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LAST WORD

On the cover: *The Gates of Repentance* by Mark Anderson.

Toxic Brew

Allan Arkush's review of Jeffrey Herf's *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left 1967–1989* (Summer 2017) astonished me. It wasn't the picture of a soft Richard Dreyfuss playing the Israeli special ops hero Lieutenant Colonel Yonatan Netanyahu (let alone Burt Lancaster as Shimon Peres!). It was the fact that the vile and ridiculous trope equating Israelis with Nazis was invented by . . . the children of Nazis in the 1960s and 1970s. This is, as Arkush quotes Herf, "a toxic ideological brew" that is still very much with us.

Danielle Kahn
Denver, CO

Open and Shut?

Reading Jon Levenson's thoughtful retrospective on the 30th anniversary of *The Closing of the American Mind*'s publication in the Summer 2017 issue of *JRB* ("The Closing of the American Mind Now"), I was back in the University of Chicago's Harper Memorial Library, looking at those ceilings and thinking about what a liberal arts education really is and—bleak thought—whether it's still possible to get one.

Alasdair MacIntyre has lamented the slow dissolution of the idea of the university (especially the Catholic university), where the theological narrative that once held together disparate disciplines has begun to fray. For men and women of faith who seek an intellectual path that embodies a way of life and not merely a self-referential play of words, the community of conventional academic discourse has become increasingly inhospitable. This is true even in many nominally confessional institutions of higher education, let alone in the large secular research universities that Bloom called home for 40 years. MacIntyre memorably concludes his classic of modern moral philosophy, *After Virtue*, by telling his readers that any hope for civilizational renewal in the West must await the arrival of another, "doubtless very different," St. Benedict. With this evocative image, MacIntyre means to convey the idea that human excellence is best cultivated through particular, embodied practices, in largely local and boldly countercultural communities.

As I thought about MacIntyre's observations, Levenson's incisive commentary on Bloom's most famous book came into bold relief. Levenson closes his piece with the following trenchant thought: "Given the social and cultural divisions characteristic of modern pluralistic societies, it is hard to imagine how an educational vision of the comprehensive premodern sort could ever be restored on most campuses. *The Closing of the American Mind* helped to clarify the problem, but it provides less help in pointing a way forward." Maybe Bloom saw his intellectual project at Toronto, the Telluride House at Cornell, and Chicago as an attempt to create his own "school within a school," a countercultural experiment in liberal education done right. But the attempt at a wholesale recovery of the university feels naïve today, even more than it did 30 years ago when Bloom was making his case.

Levenson gets this exactly right, but his point raises another related, and intriguing, question: What would a distinctly *Jewish* liberal arts education look like? Can we even make sense of such an enterprise? If reason and what is discussable are reduced to only the flatly biological or the empirically verifiable, the largest human, and Jewish, questions—love and friendship, morality and meaning, God and Mammon—get left out. Are there models or exemplars of a kind of theologically informed Great Books education that we Jews might turn to for inspiration and guidance? Could this be at least one "way forward," to use Levenson's suggestive expression, beyond the impasse Bloom seems to leave us with?

In Christopher Derrick's little gem of a book *Escape from Scepticism: Liberal Education as if Truth Mattered*, he described a visit to Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California, some 40 years ago: "I stayed up late last night, discussing all things with half-a-dozen of the students . . . [and] the later it gets, the more profound and universal the subject under discussion becomes. At nine, perhaps, you are discussing politics, in the form of some currently newsworthy piece of public villainy: by ten, you have got to the principles of political action; by eleven, to the general principles of all human action, and by twelve, to the nature of the good and the beautiful and the true. Before the party breaks up in the small hours, God himself will have been given the full treatment."

Could such a conversation take place among young Jewish Americans now, in the 21st century? Is it time for we Jews to take up the educational challenge of developing what Levenson calls a "well-articulated, comprehensive vision of the liberal arts" along Jewish—theological or cultural—lines? I'm pretty sure I know what Bloom would think about such a project (noble-sounding but ultimately self-refuting). After his deep analysis of the strengths and limitations of Bloom's book, I'd like to know what Levenson would think of this possible Jewish "way forward."

