate in the Science, Technology, and Society (STS) program at Bar-Ilan University.

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Navigations, the English title on the copyright page of Elazar Stern's recent memoir, does not really capture the flavor of the book's Hebrew title. *Masa kumtah* is the exhausting trek that an Israeli combat soldier must undertake at the end of basic training, before receiving the special beret, or *kumtah*, that he will subsequently wear. But this is when *masa* is spelled with a *samekh* and an *ayin*. When spelled with a *sin* and an *aleph,* as it is in Stern's title, it means "burden." The author, an ex-general whose beret was paratrooper-red, is telling his readers that he has taken a long and difficult road.

The product of a Religious Zionist upbringing, Stern grew up in Tel Aviv, joined the paratroopers, became the commanding officer of a platoon, and rose through the ranks to become the commander of the IDF officer school, the Chief Education Officer, and, in his last post, the IDF Manpower Chief. He has written a book in which he tells us just how much better he has always understood things than have many generals, most rabbis, and all politicians. While Stern doesn't pretend to have won all of his battles, he is sure that he was always on the right side. The fact that he was indeed right in most cases hardly makes this any less irritating. "Tell me if I'm right," he quotes himself saying to former general and former deputy head of the Mossad, Amiram Levin, only to receive the predictable answer: "you're right." Throughout this book, people either admit in advance that Stern is right, admit it after the fact, or are condemned by the author for their refusal to see the light.

In the course of their gyrations and splits, the political representatives of the Religious Zionist sector have lost their importance.

Not surprisingly, quite a few Israelis, most of them Religious Zionists, consider Stern to be a pain in the neck. For many years, he had been a source of pride within the Religious Zionist community as a prominent member of the first generation of *shomer shabbat* generals. As he made his way through the ranks and units in which he was serving, Stern wore his *kippah* unabashedly, never shying away from his background or camouflaging his beliefs and practices. On the contrary, he often displayed what many perceive as the superiority complex shared by many in the Religious Zionist camp, their sense of themselves as the true heirs of the original Zionist pioneers.

Yet even as he was pursuing his military career, Religious Zionism was changing in ways that made him the contrarian that that he is today. Attracted by its more stringent practices, Religious Zionists were sliding toward ultra-Orthodoxy in halakhic practice. At the same time, their ever-intensifying devotion to the land of Israel had eroded the signifi-

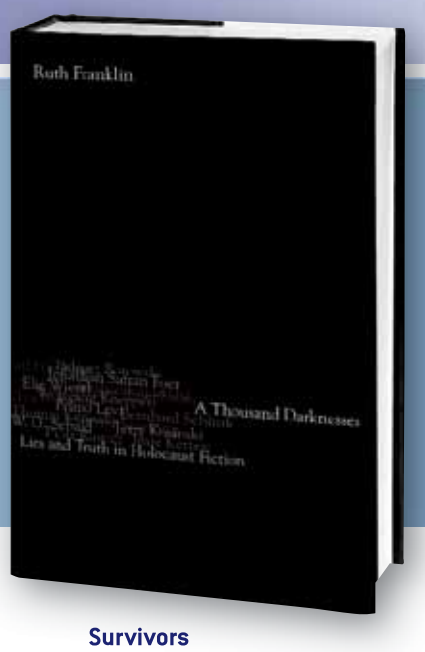
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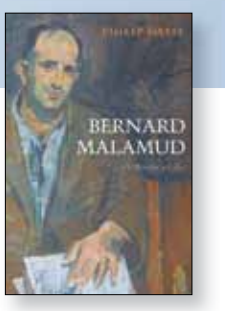
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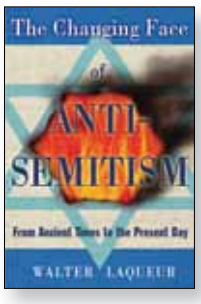
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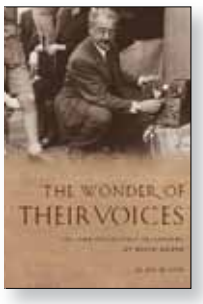












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cance—even holiness—they had once attributed to the state. Stern, who remained religious and Zionist in equal measure, discovered that his performance of what he considered to be his duties to the State of Israel brought him foes of a new kind. After being shoved around by Orthodox bullies while praying at the Western Wall, he has sometimes even needed bodyguards to protect him from his coreligionists. Distinguished rabbis have decried him as "criminal" and "evil."

Yet Stern's enemies haven't been able to chase him off and he has no thought of abandoning his community. "I continue to send my children through the Religious Zionist educational system and would like to see my grandchildren growing up within these institutions," he writes. But this hasn't stopped him from criticizing the rabbis who currently lead those institutions.

Where have they gone wrong? Stern tells us about a meeting between military men and some leaders of the settlement movement in 2005, in the days preceding Israel's pullout from the Gaza Strip. This was a very tense period, filled with fears of civil war. As the general in charge of military manpower, Stern was at the eye of the storm. This wasn't easy, especially not for a regular worshipper at a synagogue full of people outraged at what they regarded as a disastrous governmental action. Stern did his best to remind such people that "a day will come . . . when we will continue to need one another. To live, to move forward, to build . . ." When he visited Rabbi Rafi Peretz, the head of the Atzmona Yeshiva in the Gaza Strip, his wife Dorit asked Peretz's wife how they were preparing the kids for the coming trauma of evacuation. "What pullout? It will never happen!" Peretz's wife shot back.

There were also formal meetings between the military and the leaders of the settler and the Religious Zionist movement. "The goal was to understand the problems and to lessen the potential for violence," Stern explains. That was his goal, at any rate. The rabbis who were calling on religious soldiers to disobey orders, or threatening to issue such a call, had other things in mind. Warned at one meeting that a mass refusal to obey orders could lead to the "military or even the state breaking apart," Rabbi Elyakim Levanon, a distinguished resident of the hard-line Elon Moreh settlement, had a telling response: "So be it . . . Maybe it's a step toward *geulah* [redemption]."

When push finally came to shove in 2005, the military and the state held together, but the threats have not ceased. What will happen in the event of some future evacuation from the West Bank will depend on many factors, including the timing, the public mood, and the reason for a pullout. But one thing has become clear: the rabbis of the Religious Zionist camp will play a much more important role than will its politicians or generals.

"Israel's Religious Right and the Question of Settlements," a Crisis Group Middle East Report, describes the National Religious Party (NRP), the political arm of Religious Zionism, as the main national-religious actor on the Israeli scene after 1967. The report provides an accurate account of the twists and turns the party has taken over several decades, concluding with an explanation of its division, after the withdrawal from Gaza, into "the National Union, an amalgam of far-right, pro-settler groups, and Jewish Home—New NRP, a more moderate lay faction."

While technically without fault, this description understates a crucial point: in the course of their gyrations and splits, the political representatives of the Religious Zionist sector have lost their importance. A group that was once led by political men (and it was always men) of substance is currently represented by relative nonentities. Their constituency may vote for them for lack of better options, but if the community follows anyone, it follows rabbis such as Elyakim Levanon.



Major General Elazar Stern visiting the family of abducted soldier Ehud Goldwasser, July 16, 2008. (Photo © Jack Guez/AFP/Getty Images.)

Levanon's views on security and foreign relations, his grasp of democratic procedure and state affairs are, to say the least, not particularly well-informed. But as Stern's book makes abundantly clear, he cannot be ignored. When Levanon argued that a woman who wanted to have an impact on public affairs in her settlement should encourage her husband to run for office in her stead, he provoked a barrage of protest, but he also received support from some fellow rabbis. One of them was the distinguished Rabbi Dov Lior of Kiryat Arba. Viewing the issue as part of the larger question about "women in the workplace," Lior concluded that a woman can leave the home to work only if there is no other choice, but would be better advised to stay home, if possible.

Lior revealed his position in a pamphlet called *Giluy Da'at*, which is distributed in thousands of synagogues around Israel. *Giluy Da'at* and dozens of similar publications have a captive audience consisting in large part of restless synagogue-goers and religious news hounds who can't watch TV or surf the net on Shabbat. I read these pamphlets myself every week, with some pleasure and curiosity, but with a mounting sense of dismay as well. I would imagine that Elazar Stern reads them with similar unease.

Ten years ago, Professor Kimmy Caplan calculated that the number of synagogue pamphlets printed every weekend in Israel to be about 1.5 million, which is more than the total number of copies printed for the weekend editions of all three of Israel's main newspapers. And while the newspapers have lost ground over the past decade, the number of pamphlets has continued to grow. Three years ago, Yair Ettinger of *Ha'aretz* counted more than one hundred of them. The largest, *Shabat Be-Shabato*, prints more than 70,000 copies every week.

Rabbis of all (Orthodox) stripes write for these pamphlets. They take positions on halakhic matters (Question: Can a woman wear a *tallit*? Answer: No); personal matters (Question: Should I date a secular Israeli who has a heart of gold for the purpose of getting married to him? Answer: Think about it twice; it will make your life complicated); and national affairs (Israel should not apologize for the flotilla debacle!). There is nothing inherently wrong with this, of course, except for the fact that many of the writers seem to believe that their strong political opinions on domestic and foreign policy have some special value because, well, because they happen to be rabbis.

Elazar Stern has been repeatedly caught in the middle, between the state and the rabbis, both ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) and Religious Zionist. For instance, when he tried to simplify the process of conversion for Russian immigrants serving in the IDF, the official Israeli Chief Rabbinate would not cooperate. Once the pride of Religious Zionism, the Rabbinate is now controlled by the ultra-Orthodox, who oppose the drafting of women altogether and consequently make it difficult for female immigrants serving in Israel's army to convert. "I was not surprised, I was shocked!" writes Stern. According to the Rabbinate, "you're either a Jew or you're a soldier in the IDF!"

But even with the more moderate rabbis who remained closer to the outlook of old-style Religious Zionism, Stern couldn't make much headway. He met with four of them about another conversion case, "and they all agreed with me on principle that this [IDF conversion] should be done." But they were still adamant at piling up more demands, insisting that the process be longer and harder than what Stern had in mind. "I explained that if the rabbis insist on . . . checking what exactly the mother of the convert's girlfriend is up to, and if she turns on lights on Shabbat, then in my opinion, in fifty years there won't be a Jewish state." This wasn't exactly a rigorous demographic prediction, but it ought to have made clear to the rabbis that broader considerations should be in play when conversion is the subject. Sadly, even moderate Religious Zionist rabbis have demonstrated little ability to think strategically about the problems of the community they lead and of Israel in general. They seem to be much more concerned with proving that they can be as rigorous as the ultra-Orthodox.

Against rabbis of a very different type, the leaders of the "Hesder yeshivas," Stern has a different set of complaints. These yeshivas, which offer a program combining an abbreviated term of military service with years of Talmudic study, have for many years been a sacred cow, esteemed by the majority of Israelis, religious and secular alike, for their singular contributions to the strength of the country's military forces. Stern is now worried, however, that the heads of those yeshivas "are stealing our

soldiers." The number of religious soldiers joining the Hesder program instead of "regular" military service has grown exponentially in recent decades, and Stern thinks that this is one example of an "ultra-Orthodox approach" that should have no place in the lives of Religious Zionists. He thinks Hesder yeshivas should be reserved for a small intellectual elite rather than providing something of a haven for thousands of youngsters whose parents want them to serve shorter, hence safer, terms in the army. Moreover, he argues that all Hesder students, while in uniform, should serve in "mixed" units, alongside the "regular" soldiers, rather than in segregated all-religious units:

> I believe this encounter is important to both sides: the secular soldier who never really met a *dati* [religious person], and similarly to the other side. In my view, it is important that the religious soldiers meet the secular soldiers, since they will also benefit from it. We will all benefit from it.

This makes good civic sense, but the heads of the Hesder yeshivas balked. Wishing to keep the students together under their leadership, they argued that maintaining the strict religious lifestyle in a mixed unit is more difficult. When Stern tried to force the change upon them, he was publicly "held in infamy and contempt."

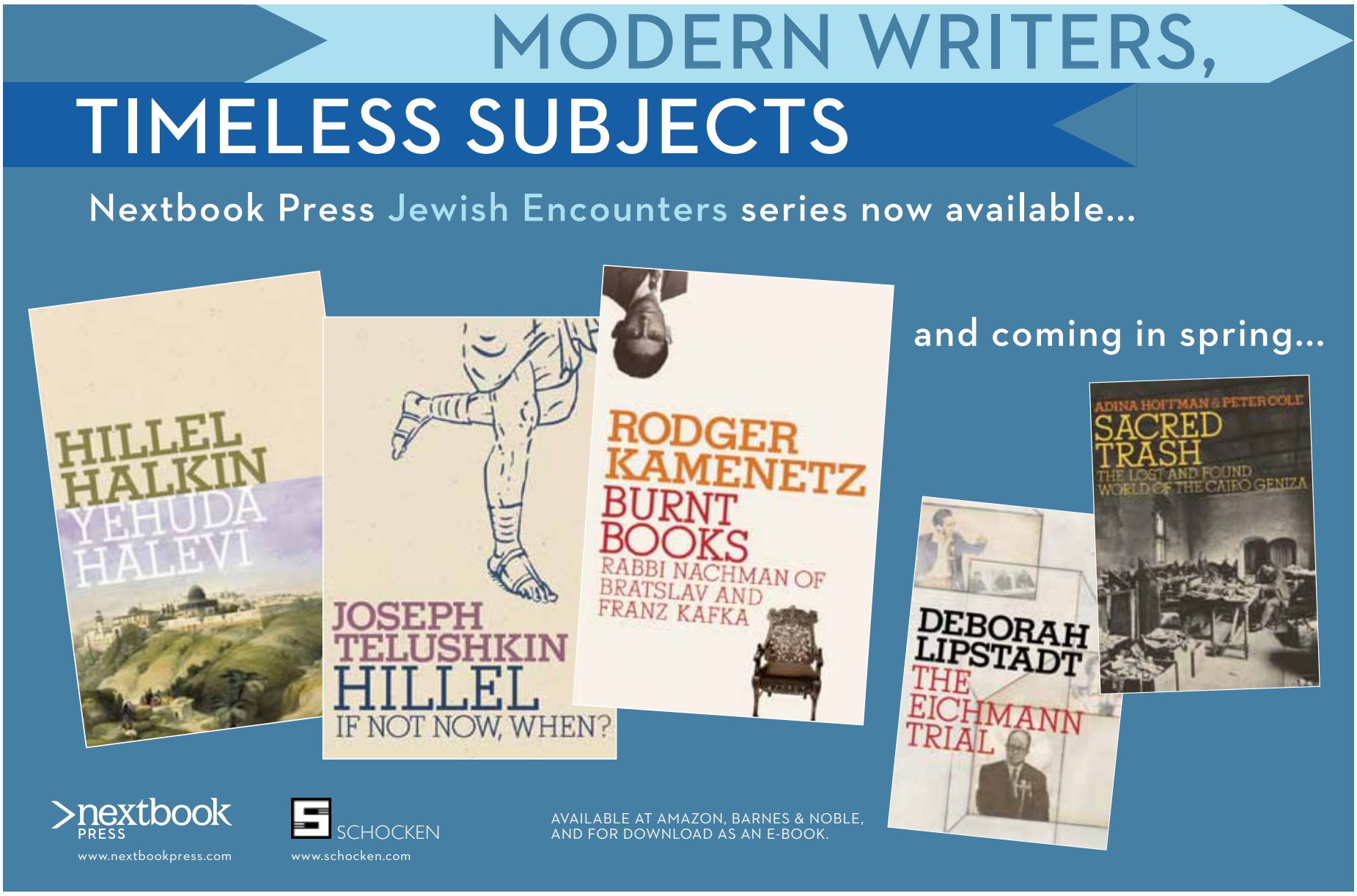
And indeed, more than two years after his departure from the military, many members of the Religious Zionist sector still hold Stern in contempt. He continues to give them new reasons for doing so. This past June, for example, he appeared in his capacity as chairman of the Genesis Philanthropy Group, one of the most vocal proponents of easing conversion procedures for Russian immigrants and other Israelis. Those opposed to such measures, he declared, should stop trying to confuse him "with halakha." Jewish law is, of course, the rabbis' proper concern. But Stern is right that their growing power in other realms of Israeli life has damaged the Religious Zionist community, as the recent brouhaha over the rabbinic letter instructing Jewish homeowners not to rent apartments to Arab Israelis has demonstrated once again.