Rabbi Mark Gottlieb, The Tikvah Fund
New York, NY

Jon D. Levenson Responds:

Mark Gottlieb's learned and instructive letter challenges me to go beyond my critique both of liberal arts education in its current self-destructive condition and of Allan Bloom's particular vision of its renewal in order to answer a question I did not address: "What would a distinctly *Jewish* liberal arts education look like?" Rabbi Gottlieb provides the broad outlines of an answer himself when he stresses, with Alasdair MacIntyre, the importance of "particular, embodied practices, in largely local and boldly countercultural communities" (though I would add that just *how* countercultural such education need be is a function of the character of the ambient culture at the time). Given the variety of Jewish commitments on offer, what such an approach excludes is easier to specify than what it includes. What I called "a well-articulated, comprehensive vision" cannot, obviously, be based on a vague cultural identity or a fading social one: The openness of American society, reflected in the skyrocketing intermarriage rates, makes such things too weak a foundation upon which to rest any serious educational vision. Similarly, "pluralism" is nothing but a weasel word without some articulation of the control that prevents the pluralism from degenerating into relativism. Finally, a credible Jewish vision of the liberal arts cannot tolerate a rigid compartmentalization of Jewish and non-Jewish subjects, with the former protected from the rigorous critical scrutiny applied to the latter. As I mentioned in the essay, there must be "a balance of affirmation and challenge." No clear-cut formula for defining that balance can be specified in the abstract.

All this is a tall order. Though I am neither a prophet nor a member of a prophetic guild, I remain doubtful that a viable institution affirming such a vision will come into existence in the foreseeable future.

Grudge Match

In the 1933 newspaper interview with Rabbi Joseph Rozin, rediscovered by Marc Shapiro ("The Rogochover Speaks His Mind," Summer 2017), the famous Rogochover Gaon is quoted as dismissing the Vilna Gaon as "having all-encompassing knowledge" of Talmud but not knowing how to learn as well as a modest schoolteacher, "small *rebbele*," who used to be his neighbor in a Russian shtetl.

In all likelihood, the Rogochover's dismissal of the Vilna Gaon was motivated by traditional Chabadsker antipathy to the Gaon as leader of the misnagdim (the Hasidic movement's opponents). In general Chabad retained its pugnacious attitude towards misnagdim far longer than other strands of Chassidus. Indeed, the polemic with misnagdim exists up until the present day in Chabad. When Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, "the Alter Rebbe," was released from prison, he was released into the custody of a sort of court Jew, Nota Notkin from Shklov, who was permitted to have a residence in St. Petersburg. He was there for a few hours before his Hasidim could arrange to pick him up and take him back to Liozna. I have heard many times the saying *Der Alter Rebbe hut gehat mehr tzaar fun di por sho'oh by der misnagid Notkin, vi in der gantze tzeyt in tfisse beym Tsar!* (The Alter Rebbe suffered more in these few hours with the misnagid Notkin than he suffered in the tsar's prison!). Combine this attitude with the traditional Chabad pungency of expression and you get the Rogochover's statement.

kaganovitch
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

Fundamental Principles

In his review of David G. Dalin's *Jewish Justices of the Supreme Court: From Brandeis to Kagan* ("Great Jews in Robes," Summer 2017), Professor Samuel Goldman writes that "for most of the Jews on the court, Jewishness has been more of an ethnic than a religious identity." Many Jews in America identify themselves similarly: as secular rather than religious Jews. But the crux of the matter is that the spiritual guidelines of Judaism as set forth in the traditional canon have provided each generation with the moral guidelines for their lifetime pursuit of *tzedaka* and *tikkun olam*.

Many philanthropists are guided by these fundamental principles of spirituality as expressed in both secular and religious ways in their final acts. The influence of the spiritual is marked by the opportunity of their demise to give back to the general community. By ignoring the spiritual essence of the Torah and Talmud and related commentary, a misidentification is propounded by the wayward Jewish thought that the motivation of the individual Jew is a secular rather than a spiritual act.

The result is a population which is subject to the weakening of its ancient roots in a world in which they are surrounded by the temptation to act with greed rather than provide sustenance for their fellow human beings. This shows the need for the kind of historical reflection which would result in more focused moral guidelines, as well as clarifying the role of language in our fundamental self-understanding.

Sigmund R. Balka
Forest Hills, NY

Is Repentance Possible?

BY ABRAHAM SOCHER

The other day YouTube decided that I ought to watch a strangely mesmerizing psychologist from Canada named Jordan B. Peterson berate me over my failure to follow his 10 rules for success. His first rule was to "stop doing the things that you know are wrong," when you *know* that they are wrong.

This is a good, straightforward rule. It's also a pretty easy one to follow, if you are a robot or an angel. I don't think that Dr. Peterson mentioned that it was Aristotle who first tried to seriously work through the question of how it is that we frequently seem to do things that we know to be against our better judgment. Socrates had said that, although a person may be wrong about what is good for him, "No one goes willingly toward the bad," which seems obviously true until one remembers that, in fact, one does so fairly often. After all, I ought to have tied myself to the mast of Microsoft Word and resisted the siren call of YouTube whose window I had ostensibly opened in order to . . . well, I am not quite sure what I opened it for anymore, but there must have been a good reason, and it had nothing to do with Jordan B. Peterson or ad words or Google's super-secret distractibility algorithm for middle-aged men. (I've been wondering if this Yom Kippur I should add a line to the *Al Chet* litany of confession: "And for the sin of opening browser windows of distraction," though perhaps someone has already done it . . . how would I Google that?)

Akrasia, which is often translated as weakness of the will, is, as Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a puzzle: If I think that, all things considered, it would be better for me to do Y than X, and I want to do Y more than X, then I will do Y, not X. But sometimes I don't, and you don't; we go on X-ing when our practical reason clearly tells us that we should Y. It is, one might almost say, our natural state to frequently and incontinently X.

In his deep, densely argued new book *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative*, Alasdair MacIntyre discusses such an akratic person "who strongly desires something that, so she judges, she has excellent reason not to desire." Perhaps she is tempted to stream a self-help video, which though potentially useful will, nonetheless, derail her from a more important task; but perhaps the stakes are higher, and she is avoiding, say, a difficult but necessary conversation, or choosing a fun but frivolous relationship over a deep one. If she understands her predicament correctly, according to MacIntyre, then she will see that "her predicament is one of desiring a lesser and inappropriate good over a greater and appropriate good." Consequently, MacIntyre writes, "she has every *reason* to redirect" her desires, but reasons alone are not quite enough. Somehow, she must "draw upon the resources provided by her earlier moral training and education and by her present social relationships if she is to act rightly." In short, she must repent, or, as the Jewish tradition has it, "return" to the priorities that she knows are right. MacIntyre writes:

> Aristotle provided an outline account of her situation, partly in what he said about *akrasia* . . . and partly elsewhere. Later Aristotelians, most notably Aquinas, have provided further resources, but the NeoAristotelian account of such conflicts needs further development and rendering into contemporary terms. Until these have been provided, there is a psychological lacuna in NeoAristotelian theory . . . [but] I see no reason to believe that what is needed cannot be provided.

One wishes that he had given us the full theory in this book rather than a suggestive promissory note. But this

The Siren Vase depicts the ship of Odysseus passing the sirens, ca. 480 B.C.–470 B.C. (The British Museum.)

would be a churlish demand to make of an 88-year-old philosopher who has helped to reframe the questions of ethics as much as anybody in the last half-century.