In the summer of 2010, Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, one of the more thoughtful Religious Zionist rabbis of the new generation, published a compilation of his answers to thousands of questions he had received during the disengagement from Gaza. It makes for interesting reading, especially because Cherlow isn't a hotheaded zealot. Interviewed by *Ha'aretz* when the book was published, Cherlow admitted that the "web-based Q & A system" that he employs "is both a curse and a blessing. The curse is creating dependence, spiritual domination, manipulation, and loss of independence." He encourages rabbis to "protect" those asking questions from this curse by fostering "independent thought and presenting answers as possibilities and not as the final word."

Nonetheless, it is not clear that Cherlow allows much room for independent thought among his readers. He is indeed a "moderate" in the sense that he opposed calls for Religious Zionist soldiers to disobey orders (which he aptly describes as presenting an "existential danger" to Israel). During the disengagement, Cherlow never claimed that the state lacked the authority to make the decision to pull out of Gaza, but he did argue that there is a halakhic way to judge such a decision, and that it was at least "borderline." Rabbis, he writes, are qualified to make judgments on matters of policy and security because they "are experts on the premises of the larger debate . . ." Moreover, "the state is not allowed to act . . . against the Torah," presumably as it is defined by its rabbinical spokesmen.

Religious Zionism is in urgent need of being led away from the notion that the premises of every policy debate are ultimately halakhic, away from the rabbinical and back to the political. Elazar Stern might have been the man to accomplish this task, but he is too stubborn, too divisive, and finally just too annoying to become an effective political leader. However, his book is a salutary example of the kind of thinking now so uncommon in Religious Zionist circles in Israel. It is a wake-up call, and like most wake-up calls it is noisy, irritating, and very necessary.

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One State?

BY PETER BERKOWITZ

WHAT IS A PALESTINIAN STATE WORTH?
by Sari Nusseibeh
Harvard University Press, 256 pp., $19.95

On June 14, 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delivered a historic speech at Bar-Ilan University, in which he declared his support for the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace with the Jewish state. Netanyahu was not the first Israeli prime minister to make such a statement—that honor belongs to Ehud Barak. But he was the first right-wing prime minister to do so, and his speech marked the consolidation of a consensus that has emerged in Israel over the past decade that a two-state solution is, for the long term, the only viable and just outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Unmoved, however, by the Obama administration's determination to quickly wrap up a final status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians to bring a Palestinian state into existence, a majority of Israelis doubt that what is necessary and right for the long term can safely be implemented in the short term. Their doubts are rooted in a sober assessment of the security challenges that confront Israel. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad lack popular support in the West Bank, where they are currently in charge. How, Israelis wonder, can one entrust such insecure leaders with sovereignty over a territory from which Iran-sponsored Hamas and other terrorist groups could launch rocket attacks and more against the heart of their country—the greater Tel Aviv area, Ben Gurion International Airport, and Jerusalem? The majority is convinced that Israel cannot afford to have an independent neighboring state that might be even more menacing than the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, where an unremittingly hostile regime already possesses missiles that can reach Tel Aviv. While Fayyad has made real progress in the past several years in expanding the West Bank economy and forming a Palestinian Authority Security force, it has not persuaded most Israelis to let down their guard.

In *What is a Palestinian State Worth?* the estimable Sari Nusseibeh, a professor of philosophy, the president of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, and the author of the political memoir, *Once Upon a Country*, also comes to the conclusion that prospects are dim for achieving a separate and independent Palestinian state any time soon. Yet contrary to Netanyahu, the Israeli consensus, the Obama administration, and indeed the weight of international opinion, Nusseibeh contends that a separate and independent state, desirable as it may be in theory, is probably the wrong answer. Owing to Israeli settlements and (though here he is less explicit) a Palestinian Authority that "has managed to rob the people of their wills," Nusseibeh thinks that the time has passed in which a viable Palestinian state could be established in the West Bank. Instead, the political logic of the current contours of the conflict and philosophical reflection on justice point to a one-state solution.

This is not an altogether new position for Nusseibeh, long considered a leading Palestinian moderate. Already in the 1970s he was attracted to the idea that Palestinians beyond the Green Line should be made citizens with fully equal rights in Israel. In 1987, he called publicly for the creation of a binational state out of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. But in the aftermath of the first Intifada, in which he played a prominent role, he changed his mind. In 1991, he and the Israeli political scientist Mark Heller co-authored *No Trumpets, No Drums*,



Sari Nusseibeh. (Photo courtesy of Harvard University Press.)

which argued for a two-state solution. Twelve years later, in June 2003, with retired colonel and former Shin Bet head Ami Ayalon, he launched "The People's Voice" to mobilize support for a two-state solution among both Israelis and Palestinians.

If Nusseibeh has now returned to the idea that he abandoned more than twenty years ago, he has nonetheless given it a surprising new twist. Instead of calling for Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza to be incorporated into Israel as full-fledged citizens, he proposes an arrangement whereby Israel would protect their civil rights and confer upon them healthcare and other benefits, but would not provide the political rights to vote, hold elective office, and serve as ministers in the government.

Nusseibeh describes this as "a mutually agreed upon conferral by Israel of a form of 'second-class citizenship' on all Palestinians who wish to accept it." Under this proposal, he rather nonchalantly assures his readers, Israel would be able to retain its Jewish character, and "the only negative side" for reasonable Israelis "would be having to put up with the Arab population living among them." At the same time, it would be for Palestinians "a far more bitter pill to swallow" because it would involve "giving up the dream of having a Palestinian state and having to make do, psychologically, with being subjects rather than citizens in their own country."

This is where the apparent skepticism embodied in Nusseibeh's title *What is a Palestinian State Worth?* emerges. As he recently explained in an interview in *Le Monde*:

> They can keep their government, and keep it Jewish if that's what they want, as long as we enjoy all our human rights. Personally, I don't want a state. If they want to be in charge of everything, and they offer me the services a state offers, that suits me. What I want, what the Palestinians want, is to live a decent life.

Here it sounds as if Nusseibeh might be calling upon his fellow Palestinians to relinquish forever any dream of attaining a state of their own. But in his book, he more tentatively describes his innovative idea as merely "a thought experiment," a temporary "halfway measure . . . 'without prejudice' to any later negotiated outcome," or as a solution that ought to appeal to the Israeli right-wing who "covet" the West Bank and Gaza. At other times, however, he indicates that what he is proposing is merely a "transitional phase" leading to a future in which the Jewish state will become obsolete. What he does not do in any serious way is explain his proposal's crucial assumptions or work out its practical implications.

Nusseibeh has been politically engaged for several decades. But he was educated at Oxford and Harvard, built a career as a philosophy professor, and his new book reads more like a set of loosely structured (and loosely philosophical) common room monologues than it does a policy proposal. It is still surprising that he does not address the obvious and all but insurmountable obstacles to the implementation of his proposal.

Since the Palestinian Authority would be dismantled (how he doesn't say), the proposal would create two categories of Arab Israelis: those already living inside the Green Line, who will presumably continue to enjoy full civil and political rights, and those living beyond the Green Line with merely civil rights. Or, perhaps, three categories, since some number, and perhaps a significant number, of Palestinians who support the PA and its leaders and those who support Hamas and its leaders will reject such a deal.

Beyond the intra-Palestinian conflict that Nusseibeh's proposal would generate, it would also create an Israel that for the first time was not a fully democratic polity promising equal rights to all its citizens. This might be the point. Perhaps Nusseibeh, who believes that the first Intifada was a lost opportunity for Gandhian tactics, would like Israel to become an apartheid state not merely in the incendiary rhetoric of its critics but in reality. He

seems to appreciate that given Israel's commitment to freedom and democracy, maintaining actual apartheid conditions would be unbearable for most Israelis, and so what he on occasion acknowledges to be a "halfway measure" and a "transitional phase" would in reasonably short time generate an irresistible pressure in Israel to grant full political rights to the new Arab citizens from the West Bank and Gaza. Once enfranchised, these people would, as Nusseibeh knows, very soon constitute a formidable minority or even slender majority of the voters in the enlarged State of Israel, and would no doubt attempt to do away with any semblance of a Jewish state, in accordance with Nusseibeh's own argument that Israel's Jewish and democratic character are simply and entirely incompatible with one another.

In short, Nusseibeh's one-state solution hardly seems the way toward his professed goal of freedom, equality and "a decent life" for Palestinians, or for Israelis. A far more likely outcome would be violent conflict and probably civil war, not only between Arabs and Jews, but also within each camp.

It might seem unjustifiable, from Nusseibeh's point of view at any rate, for the Jews of Israel to put up a fight to hold onto a state of their own. For states, in his opinion, are not of value in themselves but are merely instruments for securing individual freedom and the satisfaction of private lives. But this is not a position that he maintains consistently. He is also capable of contending, "the question of what states are for is ultimately about what it is to feel at home, about our inner emotions and aspirations, about who we are as human beings and how we can best live together." It was precisely this aspiration that inspired the creation of a Jewish state, a state that was understood since its founding also to be dedicated to the protection of the rights of all its citizens. And according to a powerful consensus that has formed in Israel, the United States, and throughout the international community, it is again to fulfill this aspiration that a Palestinian state should be created, by Israel's side, a state that would likewise protect the rights of all its citizens.

It is ominous that Nusseibeh employs contradictory conceptions of the state in his book to simultaneously undermine Israel's claims to be both Jewish and democratic and to set the stage for a single state in which Palestinians would feel at home and Jews would not. It suggests that despite his apparent evenhandedness, Nusseibeh is drawn to the same destructive all-or-nothing logic of his intransigent colleagues: there can only be one state between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. Apparently, he, like them, believes that dissolution of Israel as a Jewish state is historically inevitable and morally and politically just.

In the final pages of his book, Nusseibeh, who has dedicated his professional life to higher education, offers reflections on what "education is meant to do, and on what it can do for the next generation of Palestinians." It is a fitting final topic for a work that draws upon political philosophy, since if there is one point on which political philosophers ancient and modern tend to agree it is that true political reform depends on educational reform. But Nusseibeh's conclusion is disappointing. It does not go much beyond the trite assertion that "what our students need most is faith in themselves—and faith that they have it within themselves to shape history."

Surely that faith must be built on solid knowledge, the capacity for independent thought, and an understanding of the political implications of liberty and democracy. But as things stand, the curricula of many Palestinian schools still foster hatred of Jews and Israel. Despite UN Resolution 181, which in 1947 gave international authorization for the creation of a Jewish state in the land of Israel (and, at the same time, the creation of an Arab state), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) continues to promote the idea of Israel's illegitimacy in the West Bank and Gaza. In a recent poll by the respected American firm of Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner, two-thirds of Palestinians affirmed that "over time Palestinians must work to get back all the land for a Palestinian state" and 60 percent agreed that "the real goal should be to start with two states but then move it to all being one Palestinian state."

A truly liberal education, one that educates Palestinians for freedom, would cease to cultivate seething resentment of Israel as a Jewish state. It would also teach that a state can protect the rights of all of its citizens, including those who belong to national minorities, while maintaining its distinctive national character. Such an education would both strengthen Palestinians' respect for Israel's achievements, and enhance their own ability to build a stable and prosperous liberal democracy in the West Bank and Gaza, one which would in the end offer a positive answer to the timely question of what a Palestinian state is worth.

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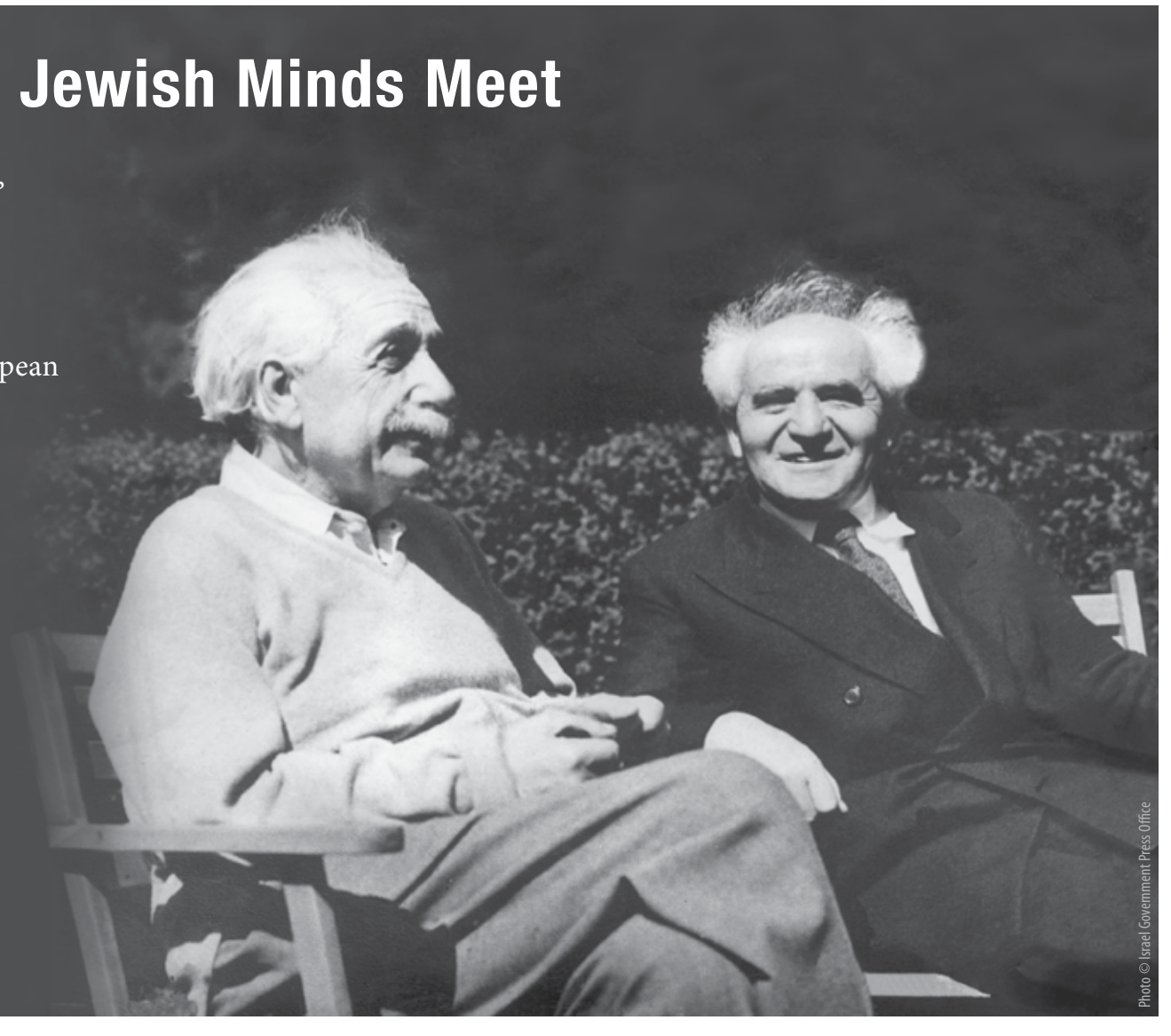


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The Future Past Perfect

BY GEORGE PROCHNIK

STEFAN AND LOTTE ZWEIG'S SOUTH AMERICAN LETTERS: NEW YORK, ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL, 1940-42
edited by Darien J. Davis and Oliver Marshall
Continuum, 224 pp., $24.95

In 1941 Stefan Zweig, the prolific genre-jumping Austrian writer, wrote to Manfred and Hannah Altmann, his wife Lotte's brother and sister-in-law, about his impressions of Bahia, Brazil.

> You cannot imagine what it means to see this country which is not yet spoiled by tourists and so enormously interesting—today I was in the huts of the poor people which live here practically from nothing (the bananas and mandiocas are growing round) and the children go like in paradise—the whole house with ground did cost them six dollars and so they are proprietors for ever. It is a good lesson to see how simply one can live and comparatively happy—a lesson to us all, who will loose every thing and are not enough happy now by the thought how to live then.

Zweig's mistakes in grammar and spelling reflect the fact that the letter, like all those compiled in *Stefan and Lotte Zweig's South American Letters,* were written in English to avoid being seized by censors in Great Britain where the Altmanns lived.

Zweig was in South America on a spectacularly crammed lecture tour that extended from August 1940 to January 1941. In addition to composing a slew of talks—and translating them, with Lotte's help, up and down their polyglot scales between French, English, Yiddish, and Spanish—Stefan worked on various articles and drafted a hybrid travelogue-history book to be called *Brasilien—Land der Zukunft* (Brazil—Land of the Future). After a long period of declining spirits due, above all, to the war, but also to Lotte's chronic asthma, and Stefan's notorious "black liver" (his term for depression), the tour injected the Zweigs with a shot of Copacabana's sparkling élan.

Among the many merits of this compelling, carefully edited volume is the insight it provides into a problem confronting all refugees from Nazi-dominated Europe: How might one begin conceiving a new vision of home while "the old country" went up in flames? They also tell the melancholy story of how, barely a year after the euphoric Bahia letter, Stefan and Lotte committed suicide in Petropolis, above Rio.

Zweig never relinquished his dream of Brazil as paradise. However, he came to feel that the Europe he carried inside himself was too vast to squeeze through those lushly overgrown gates. The narrative of these letters plays out like a protracted riff on Franz Kafka's response to Max Brod's question about whether hope might exist somewhere outside our own botched world: "Plenty of hope," Kafka smiled. "Only not for us."

The bulk of this compact volume consists of letters by Stefan and Lotte to Hannah and Manfred, presented in two batches: the first written during the busy tour alluded to above, the second beginning in August 1941, when the Zweigs returned to Brazil, and ending with the couple's death in February 1942. The letters reveal Stefan in a rarely documented, familial mode. He worries about the Altmanns' well-being, imploring them to make free use of everything the Zweigs have left behind from the house itself to "all clothes, underwear, linnen, overcoats and also whatever we have there." And he devotes himself to reassuring the Altmanns that Lotte is flourishing in Brazil.

These letters play out like a protracted riff on Franz Kafka's remark to Max Brod: "Plenty of hope," Kafka smiled. "Only not for us."

A persistent, lazy tradition of Stefan Zweig's biographers dismisses Lotte as a passive shadow of the Great Writer. This collection allows Lotte's own voice to tell a different story. The letters reveal Lotte, who was 27 years Zweig's junior, as a forceful, cultivated person in her own right. In the midst of organizing their laborious travel, assisting with his frenetic production of lectures, and balancing a plethora of practical arrangements for her scattered family members, we see her closely observing the customs and characters encountered over the course of their wanderings. In an aside to her brother and sister-in-law about the American family caring for their daughter she writes, "They are very American, kind, gay and without any imagination beyond their own scope . . . somehow the life of the average American is always a rush . . ." The edge to her tone seems to fit the tall, elegant figure with strongly etched features and a flair for fashion that emerges in photographs.

Hardly an observation on Brazil's beauty passes Lotte or Stefan's pen without triggering guilt at their improbable good fortune. Confessing at one point to the difficulty they experience even writing Hannah and Manfred in the midst of reading news-stories about "the furious attacks on England," Stefan describes how "ashamed" they feel "to have here such a perfect life. To look out our windows is simply a dream, the temperature is superb . . . the people spoil us in every possible way, we live quietly, cheaply and the most interesting life—really happy would it not be for you and all the friends and the great misery of mankind." There is a dazed, blinking quality to Zweig's delight throughout these letters.

Ernst Feder, a Berlin-born journalist writing for a Rio daily, claimed that no other writer, native or foreign, enjoyed Zweig's popularity in Brazil, adding that it was impossible to enter any house in the country without finding several of his books, no matter the size of its library. Allowing for an element of hyperbole in Feder's assessment—he was a good friend of the Zweigs and one of the last to see the couple alive—there's no question that Zweig was a literary superstar in both Brazil and Argentina. Zweig's short fictions and long historical biographies, flickering with secrets, abrupt intimacies, and intricately filigreed erotic fantasy, struck home on the continent long before his arrival.

By the mid-1930s, Zweig had been leading a nomadic existence for some time. Estranged from his first wife, Friderike, and convinced that Austria was doomed, he insisted that she sell the former archbishop's hunting lodge on a hill overlooking Salzburg where the couple had lived and entertained for almost two decades. He abandoned the desk once belonging to Beethoven on which he'd written many of his best-known books, and began selling off his vast collection of rare manuscripts. Foregoing his beloved Paris out of fear that there he would merely "drift into some corner of émigrés," he moved to London and wrote at the British Museum. Although Zweig tried to persuade himself that England might serve as a permanent alternative to Austria, he lacked the deep gratitude for British values of rational moderation that so moved his friend Sigmund Freud. Whereas Freud made of England's "sober industriousness" a supreme civilized ideal, Zweig had a taste for cultures with less well-regulated passions. England's grey skies and emotional reserve left him more prone to fidget than to sublimate.

Given his stellar reputation there and his hunger for some warmer national clasp, we might expect Zweig to have been ready for a love affair with Brazil. In fact, he sailed to South America expecting to find a "hot and unhealthy climate" in which stagnation alternated with "political unrest, and desperate financial conditions." The entire continent, he imagined, would prove "badly governed, and semi-civilized," one more tropical backwater for "desperate immigrants and settlers." But upon arriving in Rio, Zweig received what he called "one of the most powerful impressions of my whole life." Amidst "one of the most magnificent landscapes in the world," he found that Brazil offered "quite a new kind of civilization." Along with "courage and generosity in all modern things"— immediately tangible in Rio's thoughtful city planning—there were suggestive "traces of a well-preserved ancient culture." Everywhere he turned, colorful, beguiling surprises gave Zweig "a rush of joy and beauty." His European arro-

gance vanished like "so much superfluous luggage." By the end of his first visit, Zweig was convinced that he'd gazed "into the future of the world."

Above all else, Brazil seemed to have solved the dilemma of racial and religious coexistence. "Whereas our old world is more than ever ruled by the insane attempt to breed people racially pure, like race-horses and dogs," he wrote, "the Brazilian nation for centuries has been built upon the principle of a free and unsuppressed miscegenation, the complete equalization of black and white, brown and yellow." It is easy to see why his emotions were stirred. The image of an exiled Jew drinking in the scene of racially mixed young people parading through Rio's "orderly, clean-lined architecture" as blood purity was being elevated to cultic supremacy across Europe is poignant. On his first trip to Brazil Zweig had written Friderike, "Brazil is *unbelievable*, I could howl like a dog at the thought of having to leave."

When Stefan and Lotte Zweig departed on his second South American junket, in the summer of 1940, Europe was at war. They were both exhausted from the constant moving about. The apparent annihilation of the European humanist values for which he'd worked his whole life jeopardized Stefan's psychology, even as Lotte's physical health deteriorated. Zweig's depression was such that he wrote one friend, "things look so frightful . . . a well-aimed torpedo-shot would to my mind be the best answer."

Zweig's letters evoke the nightmarish wartime hurdles to border-crossings, which compelled them to lug about "a whole bag of different papers" including passports, English and Brazilian health certificates, luggage tickets, air tickets, fingerprints, photographs, and lecture invitation tickets. If one document got mislaid, it became impossible, he wrote, to "go forward or backward." He described himself as "formerly [a] writer, now expert in visas."

Nonetheless, once again Brazil worked its magic. If possible, his presence with Lotte by his side inspired an even more effusive adulation than the previous trip elicited. Already in his first letter from Rio, Stefan wrote the Altmanns, "Unfortunately I am afraid that Lotte will loose her modesty here since she is always with ambassadors, ministers, photografed in all newspapers." Within a couple of weeks of arriving, he was invited to deliver a lecture in Sao Paolo that would pay all their expenses for a month in one swoop. "I have no material worries," he announced, "as the lectures in Uruguay, Argentine, Chile are equally well paid." In one letter Lotte describes a 24-hour period in which a conference and a book-signing in Rio precede an address before a men's luncheon and an introduction at a "Jewish charity affair."

Though Argentina never captured his heart the way Rio did, the Zweigs were a sensation there too. At his first lecture, more than three thousand people attended; police had to intervene to reign in the crowds. Before he reached the lectern, the first thousand seats for the next address had been sold. In Montevideo, Stefan reported, "even the W.C. and bidet are full of flowers for Lotte." It would have been difficult not to be intoxicated, especially since Zweig's works were now banned in Austria and Germany.

In *Brazil: Land of the Future*, Zweig initially appeared to slip into a patronizing tone. He acknowledged that Brazilians evidence "more indolence in the way of living; under the imperceptibly relaxing influence of the climate people develop less impetus, less vehemence." Then comes the twist. "In short," Zweig declares, the Brazilians possess "less of just those qualities which nowadays are tragically overestimated and praised as the moral values of a nation." He goes on to deplore the use of statistics to gauge quality of life. "Judging by these figures the most cultivated and most civilized peoples would seem to be those who have the strongest impetus to production, the maximum consumption, and the greatest sum in individual wealth." Things get mistier as he tries to identify an alternative measure. He settles for invoking a "peaceful way of thinking" and "humane attitude," but his main point is that "the highest form of organization has not prevented nations from using just this power solely in the interest of bestiality."

It is easy to characterize this as a familiar European quest after prelapsarian tropical innocence. Some of this is certainly there, along with a few cringe-inducing allusions to smiling Negros at work in the fields. Yet the tribute Zweig pays to cities like Rio and Sao Paulo is subtler. What he finds most moving in Brazil is ultimately neither the floral vistas, nor the happy laborers, but the way the culture evokes, at least for him, the relaxed, graceful cosmopolitanism that nurtured his own artistic production. As his friend and literary executor Richard Friedenthal noted, Zweig came to believe that the "ancient and old-fashioned virtues of European cultured society . . . gentleness, tolerance, appreciation of spiritual values" had found a "last refuge" in Brazil.

A brief intermediary section of *Stefan and Lotte Zweig's South American Letters* treating the time between their two trips to Brazil shows how New York punctured their South American buoyancy. Manhattan revolted Zweig "with its luxury-shops, its 'glamour' and splendour—we Europeans remember our country and all the misery of all the world too much." He found the refugee community even more unbearable. Zweig has sometimes been maligned for neglecting his fellow Jewish émigrés, but these letters refute the charges by showing just how arduously he worked on their behalf to procure support and essential traveling papers. But the correspondence also shows how psychically flayed he felt by the sense that it was never enough. While staying in New Haven, Zweig describes his relief at getting away from all the people "now crowded in New York—the whole Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Frankfurt and all possible towns."

Notwithstanding his wretchedness in New York, months of indecision regarding their next move ensued. "America has its advantages—libraries, possibilities of income etc—But Brasil—beauty, quiet life, cheap," he wrote. Finally, Zweig made up his mind to return to "the land of the future." But in his last letter from New York to Hannah and Manfred, it's clear how reduced his expectations had become. "Our hearts are not light at all . . . Lotte is physically much better now and perhaps we will have in Brazil a better time: only if this nomadic life would come to an end, I would like to live in a Negro hut in Brazil if I should know if I could stay there." The Zweigs' final return to Brazil in August 1941 again supplied a measure of therapeutic calm. Yet, for the



first time, Stefan was not swept up by Rio's charm. Days after arriving, he wrote the Altmanns that he could not continue without books or a home. "We remain Europeans for ever," he wrote, "and will feel everywhere strangers." What went wrong?