Thirty-six years ago, in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre famously argued that modern moral thinking was a mess, a rubble heap of incompatible theories leaving us with an incoherent moral vocabulary in which we appeal to the greatest good for the greatest number at one moment, to rights and duties at another, and to something like transcendent moral law at a third. This left MacIntyre with his famous challenge: Nietzsche or Aristotle? Either morality as we know it should be razed to the ground, or we should junk the implausible systems of what he called "the Enlightenment project" and attempt a qualified return to Aristotle's naturalistic, character-based virtue ethics.

A quarter-century earlier the Cambridge philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe had suggested that we simply drop "the concepts of obligation, and duty—*moral* obligation and *moral* duty, that is to say—and of what is *morally* right and wrong," and MacIntyre's argument can be taken as filling out Anscombe's suggestion. As Anscombe wrote:

> [T]he *moral* sense of "ought," ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it.

Anscombe herself was a Catholic, but with the modern eclipse of what she called Judaism and Christianity's "law conception of ethics," she had also recommended a return to Aristotle.

As is partly evident from his reference to St. Thomas Aquinas in the quote above, MacIntyre himself ended up converting to Catholicism shortly after publishing *After Virtue* (one can see the signs of it already in that book). These are mere biographical facts, but they may make one wonder just how possible it is to do without that moral "ought," and in particular whether precisely that sense of obligation might be one of the necessary resources for the kind of character reform, or repentance, that MacIntyre describes.

On the Aristotelian view, morality is internal to human life rather than a matter of obedience to a set of abstract rules or an external authority. Briefly, we have dispositions to act or react in certain ways, and these dispositions are shaped by education, admonition, example, and habit. The best of these traits will fall between the extremes of behavior: It is bad, for instance, to be either timid or foolhardy, but it is good to follow the "middle path" and be courageous. So, courage is a virtue, and timidity and foolhardiness are vices (though far from the worst ones).

What makes courage and the other virtues—for instance, generosity, truthfulness, and temperance—good is the natural fact that they help a human being to thrive and be happy, in the widest and highest possible sense of that word. Therefore, one ought to develop the virtues because they are, as we now say, "life skills" which will help us succeed, not because we *morally* ought to, in the sense of which Anscombe disapproved. How, exactly, such a system can be, or rather was, adapted to a religion based on divine authority is a question to which I shall return.

In the meantime, however, it's worth noting just how hard a task MacIntyre's akratic woman faces. Her character has been formed by relationships and incidents since birth, many of them forgotten, not to speak of brain chemistry and the blind impress of events. Her actions and desires are, by now, governed by stable habits of action, which have been with her since childhood. How likely is it, really, that, in the middle of the journey, she, or any of us, can change these habits, turn vice into virtue? Perhaps this puts the question too strongly, since MacIntyre describes her as a person who is merely tempted by a "lesser and inappropriate good," rather than what is actually bad (the distracting YouTube video or the frivolous friend, not the stiff drink in the afternoon). But, after all, bad desires do happen to good people, even those who have been fortunate enough to grow up with a loving family, good friends, and a well-ordered community.

Aristotle argues that weakness of the will is not quite a vice; it's more, he says, like epilepsy, and, af-

ter the temptation has passed, the weak-willed person regrets his actions. But he does not tell us how such regret can be transformed into repentance. As MacIntyre frankly admits, there is a gap, "a psychological lacuna," in the theory, for Aristotle, for his medieval Christian commentator Aquinas, and for us.

As it happens, the Jewish approach to repentance was authoritatively codified by Thomas's great Aristotelian predecessor Moses Maimonides, and his approach demonstrates both the strengths and the weaknesses of virtue ethics, as well, perhaps, as the extent to which moral thinking was messy even before the modern world.

Maimonides once posed an interesting question which had never occurred to Aristotle (in fact, it wouldn't have made any sense to him), though the Muslim philosopher Alfarabi had earlier asked a similar question for similar reasons. The question is: Who is better, "the man of self-restraint [who] performs moral and praiseworthy deeds," but does so only by struggling with his desires and dispositions, or the man who "acts morally from innate longing and desire" because he has a virtuous character? In this early essay, Maimonides says that philosophers "unanimously agree that [the virtuous man] is superior to, and more perfect than, the one who has to curb his passions," even if they are behaviorally indistinguishable. But, he says, the rabbinic tradition regards the person who must work to subdue his temptation and do the right thing—or stop doing the wrong ones—as better. Among the famous rabbinic sayings he quotes are "the greater the man, the greater his evil inclination," and "according to the difficulty is the reward."