It is never, of course, the same to set up residence somewhere as it is to ponder a place's platonic advantages from hotel rooms and airplane cabins. Ongoing headaches with their Brazilian identity documents forced Zweig to recognize that the country had its own bureaucracy. More disturbingly, his Brazil book was being attacked locally for showcasing the country's exoticism without paying due tribute to its modern achievments. Rumors that he'd been paid by the Vargas dictatorship to write the book further tormented him. Portuguese also defeated the Zweigs. For all their linguistic facility and diligent study, it proved one tongue too many. It can't have helped matters that once Vargas resolved to throw his country's fortunes onto the side of the Allies his government banned German newspapers, seized German books, and made it illegal to speak German in public.

Mostly, the Zweigs were simply worn out. In letter after letter, Zweig makes clear that he no longer believes he can outlast the war. The German invasion of the Soviet Union provoked Zweig to write the Altmanns that the war situation would only "become worse and worse for our mankind," and that "while a younger generation would no doubt live to see better times, I with my 'three lives' feel that my generation has become superfluous."

To escape Rio's heat and crowds, the Zweigs moved into a bungalow in the Brazilian summer resort village of Petropolis. For a time, they cherished the quiet of their new life. Yet the seclusion they'd pined for soon turned lonely. Increasingly, they fretted away their hours waiting for the next mail delivery. Stefan yearned to launch a major new writing project, perhaps to finally complete his biography of Balzac or magnify his germinal study of Montaigne. The plaintive cry that he lacked the right books rings through his letters.

His mood began to careen like a streetcar off its tracks. One moment, he writes movingly of his and Lotte's shared love for their new life, and the next he abruptly rails against her "damned asthma, which is somewhat better but every night there are one or two dialogues between her and a dog in a house far away." Then he lurches again. "Alltogether I cannot tell you happy we are to have left New York where our life did not belong to us and we had all kind of problems, while here we live forgotten and forgetting the time, the world (but not you)." And yet he can't stop gaping over the change that's befallen him. At one point he breaks out, "I would not have believed that in my sixtieth year I would sit in a little Brazilian village, served by a barefoot black girl and miles and miles away from all that was formerly my life, books, concerts, friends, conversation." Lotte struggled to comprehend Stefan's "black liver," but found little to grasp beyond the notion she took from their friends that his depression was "not an isolated case but was attacking—and leaving—the different European authors one after the other."

Gradually, a new note creeps into the Zweigs' letters. Their most vivid pleasures now involve rekindling the distant past. In a letter to her sister-in-law, Lotte describes teaching herself and the maid to make Palatschinken, Schmarren and Erdapfelnudeln and other 'European dishes' . . . My memory . . . is going back further and further." As time closes in on the Zweigs, they spend their hours reading the classics, taking long walks with their fox terrier, stopping off at the nearby Café Elegante for coffee, and playing chess in the evenings. With their simple pleasures— the traditional Central European dishes at home, the old great books, the uneventful rhythm of their days—it's as if Stefan and Lotte are striving to recreate a domestic version of the Austro-Hungarian "world of yesterday," of which he had so evocatively written. But in the midst of heavy rains, tropical mold invades the house and won't leave their clothes, books or papers alone. They're kept awake nights by mosquitoes, fleas, spiders and little animals. A pair of snakes appears in their garden.

Zweig's restrained, deeply moving suicide letter reads at times like a love note to Brazil. It begins with the announcement that "before parting from life of my own free will and in my right mind I am impelled to fulfill a last obligation: to give heartfelt thanks to this wonderful land of Brazil which afforded me and my work such kind and hospitable repose." There has been much speculation about what, finally, snuffed out Zweig's will to live. He killed himself just after watching Rio's carnival, and the contrast between that riotous celebration and the depths into which most of the world was descending certainly gave a further jolt to his anguish. America's entry into the war in December, coupled with the fall of Singapore, convinced him that there would soon be nowhere on earth free from the contagion of the conflict. But why, really, look for answers beyond the reasons he gave in his letter?

After declaring "every day I have learned to love this country more and more, and nowhere else would I have preferred to rebuild my life from the ground up" he finishes:

> After one's sixtieth year unusual powers are needed in order to make another wholly new beginning. Those that I possess have been exhausted by the long years of homeless wandering. So I hold it better to conclude in good time and with erect bearing a life for which intellectual labor was always the purest joy and personal freedom the highest good on earth . . . I salute all my friends! May it be granted them yet to see the dawn after the long night! I, all too impatient, go on before.

Lotte left no note. But her final letter to Hannah is equally clear. "Going away like this my only wish is that you may believe that it is the best thing for Stefan, suffering as he did all these years with all those who suffer from the Nazi domination, and for me, always ill with Asthma . . . Believe me it is best as we do it now." President Vargas ordered a state funeral.

Two days after the suicide, the writer René Fülöp-Miller received a letter from Zweig. Zweig encouraged his friend to make a close study of Montaigne, and concluded by quoting him: "In life we are dependent on the will of others, but our death is our own affair. Reputation has nothing to do with it . . . Death is the great homecoming."

George Prochnik is the author, most recently, of In Pursuit of Silence: Listening for Meaning in a World of Noise. *He is completing a novel about Stefan and Lotte Zweig's American exile.*



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Commentary

Letters From Chicago

BY STEVEN J. ZIPPERSTEIN

A novel, like a letter, should be loose, cover much ground, run swiftly, take risk of mortality and decay.

—Saul Bellow to Bernard Malamud, 1953

SAUL BELLOW: LETTERS
edited by Benjamin Taylor
Viking, 608 pp., $35

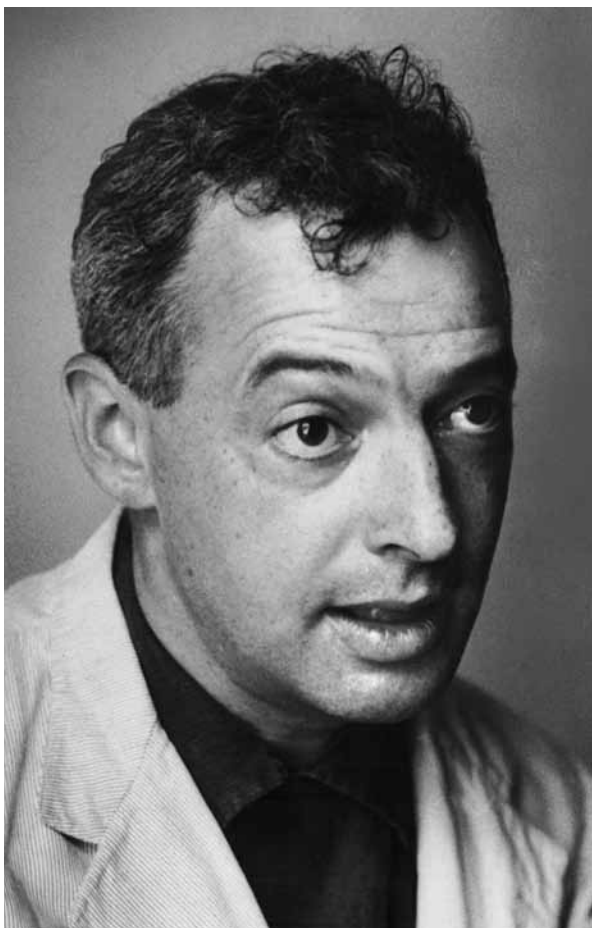
Here is Saul Bellow describing Chicago at its worst: "On winter afternoons . . . the soil was frozen to a depth of five feet and the Chicago cold seemed to have the headhunter's power of shrinking your face . . ." Bellow himself was whipsawed, time and again, over his long career between critical acclaim and blasts as ferocious as the winds off Chicago's brutal, gorgeous lake.

The gap between critical appraisal and character assassination was often paper-thin. Mark Harris built an entire book, *Saul Bellow: Drumlin Woodchuck*, around the mystifying conceit that he was a rodent ("a woodchuck is very smart. A woodchuck has the sense to hide.") In *Saul Bellow: A Biography of the Imagination*, Ruth Miller, an ex-student and discarded lover, explained Bellow's politics as the result of bad parenting. James Atlas' massive and influential *Bellow: A Biography* was the product of a great deal of labor and not inconsiderable bile (as a biographer, Atlas seems to have aspired to the headhunter's power too). Bellow was reduced to a crabbed man, as vain as a movie star and as promiscuous as an alley cat. One gets little sense from Atlas of how his subject produced indispensable novel after novel, except to the extent (admittedly always large for Bellow) that they were quarried from his hopelessly messy life.

Of course, Bellow was graced with many gushes of warm wind too: relatively early acclaim, close literary friendships that were surprisingly free of rancor and envy (though Bellow was entirely capable of both), and, eventually, every award including the Nobel Prize. One of his great literary friends, Philip Roth, wrote as lovingly astute a summation of his his career as has been written about any American writer of the last century. In "Rereading Bellow," Roth focused, as have so many others, on Bellow's voice, his sentence-by-sentence genius, as it burst forth in his first great book:

> Engorged sentences had existed before in American fiction—notably in Melville and Faulkner—but not quite like those in *Augie March*, which strike me as more liberty-taking . . . There are sentences in the book whose effervescence, whose undercurrent of buoyancy leave one with the sense of so much going on, a theatrical, exhibitionist, ardent prose tangle that lets in the dynamism of living without driving mentalness out. This voice no longer encountering resistance is permeated by mind while connected also to the mysteries of feeling. It's a voice unbridled and intelligent both, going at full force and yet always sharp enough to sensibly size things up.

Ben Taylor's meticulously edited and annotated volume of Bellow's letters provides the most intimate glimpse we have yet encountered of how this voice emerged. *Saul Bellow: Letters* is drawn from several archives and many private collections and takes its place beside the best of such compilations. Although there is nothing in the volume as explosive as, say, the intermittent anti-Semitism or sexual frivolities found in Philip Larkin's letters, it offers a comparable close-up of a great writer's workshop. This is all the more crucial in Bellow's case since we still lack a first-rate biography.



Saul Bellow, January 1953. (Photo by Richard Meek/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.)

Bellow came of age as a writer in the mid-1940s as part of the intellectual and artistic cohort around magazines like *Partisan Review*, *The New Republic*, and *Commentary*, all of which were eager for America to capture a literary role in the world comparable to its diplomatic one. Bellow made this aspiration his own, but first came rejected manuscripts (the letters describe two discarded novels that have never been found), tawdry apartments, and a failed early marriage. Even when he achieved critical success, sales did not follow. "Surely you don't mean that the total sales of the book come to two thousand!" he writes his editor in 1948, soon after the appearance of his second novel, *The Victim*. "Why, you wrote last November that it had an advance sale of twenty three hundred . . . I don't understand this at all; I feel black and bitter about it, merely." (The characteristic Bellovian touch is in that "merely.")

In the late 1940s, Bellow was just scraping by, viewed as important by influential critics but also seen, much to his distress, as something of a wastrel by his businessmen father and brothers, who still gave him occasional handouts. Then, while in Paris in 1949, on a Guggenheim fellowship, working on yet another grim novel, he began sketching, almost doodling, the work that would become *The Adventures of Augie March*. What emerged was an altogether different sort of manuscript, something freer, less dark, and curiously enough, less European.

His previous two novels had been taut, internal books, written under the influence of Dostoevsky (*Dangling Man*'s original title was *Notes of a Dangling Man*.) Yet he had long worried about why he felt so inhibited on the page, why, as he put it to his Trotskyist friend David Bazelon in 1948, "there is a certain diffidence about me . . . I assemble the dynamite but I am not ready to touch off the fuse." With *Augie March,* Bellow exploded. He explained what it felt like to touch off the fuse in the novel itself, a description of the creative process as brilliant and candid as any produced by a novelist:

> Hard, hard work, excavation and digging, mining, moling through tunnels, heaving, pushing, moving rock, working, working, working, working, working, panting, hauling, hoisting. And none of this work is seen from the outside. It's internally done. It happens because you are powerless and unable to get anywhere, to obtain justice or have requital, and therefore in yourself you labor, you wage and combat, settle scores, remember insults, fight, reply, deny, blab, denounce, triumph, outwit, overcome, vindicate, cry, persist, absolve, die and rise again. All by yourself! Where is everybody? Inside your breast and skin, the entire cast.

When *Augie March* was a hit, the attacks began, with the most robust on the pages of the magazines that had most vigorously first promoted Bellow. "We acted," mused *Partisan Review* editor William Phillips in his memoirs, "as though . . . in a primitive struggle for survival."

Bellow attracted special attention, no doubt, because of his success coupled with a never sated touchiness and a voracious ambitiousness that stood out even in a milieu packed with outsized egos. More galling still, he was also the author that captured, in the famous first lines of *Augie March*, the ambition of an entire generation of Jewish writers—and others, too—to claim America as their own:

> I am an American, Chicago born—Chicago, that somber city—and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style, and will record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent.

The subsequent jealousy was thick, especially as he went on, time and again, to write utterly distinct and brilliant novels that drew promiscuously on lives close to his while always keeping the best of himself for his writing desk.

Among the critical complaints lodged against Bellow were that he was too talky, a writer of the mind not of the heart. Bellow's sixth novel, *Herzog*, helped to solidify this perception. Interspersed throughout the book were Moses Herzog's manic, obsessive, and breathtakingly smart letters to family, friends, lovers, philosophers, and politicians ("Dear Mr. President, Internal Revenue regulations will turn us into a nation of bookkeepers. The life of every citizen is becoming a business. This, it seems to me, is one of the worst interpretations of the meaning of human life history has ever seen."). This perception was belied by Bellow's preoccupation with the inescapability of feeling, but it was buttressed by his portrayals of women, ex-wives in particular—"will never understand what women want. What do they want? They eat green salad and drink human blood." Despite all the acclaim, for many years Bellow was cast aside, even by some serious readers, as somehow too serious, too angry, too old-fashioned, and not quite worth the effort.

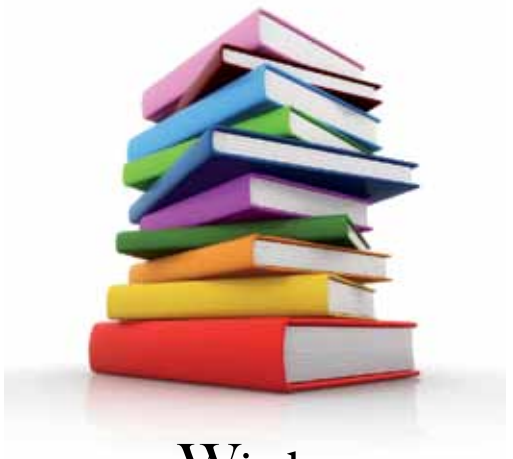
"Have you ever visited a clothing factory, heard the sewing machines rrrh*hhah-h*hrr with the loudness in the middle of the phrase? I feel like that myself."

One of the many pleasures of Taylor's volume is how it reacquaints us with Bellow's wry, poignant, infectiously erudite voice. This is all the more surprising because he wasn't, or at least so he insisted, a natural-born letter writer. He would often claim, a little grandly, that it was easier for him to finish a short story, even a novel, than a letter, and he criticized Isaac Rosenfeld, the literary-brother of his youth, for his long and wasteful bouts of letter writing. Indeed, many of Bellow's most striking letters are about the joys and rigors of solitary writing. To Susan Glassman, who would soon be his third wife, he describes his work on *Herzog*:

> I live on broiled meat and salt-pills and my brains and insides go around at high speed. Have you ever visited a clothing factory, heard the sewing machines rrrh*hhahh*hrr with the loudness in the middle of the phrase? I feel like that myself . . . Only the machinery is internal and seams never end.

Another pleasure is the chance to hear Bellow describe Chicago, where most of his greatest novels were set. The city both fascinated and horrified him; it was proof of both life's plentitude and griminess. In his essay, Philip Roth notes that Bellow first shied away from writing about the city. *Dangling Man*, while situated there, took in Chicago barely at all. ("Dangling Man is not a book about a man in a city: it's about a mind in a room.") At first, writes Roth, Bellow may well have feared being seen as merely a local writer much as he resisted being slotted as a Jewish one. The two, Roth proposes, were arguably for Bellow then, and always, interlinked:

> I wonder if at the outset Bellow shied away from seizing Chicago as his because he didn't want to be known as a Chicago writer, any more, perhaps, than he wanted to be known as a Jewish writer. Yes, you're from Chicago, and of course you're a Jew—but how these things are going to figure in your work, or if they should figure at all, isn't easy to puzzle out right off. Besides, you have other ambitions, inspired by your European masters, by Dostoevsky, Gogol, Proust, Kafka, and such ambitions don't include



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> writing about the neighbors gabbing on the back porch . . .

Roth, of course, might have been speaking about himself as well. One of the more salient features of the work of both writers is their capacity to encompass so much while remaining so fixed on the turbulence of oneself. Both were loners, eager each in their own way, for some true shred of community, though in the privacy of their letters, both savaged so many of those near to them. When Bernard Malamud died, Bellow wrote to Roth: "He did make something of the crumbs and gritty bits of impoverished Jewish lives. Then he suffered from not being able to do more."

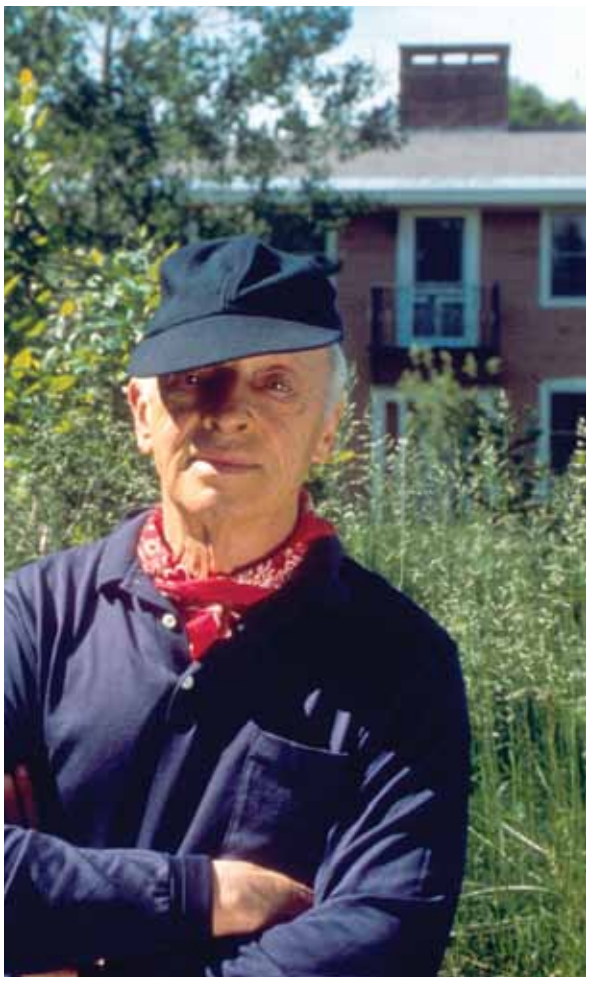
The tension between the "gritty bits" that most achingly inspires one's imagination and a no less aching desire to produce world-class fiction, is the spine that holds this volume of letters—and, arguably, also Bellow's remarkable literary career—together. "Our language was English, and a language is a spiritual mansion from which no one can evict us." Bellow resolutely believed this, but he offered it up in a speech honoring Malamud after this death at the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters where he declared Malamud "a rich original of the first rank."

Bellow had sent his letter to Roth about Malamud's imaginative life just a few months earlier. Of course, the gap between a eulogy and a confidence between friends is, justly, substantial. Indeed, one of the pleasures of reading volumes of letters is the access they seem to give to the writer's private thoughts. Arguably, though, such letters exist at something of a mid-way point between the private and the public. It is never quite clear when reading letters like these whether you are engaged in a slightly wicked, prurient activity or have been hoodwinked by a sly master, who was always writing for posterity as well as his addressee.

Hoodwinked or not, Bellow's language in letters, as in fiction, is stunning. His is an English both earnestly and adoringly cerebral and earthy, drawing on the cadences of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, Hyde Park Trotskyism, the high-church intellectualism of the University of Chicago, and the *Guys and Dolls* patois of Damon Runyon. He sometimes compared his writing to an act of escape. In a letter to novelist and essayist Edward Hoagland, after finishing *Herzog*, he writes:

> Oddly enough, I do feel extraordinarily locked-up, and some of my books, especially *Augie March*, are written in a jail-breaking spirit. And most prison breaks, like most revolutions, are unsuccessful. After I had written *The Victim*, I felt the limitation of conventional despair and disappointment, and all the rest of it, of that romanticism which makes excessive and ridiculous demands for the individual and seems ignorant of what there really is to ask for. In the excitement of freeing myself, I think I went too far . . . As for *Henderson*, I understand it least of all my books.

As fantastic an imagination as he possessed (and Henderson the Rain King found his soul in an Africa conjured entirely out of Bellow's mind), and as impractical as he was in life and love, Bellow nonetheless retained a steady, emphatic belief in the primacy of what he insisted on calling "reality." Sometimes he meant the term as an aesthetic category: the capacity to produce art that evades nothing. Writing to Roth in 1969, he gives him his highest compliment: "I knew . . . that you were the real thing. When I was a little kid, there were still blacksmiths around, and I've never forgotten the ring of a real hammer on a real anvil." What he disliked most in Malamud's later novels, like *Dubin's Lives*, was their insistence, as he saw it, on prettifying life.



Saul Bellow at his home in Vermont, June, 1989. (Photo by Dominique Nabokov/Liaison Agency.)

But Bellow's notion of reality also had a moral and, in some measure, a political sense. To confront reality was a virtue even if it involved ethical compromise. Practical men of the world, like Jerusalem's mayor Teddy Kollek, who Bellow nominated for a Nobel Prize, drew him in, impressing him with their ability to get things done. "And, yes, I know all about Teddy," he writes his friend, the Yiddish scholar Ruth Wisse, "the schemer, finagler, and arranger. With all his less-than-admirable qualities, he towers over most of the political figures I have known." For the same reasons, and perhaps with his own father's checkered, aggressive business career as bootlegger and coal-yard owner in mind, Bellow was awestruck by Chicago's blustery, bigger-than-life politicos and businessmen. Although ordinarily he was quick to take offense, rarely was he insulted by their indifference to his accomplishments.

He managed his own finances badly; launched a series of magazines that all flopped; tried his hand at Broadway (also a failure); and often bemoaned his incapacity to understand the real world. Recalling a conversation with his longtime academic patron, Ralph Ross, who was also close with Isaac Rosenfeld, Bellow writes, "You said that Isaac was the most unworldly person you had ever known, with one exception: Compared with me, Isaac was the complete sophisticate . . ."

The need to acknowledge reality, however unpleasant, would come to mesh in his thinking with his sense of kinship, of common fate, with Jews. "I'm often tempted to take the Nabokov-Literature-Only line," he writes to novelist and essayist Cynthia Ozick. "Perhaps it was easier for him. The situation of a Russian in exile (a Christian one, after all) can't approach that of a Jew with its splendid complications and singular horrors." *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, Bellow's most biting, polemical novel, included an essay-like condemnation of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Above all, Bellow/Sammler condemned Arendt for her failure to see what might realistically be expected from people in the darkest times. "She could often think clearly, but to think simply was altogether beyond her," Bellow writes in a 1982 letter to the young Leon Wieseltier.

To Ozick, he writes a remarkable letter in 1987, after reading her novel *The Messiah of Stockholm*, with something of a confession regarding his own trajectory as a once-lamentably indifferent Jew:

> I was too busy becoming a novelist to take note of what was happening in the Forties. I was involved with 'literature' and given over to preoccupations with art, with language, with my struggle on the American scene, with claims for recognition of my talent or, like my pals of the *Partisan Review*, with modernism, Marxism, New Criticism, with Eliot, Yeats, Proust, etc.—with anything except the terrible events in Poland. Growing slowly aware of this unspeakable evasion I didn't even know how to begin to admit it into my inner life. Not a particle of this can be denied. And can I really say—can anyone say—what was to be done, how this 'thing' *ought* to have been met? Since the late Forties I have been brooding about it and sometimes I imagine I *can* see something. But what such broodings may amount to is probably insignificant . . . I can't even begin to understand what responsibility any of us may bear in such a matter, in a crime so vast that it brings all Being into Judgment.

The letter is itself a distinguished contribution to what he calls in another letter "the history of Jewish feeling."

Bellow's letters deepened in intensity, even beauty, as he aged. He remained, despite his accomplishments and fame, the wide-eyed Midwesterner astonished at the manifold pleasures life had to offer. Happy with his fifth wife, Janis, in ways he never, it seems, had before experienced, he writes in a letter in 1990, "I have no serious diseases and at seventy-five with foolish enthusiasm I pedal a bike up and down the Vermont hills. The neighbors take me for some kind of crazy prodigy."

Steven J. Zipperstein, Daniel E. Koshland Professor in Jewish Culture and History at Stanford, is currently writing a cultural history of 19th- and early 20th- century Russian Jewry.

Sarah/Sara
by Jacob Paul
(Ig Publishing, 251 pp., $15.95)

In Jacob Paul's riveting and assured debut novel, Sarah Frankel, a newly observant Orthodox woman, undertakes a solo kayaking expedition along the Alaskan coast after her parents are killed and she is disfigured by a terrorist bomb in a Jerusalem café. Her journey is intended as a memorial to her father, a 9/11 survivor whose retirement dream was to kayak through the Arctic. "It's just me and Hashem, discounting the demons, some bears nearing hibernation, and the contents of my kayak." The novel is comprised of diary entries that are at once travelogues, survival lore, childhood reminiscences, and meditations on faith—interwoven with a messianic fantasy of her post-Arctic life in Jerusalem. While this material can seem stark and Sarah's first-person voice is occasionally cloying, Paul sustains the narrative with verve, tension, and charm. Sarah rows through squalls to the cadences of *tehillim*, recites the *shema* when encountering a polar bear, and invokes the tenet of *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) when feasting on the spam she finds in an abandoned shack. As the Arctic ice closes in around her, Sarah navigates both the geographical terrain and the limits of her religious ardor. The author's blurb indicates that Jacob Paul is a World Trade Center survivor.

History Lessons: The Creation of an American Jewish Heritage
by Beth S. Wenger
(Princeton University Press, 296 pp., $35)

While the author of this book is attentive to the outlooks of some groups on the margins of American Jewish life, especially those on the extreme left, she mainly strives to elucidate what she calls "the triumphant reading of American Jewish history that had been brewing since the late nineteenth century and had become dominant by the interwar period." Wenger skillfully assembles sermons, textbooks, artwork, and other materials to show how most American Jews came to believe that Judaism and Americanism converged. Nobody summed up this conception of the American Jewish heritage better than Rabbi Israel Goldstein: "We were here with the founders of these United States and we were here with the Pilgrim Fathers, and we were here with Columbus when he set foot on the soil of the new world. And we have borne our full share of responsibilities, both in war and in peace. We have helped to make America what it is."

Over the years, as Wenger shows, American Jews made such claims with varying degrees of fidelity to historical truth, sometimes with considerable self-assurance and sometimes rather defensively. Columbus long remained a pivotal figure; if he himself was not secretly Jewish then at least his interpreter was, and he was the first member of the crew to step ashore in the New World. Thanks to the Pilgrims and the Founding Fathers, the United States is the very embodiment of the principles of freedom and equality first spelled out in the Hebrew Bible. Molded by essentially Jewish principles, this country is naturally suited to be a new promised land for the Jews—who have again and again shown their readiness to shed their blood for it. Without reaffirming or criticizing these tenets of the American Jewish heritage, Wenger thoroughly and engagingly tells the story of their origin and evolution.

Siegel and Shuster's Funnyman: The First Jewish Superhero, from the Creators of Superman
edited by Mel Gordon and Thomas Andrae
(Feral House, 240 pp., $24.95)

Imagine Seinfeld striking fear into the criminal underworld. Apparently Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster of *Superman* fame thought that something of the sort—a crime-fighting comedian whose fiercest weapon is a clownish pair of oversized springy shoes—would make a terrific second act. This really was a couple of speeding bullets short of sane, but in 1948 the co-creating duo toiled mightily over the short-lived *Funnyman*, even modeling his suave comedian alter-ego, Larry Davis, redheaded locks and all, after the multi-talented Jewish comic actor, Danny Kaye.