In the end, Maimonides explains away the rabbinic statements that seem to prefer the conflicted man who wrestles with his desires to the virtuous one, but he cheats a little in order to get his rabbinic and philosophical authorities on the same page. The details of how he cheats—some of his prooftexts are straw men, and he ends up invoking a distinction between rational and irrational laws that he doesn't really believe—are less important than the fact that he feels compelled to do so. For the tension he identified is a genuine one.

If ethical action is a consequence of accepting "the yoke of the law," and the primary object of evaluation is the individual act, then the person who, against his own inclinations, bends himself to the commanded task is heroic. If ethical action is a matter of one's character, then that very same person will be just barely passable, like an alcoholic who is "on the wagon," at least for now.

One can see this tension still at work near the outset of Maimonides's great code of law, the *Mishneh Torah*. In its first volume, he codifies both *Hilchot De'ot*, "Laws of Moral Traits," and *Hilchot Teshuvah*, "Laws of Repentance." In *Hilchot De'ot* he briskly sketches an Aristotelian account of the virtues as a set of acquired habits whose ideal lies between two extremes. One case in which he unambiguously endorses straying from the middle path of classic virtue is instructive:

> There are some dispositions in regard to which it is forbidden merely to keep to the middle path. . . . Such a disposition is pride. The right way in this regard is not to be merely meek, but to be humble-minded and lowly of spirit to the utmost. And therefore was it said of Moses that he was "*exceedingly* meek," (Num. 12:3), not merely that he was "meek." Hence, our sages exhorted us, "Be exceedingly, exceedingly lowly of spirit" (Ethics of the Fathers 4:4). They also said that anyone who permits his heart to swell with haughtiness has denied the essential principal of our religion, as it is said, "And your heart will be proud, and you will forget the Lord your God" (Deut. 8:14).

How likely is it, really, that, in the middle of the journey, she, or any of us, can change these habits, turn vice into virtue?

This is very far from the virtuous person Aristotle called the "great-souled man" who thinks himself worthy of great things because he really is worthy of them. For Maimonides, it would seem impossible for such a man to understand that he is obliged

Undated portrait of Michel de Montaigne by Thomas de Leu.

to bow to the law and its giver, hence the deviation from the golden mean even by that greatest-souled of prophets, Moses.

Nonetheless, although the shadings are different, the overall picture of moral life given in *Hilchot De'ot* is an Aristotelian one. A good and happy human life is the natural result of the cultivation and exercise of the virtues, which is, more or less, equivalent to following the commandments of the Torah. Indeed, even the afterlife is a natural result of the highest of these virtues, those of the intellect. On such a picture, it is almost as impossible to have a good, flourishing life without a good upbringing, parents, and education as it would be to cultivate a vegetable garden in permafrost. This makes the religious obligation to repent a bit of a problem. "Ought," as they say, "implies can."

In *Hilchot Teshuvah*, Maimonides famously defines complete repentance as having been demonstrated when a person is faced with an opportunity to commit the same offense and refrains from doing so "because of his repentance rather than fear or failure." Since it is a commandment to repent, this is incumbent upon all Jews, but what if some of them lack the resources to pull this off?

In his discussion of repentance, Maimonides devotes an entire chapter to insisting that we have free will, but that really sidesteps the problem. Aristotle had argued that choosing virtue or vice was up to us. But he also thought such choices had a shelf life; there is a time when it is unfortunately too late to become a courageous or truthful person, just as it can be too late to begin training as a triathlete or a poet. How in such a system can repentance be obligatory? Yom Kippur, for instance, might seem like a good tool to rethink one's habits and reprioritize one's desires, but focusing on particular sins is really secondary to the vices that gave rise to them, and vices cannot be erased in a day.