Funnyman's origin story is less than stirring. But then it's difficult to top that one about the infant rocketed to Earth from a dying planet. Davis, slated to dress up in an outlandish costume and foil a fake crime as part of a publicity stunt, instead ends up saving the day for real. So he decides to make a career of it, and continues to don the fake shnoz. Unlike the Mosaic sense of destiny defining the Man of Steel, Funnyman seems to be just a case of mistaken identity. It is debatable which of the two is more Jewishly resonant (or whether it matters), but Mel Gordon and Thomas Andrae argue for a Funnyman steeped in a tradition of Jewish comedic lore. *Funnyman* lasted only six issues, which must have been heartbreaking for Siegel and Shuster who saw the coffers of DC Comics swell on *Superman* royalties, while they were famously short-changed. Siegel was reduced to working as a mailroom clerk; Shuster's career took a turn for the sordid, as detailed in another recent book, *Secret Identity: The Fetish Art of Superman's Co-creator Joe Shuster*.



The first issue of* Funnyman*, 1948. (Courtesy of Feral House.)

Young Tel Aviv: A Tale Of Two Cities
by Anat Helman, translated by Haim Watzman
(Brandeis University Press, 216 pp., $55)

In the two decades following the end of World War I, Tel Aviv evolved from a suburb of Jaffa into the world's "first Hebrew city," at least in nickname. As Anat Helman reminds us, it remained "in practice a multilingual city" despite some people's best efforts to stop it from being so. (As Helman writes, "A public mock trial was held in Tel Aviv in 1935 to highlight the evils of using the German language in the Land of Israel.") Those who tried to give the city a higher religious profile had even less luck. The chief rabbis uselessly protested the "act of wantonness" committed by young women who wore shorts on the city's streets, "revealing their legs in an utterly immodest way." For kibbutzniks, on the other hand, Tel Aviv "quickly became a symbol of nonpioneering materialists." But if the city was neither completely Hebrew, particularly pious, nor zealously idealistic, it proudly displayed its Jewishness, whether in nighttime torchlight processions on Hanukkah or on regular Sabbaths, when the "Oneg Shabbat" program initiated by the great poet Chaim Nachman Bialik brought together more than a thousand people at a time to hear lectures on Jewish subjects and to sing Hebrew songs. What was most Jewish about the young city was perhaps its frenetic energy and unruliness. Young Tel Aviv was, in the words of the Polish Zionist leader Yitzhak Gruenbaum, a place "where the Jew feels at home, free in his own creation." Helman makes it clear that it was also an ugly city, even if many of the photographs from that era seem to indicate otherwise. She also reminds us of something that no photograph can reveal: lacking a sewage system until 1942, young Tel Aviv was a very smelly city.

The Relationship of Orthodox Jews with Jews of Other Religious Ideologies and Non-Believing Jews
edited by Adam Mintz
(Yeshiva University Press, 401 pp., $30)

Every year for the past twenty years, the Orthodox Forum has hosted a conference on an issue facing the Orthodox Jewish world, and invited distinguished academics and rabbis to participate. This volume's contributors include leading figures, such as Aharon Lichtenstein, Sylvia Barack Fishman, and Yuval Cherlow. Historian Jonathan Sarna opens with a fascinating account of relations between Orthodox Jews and their more liberal coreligionists in America. Among the surprises is that Haym Solomon, the famous financier of the American Revolution and perhaps the most prominent Jew in the colonies, was one of three officiants at an unsanctioned marriage of a *kohen* and a female convert. It was probably the first marriage of its kind in the new world. Nuggets like this and the article's smooth narrative provide a useful context for the rest of the book. "Since the colonial era," writes Sarna, "tensions have divided those who seek compromise for the sake of Jewish unity from those who demand firmness to uphold sacred Jewish principles." Some of the pieces in this valuable collection exhibit a similar internal tension.

Living Postcards

BY WILLIAM MEYERS

16MM POSTCARDS: HOME MOVIES OF AMERICAN JEWISH VISITORS TO 1930s POLAND
Yeshiva University Museum and YIVO at the Center for Jewish History

When people see a still camera, they know they are supposed to pose. When they see a movie camera, they know they are supposed to do something. Only infants and trained performers know how to act normally before the camera. The subjects of "16mm Postcards: Home Movies of American Jewish Visitors to 1930s Poland," an exhibit at the Yeshiva University Museum, behave as they are expected to; they form into lines, wave at the camera, walk forward smiling intensely, clown around, and show off their children. A few refuse to be recorded. One covers his face with a book and a *tallit* bag and rapidly walks away.

There is an ethnography of gestures, and some of the performances show the differences between the natives and the visitors. Americans wave to the camera by raising their right arm and moving it from side to side; Poles wave by putting their right arm forward and flapping their hand. There seem to be differences in the way people hold themselves and move: city folk stand erect and walk briskly, while the country folk stoop a bit and do not seem to be in such a hurry.

The most important thing about the people caught on film in "16mm Postcards" is that they are nothing special. Not to us anyway. They may have been special to the people who took these amateur movies and to their intended audiences—friends, family, *Landsmannschaften*—but they are displaced in this 21st-century-museum setting. It is their aura of the quotidian, however, the very sense of how ordinary they are, that makes watching them go about their paces in the stuttering movements of these simple films so fascinating.

The heart of "16mm" is four compilations, each 8 to 12 minutes long, of segments from movies taken by American visitors to Poland in the decade before the outbreak of the Second World War. The films were culled from the extensive holdings of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research by Zachary Paul Levine, assistant curator at the Yeshiva University Museum, and Jesse Cohen, YIVO's Photo and Film Archivist. Most of the cinematographers were immigrants to America who were returning to visit their *Alte Heym*. (The exhibit closed in early January 2011, but the films can still be watched on the Center for Jewish History's website.)

The films are continuously projected on the walls of the gallery so the figures appear to be about life-size. Benches are provided for the museum visitor to sit and watch, but the experience is very different from going to the movies: there is no story. It is not even like watching a documentary where there is exposition and a point of view. The compilations are ordered in loose thematic categories—Landscapes, Portraits, Candids, Panorama—but the themes tend to meld into each other. In the end, the unit of interest is the individual segment, each with its unique setting in a city, town or village, and each with its individual cast of characters.

Almost all of this is anonymous. Warsaw, Lublin, Krakow and Vilna are names with which viewers will be familiar, but how many can locate Skidl, Szedziszow, Kamionka, Skeirniewice? They are places whose existence for us depends on their having been filmed. This is even more so, and more affecting emotionally, of the people, none of whom is identified by name: they exist because on a certain day they wandered in front of the lens of a camera held by someone who had returned from America. For some of the segments, neither the cinematographer, nor the subjects, nor even the locale are known.



Visiting with children in Vilna. Film by Gustave Eisner. (Photo © YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.)



"16mm Postcards" exhibit at the Yeshiva University Museum. (Photo courtesy of Zachary Paul Levine, Yeshiva University Museum.)

There are all sorts of Jews. Visitors to the museum who are familiar with *Image Before My Eyes: A Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland, 1864-1939* by Lucjan Dobroszycki and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, or the associated documentary by Joshua Waletzky, know how varied Polish Jewry was. There are picturesque *shtetldik* couples in caps and kerchiefs, and Hasidim in caftans and ankle-length skirts, but there are also city dwellers in three-piece suits and fur-trimmed coats worn with smart hats. Throughout, there are children of all varieties and in large numbers.





Left: Visiting the cemetery in Kalushin, east of Warsaw. Above: three men in the town of Mińsk Mazowiecki (Novominsk), east of Warsaw. Films by Max Rose. (Photos © YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.)



Man covering his face with siddur and tallit bag, Krakow. Film by Earl Morse. (Photo © YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.)

A recurring scene is a visit to the cemetery. Typically there will be a shot panning across the whole cemetery, and then close-ups so the inscriptions on particular headstones can be read. Often, there will be a sequence with the visitor saying *kaddish*, in one instance with tears streaming down his cheeks.

Other scenes that occur more than once are pictures of a village marketplace, children working the handle of a water pump, synagogues, horses and horse-drawn wagons, the countryside shot from the window of a moving train, the children in an orphanage or school arrayed in neat lines, the principal churches and public buildings of a city, evidences of poverty, someone being kissed, more horses and horse-drawn wagons, and, somewhat surprisingly, marching bands, some in uniform and others in civilian clothes. One wonders if they are Jewish bands, what tunes they are playing, and for what occasion.

In one shot, a self-important chicken struts around a village. In another, a woman with only two teeth breaks into an incredible smile. And there is a shot of children surrounding a street juggler who keeps three and then four balls in the air and finally passes the hat.

"16mm" purposely does not refer to the probable fate of the subjects of these films in the coming war. It concentrates instead on the happiness of the moment when they met up again with their American kinsman, and waved at his camera so they would be remembered to those they loved.

William Meyers writes regularly on photography for The Wall Street Journal. *His work can be seen at www.williammeyersphotography.com.*

What . . . Him Worry?

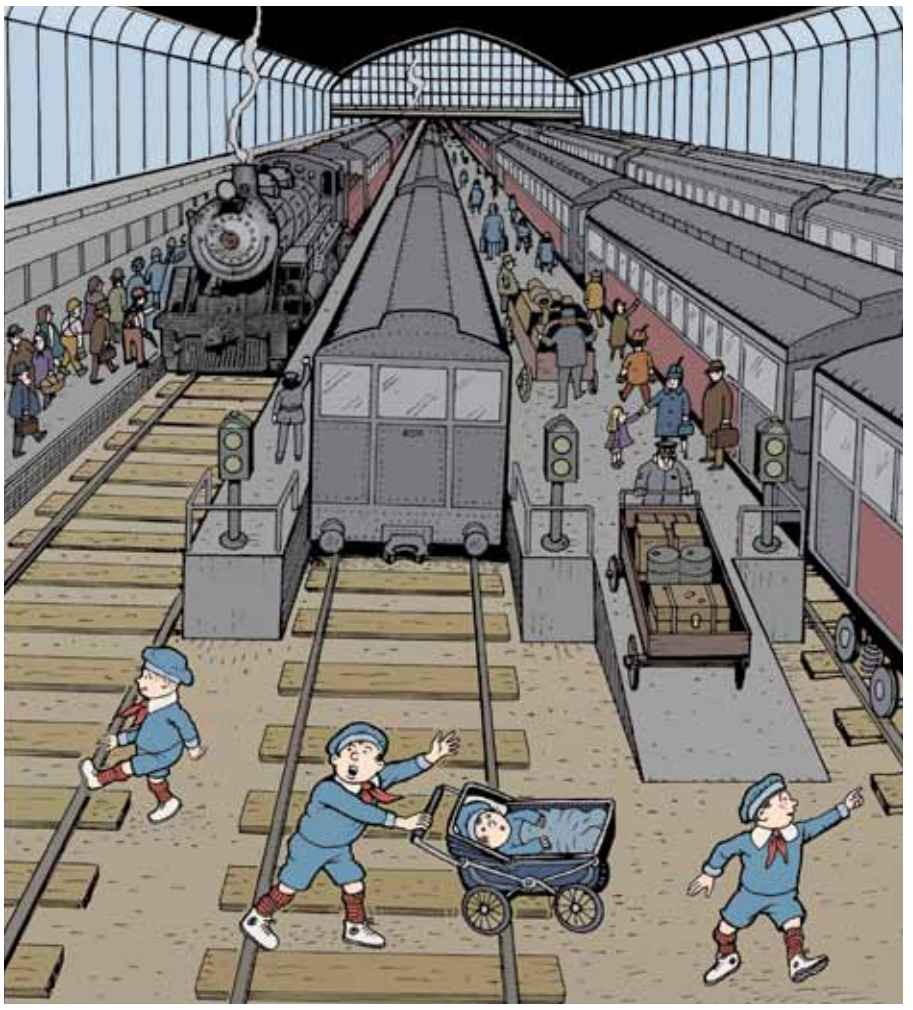
BY ARIE KAPLAN

AL JAFFEE'S MAD LIFE
by Mary-Lou Weisman, illustrated by Al Jaffee
It Books, 240 pp., $27.99

In 1936, Abraham Jaffee, a rambunctious, clever student at Herman Ridder Junior High School in the Bronx, was told to report to the art room. When he and fifty other children were told to draw something, he began a detailed rendering of the village square in Zarasai, Lithuania, where he had lived from ages 6 to 12. Wolf William Eisenberg, the skinny, freckle-faced boy sitting in front of Abraham, drew a portrait of a peasant. When the assignment was over, Abraham and Wolf were both sent to the principal's office. Abraham was frightened until Wolf—who would later be known as the cartoonist Will Elder—leaned over and, in his thick Bronx accent, intoned, "I tink dere gunna send us to art school."

In *Al Jaffee's Mad Life*, Mary-Lou Weisman tells the story of how this young Abraham, raised in the shtetl of Zarasai, became one of *MAD* magazine's most prolific and recognizable cartoonists. The recurring features that Al Jaffee has created for *MAD*, such as "Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions" and especially the ingenious back-page "*MAD* Fold–In," are as closely associated with *MAD* as are "Spy Vs. Spy" or the magazine's "What . . . Me Worry?" mascot, Alfred E. Neuman. (Elder would also become one of *MAD*'s star cartoonists, during its formative years in the 1950s.) Weisman received Jaffee's full cooperation and the book features several dozen autobiographical illustrations by Jaffee himself, still active at age 89.

It isn't hard to see why a gifted boy like Abraham Jaffee would be obsessed with the notion of cobbling together something out of nothing. Born in Savannah, Georgia, Jaffee experienced a taste of the modernity and luxury of America, before being thrust into a comparatively rustic corner of Lithuania. Weisman conveys the panic that Jaffee felt when his mother Mildred, or Michlia, took him and his three brothers back to Zarasai, leav-



Jaffee, age 6, pushing a carriage and watching his brothers in the Hamburg train station, 1927. (Photo © Al Jaffee.)



Jaffee drawing Mickey Mouse for his friends in Lithuania, c. 1930. (Photo © Al Jaffee.)

ing his father Morris behind. Mildred, already a psychologically fragile woman, was horrified that her husband was obliged to work on the Sabbath in his job at Blumenthal's department store, by the difficulty of keeping kosher, and by America more generally. Morris, on the other hand, was, as Jaffee recalls "a dandy" who "felt like a million bucks" in America, "and was very, very eager to join the twentieth century."

During his childhood years in Zarasai, Jaffee's father kept in touch with his children by mailing cardboard tubes stuffed with newspaper comic strips, which Jaffee would read to his brothers and try to copy. However, as time wore on and Morris' work situation became dire, these comic-strip care packages became less and less frequent. Adding to Jaffee's misery was the fact that his mother was rarely around, and as the first-born child in the family, it often fell on him to take care of his three siblings. On the way to Lithuania, in the Hamburg train station, he had had an epiphany while trying to take care of his younger brothers after his mother had wandered off: "I realized that she was irresponsible. That I knew better than she did. I knew I could not put my life in her hands. I knew I was on my own." When Jaffee finally returned to America, his mother stayed behind, and was almost certainly murdered when the Nazis liquidated the town a few years later.