One moment when one sees the strain between Maimonides's commitments to an ethics of character, on the one hand, and an ethics of obligation, on the other, is in what he writes about repentance in old age:

> If, however, a person only repented in old age, at a time when he is no longer capable of doing what he had done, even though this is not an excellent form of repentance, he is counted as a penitent. Even if he transgressed his entire life and repented on the day of his death and died as a penitent all of his sins are forgiven.

One can, just barely, reconcile such a statement with the virtue ethics that is laid out in *Hilchot De'ot*, but it is also clear here that Maimonides has reservations about someone whose repentance consists largely or entirely of regret. Indeed, what can such a verbal repentance even mean if it does not draw upon the kind of moral resources that MacIntyre enumerated and does not issue in the kind of behavioral change that Maimonides set out as a criterion of success? One suspects that Maimonides would have been tempted to agree with Montaigne, who said that he saw "nothing of conscience" in deathbed repentance: "[C]hagrin and feebleness imprint on us a lax and snotty virtue."

But is this really fair? And would one want to live in a moral culture in which repentance was no longer a possibility for those who were badly raised, or fully formed, or near death? Perhaps what Maimonides and the Jewish tradition he is summarizing are suggesting is that if one does not have the resources to change one's desires, then God will provide them. Or, alternatively, that in insisting that repentance is always both obligatory and possible, that "the gates of repentance" reopen every year, the tradition itself provides the resources to "stop doing the things that [one] know[s] are wrong," though it does not guarantee that one will.

What then of Maimonides's virtue ethics? Perhaps his inconsistent—or at least tension-ridden—system in which our moral lives are described in terms of both virtues to cultivate and commandments to be obeyed is closer to our felt experience than either is alone. Moral thinking, it turns out, was always messy.

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

Businesswomen Before Bar Kokhba

BY ELIZABETH SHANKS ALEXANDER

Babatha's Orchard: The Yadin Papyri and an Ancient Jewish Family Tale Retold
by Philip F. Esler
Oxford University Press, 288 pp., $45

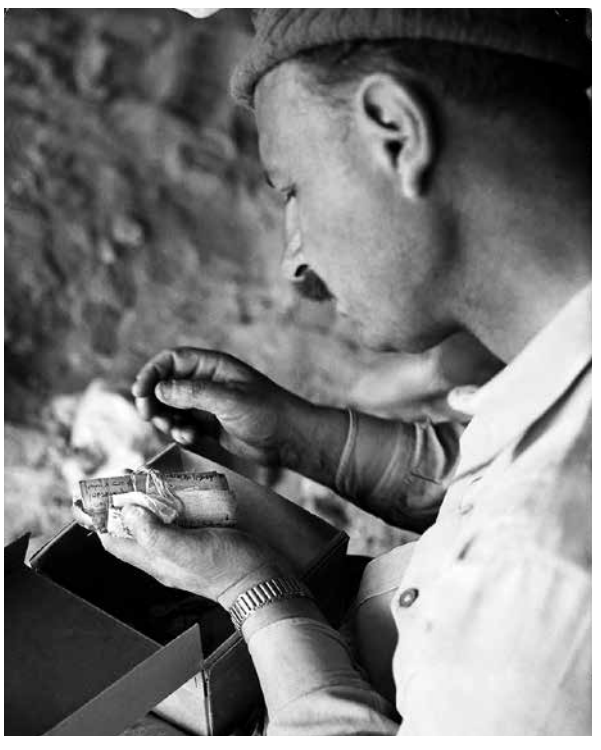
Sometime toward the end of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–135 C.E.), a Jewish woman named Babatha, daughter of Shimon, fled Ein Gedi with a group of fellow Jews. She had been visiting her stepdaughter and ended up in a remote cave in the Judean desert, accessible only by a narrow ledge carved into sheer cliffs 650 feet above the canyon floor. Like fleeing refugees of other times and places, Babatha carried her most important papers with her, so that she would be able to reclaim her property and re-establish her life when the war was over. However, she and the Jews she was hiding with either died of starvation when Roman soldiers cut off their supply lines or were killed outright when the soldiers penetrated the refuge. Sometime before that happened, she hid her satchel with its 35 documents, including wedding contracts, a property registration, legal petitions and summonses, deeds, and loan notes, in a recess of the cave. These documents were written between 94 C.E. and 132 C.E. in Nabatean Aramaic, Judean Aramaic, and Greek. More than 1,800 years later, in 1961, a research team led by the Israeli general turned archeologist Yigael Yadin discovered Babatha's archive when a rock wobbled under the feet of a volunteer, revealing the satchel. They also found several other items that likely belonged to Babatha, including a pair of sandals, balls of yarn, two kerchiefs, a key and two key rings, bowls, a clasp knife, and three waterskins.