Curiously, in late-life, Jaffee, who calls himself a "lapsed Jew," has contributed several cartoons to the Lubavitcher children's magazine *The Moshiach Times*. He does it, he says, because he retains a fondness for "the kind and gentle souls of the people of Orthodoxy . . . or maybe I'm doing penance for my mother."

What effect did all this have on Jaffee's eventual career? Jaffee is best known for the artistic ingenuity displayed in his famous "fold-ins," in which the back-page illustration is transformed into a second image that wittily comments upon



Jaffee and Wolf Eisenberg (Will Elder), in the lunchroom of The High School of Music & Art in New York, c. 1936. (Photo courtesy of Al Jaffee.)

the first when the page is folded into thirds. Several generations of *MAD* readers remember their astonishment at the transformation when one simply folded the tabs "so 'A' meets 'B.'" Weisman traces the origins of Jaffee's comic inventiveness ("The Automated Ferris Wheel Rapid Parking Facility!") to his difficult childhood years in Lithuania, where he and his brother were forced to invent their own toys. As Weisman notes, "This childhood pleasure of making things from virtually nothing would turn Al into a lifelong scavenger and inventor who prefers homemade to store-bought."

There is also, of course, the familiar biographical irony of a miserable childhood leading to a career in comedy. Weisman sees Jaffee's "Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions," in which put-upon wiseacres respond to inane queries, as "Al's way of getting back at everyone who had ever put him down, beaten him, starved him, neglected him, [or] abandoned him." This is probably true, though it is questionable whether it gets to the manic source of Jaffee and *MAD*'s perpetual adolescent brio.

It is precisely here that *Al Jaffee's Mad Life* falls a little short. The bulk of the book concentrates on Jaffee's early years. Once Weisman reaches the point where Jaffee becomes a success at *MAD*—and goes on to draw cartoons for Harvey Kurtzman, Hugh Hefner, and others—the book is almost over.

The reader comes to understand the personal demons that drove Jaffee's "mad life" (when he grew up, Jaffee himself became a self-admittedly indifferent parent), but not quite how they led to the antics of *MAD*. Nonetheless, one does get a vivid picture of Abraham Jaffee, the kid who tinkered with intricate inventions because, like a well-made joke, they were the part of life one could control: fold the page over left and then back "so 'A' meets 'B.'"

Arie Kaplan is a writer for MAD *and has also written for DC Comics. He is the author of* From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books, *which was a 2008 National Jewish Book Award finalist.*

Where To: America or Palestine? Simon Dubnov's Memoir of Emigration Debates in Tsarist Russia

BY SIMON DUBNOV

Simon Dubnov (1860-1941), whose name is often spelled "Dubnow" to yield the correct pronunciation in German, was one of the 20th century's most influential historians of the Jews. Like Gershom Scholem and Jacob Katz, he transformed not only what we know about the Jewish past, but the way we understand what "history" means for a diasporic people. In his native Russia, Dubnov was both a well-known historian and an engaged public intellectual whose best-selling works recast the Jewish past and its relevance to the present.

Dubnov's magisterial autobiography, Kniga zhizni; vospominanīia i razmyshlenīia. Materīaly dli a istorīi moego vremeni. (The Book of Life: Memoirs and Reflections. Materials for the History of My Time), *published in Riga between 1934 and 1940 while Dubnov was in exile from both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, takes the reader on a deeply personal journey through nearly a century of upheaval for the Jews of Eastern Europe. This excerpt is taken from the new English translation by Dianne Sattinger, edited and annotated by Benjamin Nathans and Viktor Kelner, forthcoming from the University of Wisconsin Press.*

My youthful radicalism also found expression in journalism. At that time [1881] the burning question was which direction the emigration of Jews from Russia should take. Refugees from the pogrom-plagued south had rushed to the German and Austrian borders with the goal of emigrating to America, but then the plan of colonizing Palestine arose. Certain eccentrics even proposed a plan of resettlement in Spain. I took a stance on this question in the article "The Question of the Day" (*Rassvet* [*The Dawn*, a Russian-language Jewish weekly newspaper published in St. Petersburg]). It was easy to deal with the Spanish proposal: an economically underdeveloped country of Catholic monks, where the law forbidding public worship by non-Catholics still had not been revoked, could not serve as a haven for Jews. For mass immigration, Palestine too was unsuitable, with its despotic Turkish regime and primitive Arab population, with its Jewish pilgrims, hostile to modern schooling and to all attempts at agricultural colonization. Only one destination was left: the great democracy of North America. There, in the sparsely settled states, broad expanses of land could be acquired for cultivation and for creating a whole network of farming colonies. Here I cited the declaration of the Parisian "Alliance Israélite" that only America was suitable for emigration, as well as the initiative of the Union of American Jewish Congregations, which had just established a collection of funds to buy land for Jewish settlers. Remarkably, at that time we all had agricultural colonization in mind and not urban industrial immigration . . .

I do not know how much my article, one of the first on the emigration question, contributed to this result; I merely know that after its appearance a lively debate took place on the pages of *Rassvet* and *Russkii evrei* [*The Russian Jew*, another weekly published in St. Petersburg] about the question "Where to": America or Palestine? The first advocates of Palestinism expressed their opinions, and two months after the publication of my article, Moshe Leib Lilienblum also came forward in *Rassvet* with heavy artillery in the well-known article "The All-Jewish Question and Palestine," in which the new pro-Palestine ideology was developed for the first time. I recall how the secretary to the editor, Markus Ka-



Simon Dubnov packing his books in Petrograd, 1921. (Photo © YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.)

gan, who was in favor of emigration to Palestine, showed me the manuscript of Lilienblum's article immediately after it was received. Before revealing it to me, he posed an insidious question: "Well, what do you think—what position will Lilienblum take on the emigration question?" I answered: probably in favor of America. Then and there he opened the manuscript and triumphantly tapped his finger on its concluding lines. At that time it could not have entered my mind that the author of *Sins of Youth*, my teacher in all things radical, would hurl a challenge at European progress and turn his face to the East. That summer I had the opportunity to express my opinion on yet another cultural question, much less urgent at the time, but which later became the subject of passionate debates. [Alexander] Tsederbaum, the editor of the Jewish weekly *Hamelits* in Petersburg, conceived the idea of also publishing a weekly in Yiddish, or as people used to say, in "jargon," under the title *Yidishes folksblat* [*The Jewish/Yiddish People's Paper*]. When an announcement about the publication arrived at *Rassvet*'s editorial office, [associate editor Mark] Varshavskii suggested that I write a special article about how necessary such an organ was, and he advised me to speak personally with Tsederbaum . . .

On a summer day I rang the doorbell at Tsederbaum's apartment on Liteinyi Prospect. I was greeted by a graying, slightly hunchbacked, diminutive old man, who bore very little resemblance to that mighty "cedar" (*erez*) by which he pseudonymously dignified himself at *Hamelits*. I was curious to speak with the editor of the once-militant organ that had unmasked rabbinic and Hasidic fanaticism, whose articles I had read with such enthusiasm in earlier years, but the conversation with him disillusioned me. The garrulous old man recounted at length his pursuits and achievements, including the Yiddish-language *Kol Mevaser* [*Voice of the Messenger*], which he published in the 1860s in Odessa, and the conflicts he had had with contributors to his publications: [Sholem Yankev] Abramovich (Mendele), [Avraham Ber] Gottlober, Lilienblum. We parted amicably, and I could not then foresee that a couple of years later this old denouncer would sharply attack me, a young denouncer, after the appearance of my articles about religious reforms. Under the influence of our conversation, I wrote a short anonymous article titled "A Newspaper for the Jewish People" (*Rassvet* 1881, No. 35), where I passionately demonstrated the necessity of creating serious journalism in the language of the people, which both "our nationalists and cosmopolitans" treated with equal scorn. The new organ was especially important given the disarray of the masses in the wake of the pogroms, when the common folk needed to know what to do, where to emigrate, and how to refashion their livelihoods on the basis of "productive labor," whether agricultural or artisanal. "The main goal of a newspaper for the Jewish people," I wrote, "should be to foster serious discussion of social problems—and not via sarcasm or humor, as has hitherto been the case." In general, the new organ fulfilled our expectations. During the 1880s it grouped around itself a number of young writers who later became famous, such as [Mordechai] Spektor, Sholem-Aleichem, and [Simon] Frug, but within the newspaper there were never-ending debates about the equality of rights "jargon" should have with Hebrew and Russian. At that time I advocated only tolerance toward the Jewish vernacular; it was only much later that I came to acknowledge its equal worth.

Translating and Remembering Chaim Grade

BY CURT LEVIANT

This past year marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of one of Vilna's greatest sons, the Yiddish poet and novelist, Chaim Grade. Born in Vilna in 1910, Grade died in New York as an old man, at the relatively young age of 72.

I translated three of Grade's most important books. In doing so, I came to understand that this actually required knowledge of four languages: not only Yiddish and English, but also Hebrew and Jewish. By Jewish I mean knowledge of the cycle of Jewish life from birth and bris through bar mitzvah, wedding, and end of life; the Shabbes and the calendar of Jewish holidays; a familiarity with Jewish liturgy, ritual, and customs; and a working knowledge of some of the basic texts of *Yiddishkeyt*.

Let me make an analogy. In addition to knowing English, a translator of Hamlet into Greek has to know *Englishkeyt* in order to understand what Hamlet means when he tells Ophelia, "Get thee to a nunnery." Otherwise he'll translate it as if it said: "Get thee to a Catholic convent," which would just show that Shakespearean English is Greek to him. Those who know *Englishkeyt* know that "nunnery" here means just the opposite— a brothel.

A translator must know the hidden corners of a culture, and this is especially true for Chaim Grade's works. Yiddish has a Hebrew component of roughly 15-18 percent. In Grade's magnum opus, *The Yeshiva*, the rabbis speak a Yiddish that can be almost completely Hebrew—supersaturated with Jewish—all set within a Yiddish syntactical structure:

> *Aderahbeh, raboysy, vegn di shayle paskent der Rosh tomid le-tzad kooleh, oon di halokkhe iz khol oleynu mi-sheyses yemay brayshis lo-netsakh ad biyas ha-goyel moshiach tzidkeynu im yirtze ha-shem bimhayra u-veyomaynu, Omen*!
>
> On the contrary, gentlemen, pertaining to this question the Rosh always decides leniently and this law is applicable to us from the six days of Creation forever until the coming of the redeemer, our righteous Messiah, God-willing, speedily and in our days, Amen!

If you don't know Jewish, then the above sentence may as well be Sanskrit. It's almost entirely in Hebrew, including the acronym of a leading medieval rabbinic authority, "the Rosh" (which might easily be mistranslated as "head"), with a couple of Aramaic terms for good measure. Moreover, it presupposes a basic understanding of halakhic discourse and the traditional Jewish way of life it governed.

Alas, there have been a number of Yiddish translators who, because of their education, were lacking in their knowledge of Jewish. In fact, even after I had successfully translated his remarkable novel about a "grass widow," *The Agunah*, where knowledge of all three languages was needed, when it came to his great novel, *The Yeshiva,* Grade still wanted to test me. But, in truth, I have a feeling it wasn't him. It was his *yetzer horeh* (evil inclination) who came in the shape of—I hesitate to say this but it's true—Chaim's late wife, Inna, who departed for *yenne velt* last year, leaving a still uncatalogued mass of manuscripts, which she had jealously guarded for the past twenty-eight years. Anyway, the wife didn't like my translations. She didn't like me. She didn't like the fact that Chaim liked me (or anyone else). So I suspect she nudged her husband to test me. But with all her faults I must say that Inna had the wisdom of Tsar Nicholas and the knowledge of Moshe Rabbeinu—she knew Hebrew like the Tsar and read Yiddish like Moshe Rabbeinu.

Translating Chaim Grade's novels required knowledge of four languages: not only Yiddish and English, but also Hebrew and Jewish.

So Chaim says to me, sort of apologetically, "I'm going to give you the first three pages of *The Yeshiva* to translate. You see, some years ago I gave them to a translator and when I read it, *Iz mir gevorn finster in di eygen* (I blanked out)." I remembered the story. The translator had rendered *emuneh shleyme*, 'perfect faith,' as the 'faith of Solomon.' *Emuneh* means faith. As for the second word, he apparently remembered that there was a king named *Shleyme*, or Solomon.

I translated the first few pages. Then I made a Xerox copy of the first page that had the correct translation of *emuneh shleyme* and I folded it into a little envelope marked, "Do not open this envelope till you finish reading all the typed pages." On the other copy I whited out "perfect faith" and typed in "faith of Solomon," and sent the packet out to Chaim. He called me from the Bronx on the day it arrived. "Coort," he said in his gravelly voice, "a very nice translation but, heh heh, you made a slight error with *emuneh shleyme*. You translated it as 'faith of Solomon.'"

> "Chaim, did you open the little envelope?"
> "No."
> "Why not?"
> "Because you told me not to open it until I finished reading all the pages. I didn't finish them because soon as I saw what you wrote on page one about *emuneh shleyme*, I called you right away."
> "Do me a favor and open the envelope now."
> I heard him opening the envelope and chuckling as he returned to the phone.
> "*Du bandit, du ganev, du host mir opgeton a shpizl!*" (You rascal, you scamp, you put one over on me!)

It was fun working with a living writer. With Sholom Aleichem I only had a one-way conversation. But with Grade it was a real conversation. I had a living writer and he had a living translator. (Unfortunately, some dead writers have a dead translator too, but better a living translator for a dead writer than a dead translator for a living writer.)

It wasn't all business. Sometimes I would drive up to the Bronx to visit him; sometimes he took the two-and-a-half hour subway and bus journey to New Jersey. He especially liked coming when my Yiddish-speaking parents were visiting. In retrospect, I guess we had a father-son bond, though one uncomplicated by the usual parent-child stresses. I was particularly proud and touched when Chaim told me, "You're one of the few people I address as *du*"—the more intimate form of you, rather than the formal *ihr*.