Yadin's more famous find in the "Cave of Letters" was the correspondence between Bar Kokhba and his generals Yehonathan and Masabala. What Philip F. Esler demonstrates in *Babatha's Orchard: The Yadin Papyri and an Ancient Jewish Family Tale Retold*, an ingenious and meticulous work of reconstruction, is that the documents in Babatha's satchel shed light on the everyday lives and business practices of Jews and Nabateans who were caught up in the conflict. In contrast to most surviving ancient literature (which was written by and for men), these documents feature women prominently, wheeling and dealing, acting as sellers, buyers, lenders, litigants, and trustees.

Esler's book focuses on the earliest four documents of Babatha's archive, all written in Nabatean Aramaic with execution dates ranging from 94 C.E. to 99 C.E., before Babatha was born. One of them records the sale of a date palm orchard to Babatha's father Shimon in 99 C.E. It is easy to see why Babatha would have held on to this document, since her father had apparently given her the orchard (she registered it as her own in a Roman property census in 127 C.E.). But the other three papyri record transactions among Nabateans who have no apparent relationship to Shimon or Babatha. The question at the center of Esler's clever microhistory is, simply, why? Why did a Jewish woman living 30 years after these contracts were executed and with no obvious connection to the named parties have them in the first place? And why did she consider them important enough to carry into hiding?

The scribes who wrote these documents not only committed words to papyrus, they carefully framed the terms that would mitigate each party's risks in the transaction.

To tell the story of these four documents, Esler must reconstruct their purposes, their parties, their provisions, and much more. At points, the papyri themselves are so damaged that all that remains of a word is a faint trace of, say, the upper stroke of a *lamed*. Esler does the hard paleographic work of reconstructing missing letters by comparing the vestiges of damaged letters with clearer samples from other documents by the same scribe, often showing photographs so readers can judge for themselves. And, of course, like all good scholars of antiquity, Esler knows how to read texts closely and how to set them in their historical and cultural contexts (one learns a lot about the Nabateans along the way). But Esler also has a trick up his sleeve. Before becoming a Bible professor, he was an attorney, and he leverages that professional experience to great effect. Esler knows that behind every contract stands a lawyer. The scribes who wrote these documents not only committed words to papyrus, they carefully framed the terms that would mitigate each party's risks in the transaction.



Yigael Yadin examines a bundle of papyri, which was found in a sheepskin bag in Israel. (Photo by Central Press/Getty Images.)

The property that Shimon bought in 99 C.E. was a date palm orchard located in Maoza, a harbor town on the southern shore of the Dead Sea on the Nabatean side of the border with Judea. The seller was a Nabatean woman named 'Abi-'adan, and the deed lays out the boundaries of the property, establishes the new owner's irrigation rights, and sets a price. It is signed by the seller, her guarantor, four witnesses, and the scribe. As per Nabatean legal custom, as purchaser, Shimon did not sign; the sale went through when he received the signed copy as proof of ownership.