Others who knew him would tell me that Chaim was a difficult man, one who angered quickly, but I never experienced this personally. His author photos on dust jackets show a man thoughtfully, even morosely, looking out into the distance, the world's burdens on his shoulders. He followed the old European tradition of confronting the camera with a serious mien. Although he smiled and laughed a lot when we were together, he did confide once, "I am not a happy man"—he said it in English; Yiddish doesn't have that concept. Grade never had any children. His first wife, Frume Libtche, and his mother, Velle, were killed by the Germans and their Lithuanian accomplices in the Vilna Ghetto. He never had any children with Inna, and their life together was stormy. It is no wonder that in my *Roget's Thesaurus* I got to know one reference number by heart, 950. There one could find all the synonyms for rage, anger, wrath, indignation, etc. Many of Grade's characters, some of them clearly alter egos for the author, were angry men.

Grade's attitude toward his fiction fascinated me. After I had finished translating *The Agunah* and bemoaned the tragic fate of the heroine, Chaim laughed and waved his hand disparagingly. "Don't fret," he said. "She's actually alive and well and living in Chicago. I just had to kill her off for the sake of the drama." When my own first novel, *The Yemenite Girl*, was published, along with a blurb from Saul Bellow, Grade was truly pleased for me. The Hebrew/Yiddish phrase *kin'as sofrim*—the envy that one writer has for another—did not apply to Chaim. Long after *The Yemenite Girl* was published I still felt a kinship with the characters I had created, especially the hero, the Israeli writer Yehiel Bar-Nun, who

in the novel had won the Nobel Prize (as, arguably, Grade ought to have). I asked Chaim if he continued to think about his characters. Again Grade surprised me. "No. I forget about them as soon as the book is done. I'm too busy thinking of new characters." At first I couldn't accept that. But by the time my fourth novel was published, I understood that it's easier to possess and treasure characters that other writers have created than to dwell on your own.

Grade had a more extensive Jewish education than any other Yiddish writer. He was ignominiously booted out of his yeshiva when teachers found him writing secular Yiddish poetry. I realized that Grade was a secular, non-observant Jew when, early in our relationship, I saw him joyously order and eat *traif* meat. Yet he continually surprised me. One early April day, I visited him in his small, book-saturated Bronx apartment. (Luckily, most of the time Inna was away; when she was home, the tension could be cut with a teaspoon.) The phone rang and I heard Chaim telling someone about his Seder. I couldn't wait for him to finish the conversation.

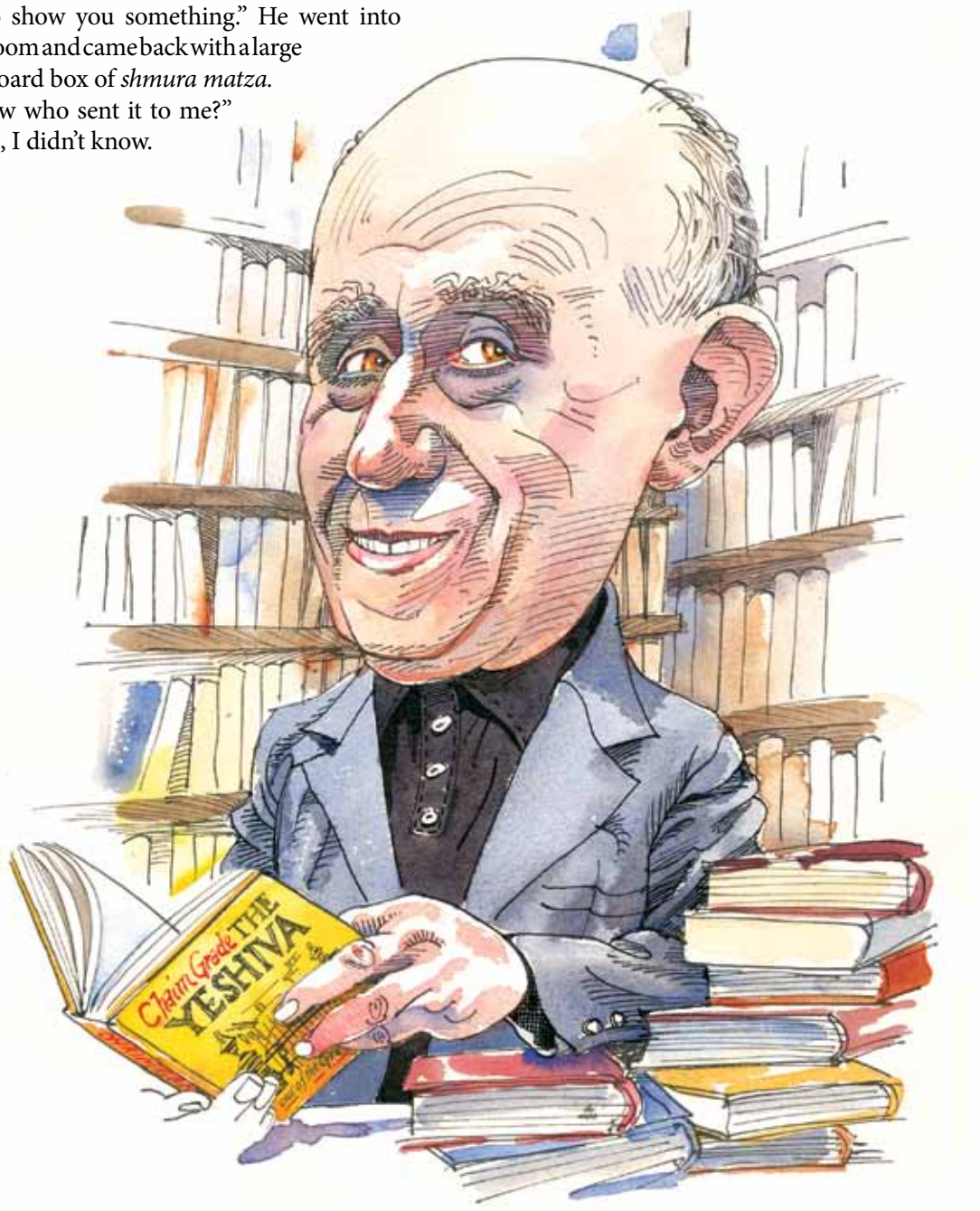
> "What? You? Chaim? *Du pravest a Seder?*"
> "*Avadeh! Vos meynstu, ikh bin a goy?*"
> (Of course! You think I'm a *goy*?)

Then he stood up, raised a finger, and said, "Wait. I want to show you something." He went into another room and came back with a large flat cardboard box of *shmura matza.*
"You know who sent it to me?"
Of course, I didn't know.

> "The Lubavitcher Rebbe. Every year at this time, he sends his personal *shliakh* (messenger) to bring me a box of *shmura matza* . . . He's been doing this for years."
> "Have you ever met him?"
> "Of course."

Grade couldn't stand the heat of the Bronx summer in his non-air-conditioned apartment. He longed to get away into the countryside for June, July, and August. Yet—I'm convinced it was purposely done, they had such a quirky love-hate relationship—his wife usually delayed and delayed until the middle of August. Once, they rented a house in Barryville, New York, and I drove up in mid-September to visit him. In the course of our conversation he mentioned going to shul for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. He had abandoned the structures of halakha, but his ostensible secularism cloaked a traditional interior. He once told me, "I can pick up a Chumash and study it without wearing a yarmulke, but when I look into Rashi—in the Chumash or the Talmud—*heybt mir on der kop tzu brennen.*" (I feel my head starting to burn.)

In the mid-1920's, Chaim Grade was a private student of the great and saintly Rabbi Avrohom Karelitz, who was known as "the Chazon Ish." He was studying with him one Friday morning when a woman came in to consult the rabbi about the chicken she was about to prepare for the Sabbath.



Chaim Grade. (Illustration by Mark Anderson.)

Here's the story Chaim told me:

> We were sitting at a little table in his house and a woman comes in holding her chicken. Since the Chazon Ish was very nearsighted he actually couldn't examine the fowl. So he whispered to me, "*Iz zee an oreme?*" (Is she a poor woman?) In other words, he wasn't going to ruin a poor housewife's Shabbes meal, probably bought with her last few pennies, and declare the chicken not kosher. And I, naïve youngster that I was, I asked her, "*Veefil fardint ayer man?*" (How much does your husband earn?) At once the Chazon Ish hissed at me, "*Bist a nar!*" (You're a fool!) And to the woman he called out, "*Kosher!*"

One of Grade's most remarkable stories, and one of the great achievements of 20th-century Yiddish prose, is "My Quarrel With Hersh Rasseyner," which dramatizes his reasons for breaking with the world of tradition. The story consists of three philosophical dialogues between two Holocaust survivors, Chaim and Hersh, who meet after the war in Paris. Both had been yeshiva students, but Chaim is now a secular Jew while Hersh's commitment to Orthodoxy has been strengthened by the horror of the Holocaust. Chaim argues that Jews must liberate themselves and participate in world culture, while Hersh advocates complete adherence to Jewish law, and a separation of oneself from the pleasures of the world, in line with the principles of the ascetic Musar movement in which they had both been schooled.

I knew that Hersh was based on an old friend, who went on to head a Musar yeshiva outside of Paris, and whom Grade had really met after the war. I remarked how unusual it was for Grade to bump into his friend three times and wondered how he was able to transcribe so meticulously the twists and turns of Hersh's thoughts and their arguments. Chaim laughed. Again he gave a disparaging wave of his hand:

> I didn't meet him three times. And it wasn't in Paris. And there was nothing to remember. I bumped into Gershon Kovler standing in front of the entrance to *The Forward* building. And I didn't talk for hours with him. I talked to him for maybe five minutes, and in the story I put into his mouth the words he could have said had he had the ability to articulate his thoughts and feelings.

Grade's artistic achievement was always rooted in his Jewish knowledge, his *Yiddishkeyt*.

Although I maintain that no one should presume to translate from Yiddish without a mastery of Jewish, sometimes even knowing Hebrew and Yiddish and Jewish (and even Sanskrit) isn't enough. In fact, sometimes even having the pleasure of a living author does not suffice. Once, while translating *The Yeshiva*, I ran across a puzzling word for some kind of pastry or cake. I had never seen the word and no dictionary I consulted had it, so I called Chaim. He thought about it for a moment, laughed, and then said, "*Du Vaist? Ikh hob sheyn fargessen.*" (You know? I forgot already.)

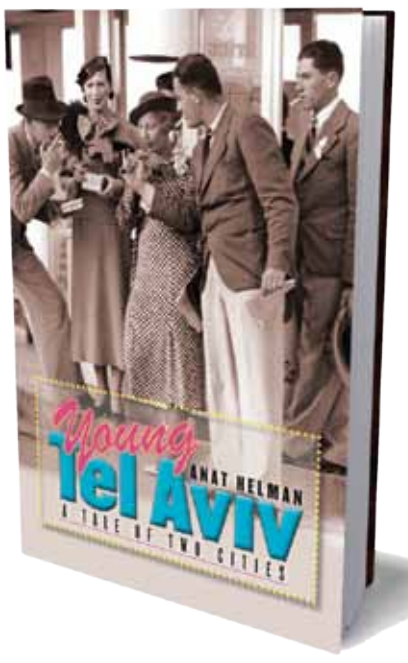
Curt Leviant is an award-winning translator and author whose seventh novel, A Novel of Klass*, is about an émigré Yiddish painter and his wife. This essay is adapted from a lecture given at YIVO celebrating the 100th Anniversary of Chaim Grade's birth.*

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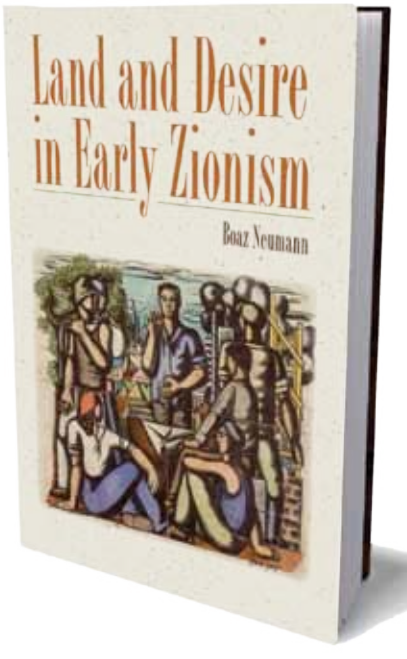
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A provocative look at the centrality of desire for "the land" among early settlers in pre-state Israel

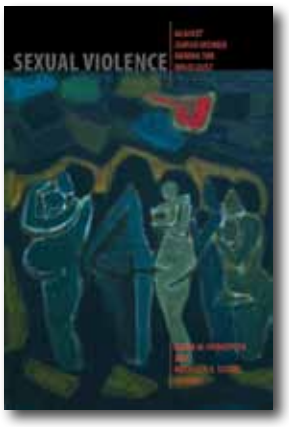
Neumann shows how early Zionists' desire for the land and a total identification with it is crucial to understanding their experience and the impact of that experience on Israeli history and collective memory.

★ ★ Starred Review ★ ★ from *Publisher's Weekly*



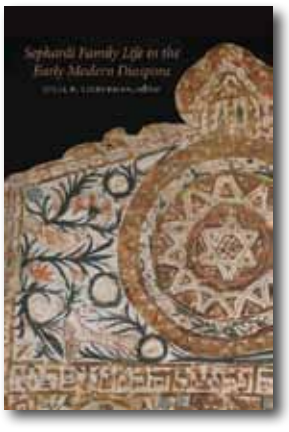
"Rubin's anthology of previously unreleased work by rising and prominent Jewish American authors shows the multitudinous and often unexpected ways in which Jewish ideology shapes people's lives. Standouts from Elisa Albert, Aaron Hamburger, Lara Vapnyar, Dara Horn, and others round out this stunning compilation of talented storytellers who have all been shaped somehow by history and faith, or lack thereof."

—Publisher's Weekly



"The Holocaust horrors suffered by males and females alike have been rightly memorialized in histories and museums, but the sexual violence suffered by females has rarely been recorded. Perhaps we would have been better able to prevent the rapes in the former Yugoslavia and the Congo if we had not had to wait more than sixty years to hear the truths that are anthologized in *Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust* by Sonja Hedgepeth and Rochelle Saidel. We owe them and the authors they assembled a debt of gratitude for a well-documented warning that sexual violence is a keystone of genocide."

—Gloria Steinem, feminist writer and organizer, co-founder of the Women's Media Center



"[This volume edited by Julia Lieberman features six] stimulating articles on Sephardi life, both in the Ottoman Empire and in the Western Sephardi communities which were founded by refugees from the Inquisition. Most of the articles deal with. . . new situations arising in women's lives, [including unique] issues created by divorce and separation, or women's new position in modern, commercial societies."

—Michael Alpert, University of Westminster

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