Curiously, one of the other four documents is another deed of sale for the same orchard (with slightly different boundaries) dated just one month earlier. It is written by the same scribe, but this time 'Abi-'adan is selling her orchard to a highly placed Nabatean official, Archelaus, son of 'Abad-'Amanu. Until now, scholars assumed that the sale to Archelaus was simply never finalized, leaving Shimon free to buy the property one month later. Esler, however, finds traces of a witness's signature, which would mean that the sale did go through.

What happened? Whatever it was, Shimon would have wanted assurances that 'Abi-'adan had regained clear title to the property before she resold it to him. Esler speculates that Shimon demanded possession of the signed, but now overridden, deed of sale, and Archelaus apparently agreed. This document was important to Shimon (and later Babatha) because it meant that neither Archelaus nor his heirs could produce it and claim that the orchard was theirs.

As Esler shows, Shimon took additional measures to protect himself from later claims by Archelaus. He observes that a man named Archelaus appears as the first witness on the deed of sale to Shimon. Earlier scholars have simply assumed that this witness Archelaus was not the same as the Archelaus who purchased 'Abi-'adan's property one month earlier, but Esler disagrees, since it turns out that the Greek name was particularly unusual for a Nabatean. Having Archelaus witness Shimon's purchase was apparently another device to secure Shimon's title. Archelaus (and his heirs) would have trouble contesting the validity of a purchase for which he himself had served as a witness.

But if the sale to Archelaus really did go through, how and why was 'Abi-'adan selling the property

again one month later? Esler speculates that shortly after purchasing the property Archelaus found himself in a sudden cash crunch, leaving him no choice but to approach 'Abi-'adan and request that the sale be rescinded. An obscure detail in the earliest of the four documents, which other scholars have barely remarked upon, strengthens Esler's conjecture.

The earliest document of Babatha's archive is a deed of debt executed in 94 C.E., five years before Shimon bought 'Abi-'adan's orchard. It records a large loan from a Nabatean woman named 'Amat-'Isi to her husband, Muqimu, drawing upon her dowry. The loan is granted interest-free for two years, at which point "customary" interest rates apply (20 years later in Nabatea the standard rate was 9 percent). A third party, 'Abad-'Amanu, serves as guarantor in the event that Muqimu fails to repay the loan. Esler reasons that Muqimu and 'Abad-'Amanu were borrowing money to finance a joint agricultural business venture. If things went well, the loan could be repaid from the profits during the initial term of two years. If not, the terms of the loan authorized Muqimu and his partner to borrow an additional large sum from 'Amat-'Isi's dowry, again interest-free for two years. But there was a catch: 'Amat-'Isi could call in the debt at any point after the first two years.

Is it mere coincidence that Muqimu's guarantor and partner 'Abad-'Amanu has the same name as Archelaus's father? It hardly seems likely, otherwise why would the document have any importance to Babatha? Now suppose, Esler suggests, that Archelaus's father 'Abad-'Amanu died just when 'Amat-'Isi called in the debt on her husband and his partner. Archelaus would have suddenly needed to get his hands on a large sum of cash—and fast. So he sold the orchard back to 'Abi-'adan, who sold it to Shimon, who gave it to his daughter Babatha, which is why she carried these documents with her as she was fleeing the Romans.

A view from one of the cave's openings to Nahal Hever where letters written by Bar Kokhba to his generals were discovered. (Israel Antiquities Authority.)

At points, the reader may feel pressed to cede Esler so many conjectures. For example, did Shimon really make Archelaus, son of 'Abad-'Amanu, whose sale was rescinded one month earlier, serve as witness for his own sale? It makes good business and legal sense, but we cannot know for sure since Archelaus's signature on Shimon's deed is damaged. All that remains is "Archelaus, son of ---." The catch is that the illegible father's name is just three letters long, which means that 'Abad-'Amanu does not fit in the available space. This forces Esler to hypothesize that Archelaus signed using a three-letter word that was his father's old nickname from the military. This may be plausible, but it is very far from certain. After all, there is no evidence that 'Abad-'Amanu used a nickname or even served in the military! Such qualms notwithstanding, the story Esler tells is compelling, if speculative at points.

It must have been difficult for 'Amat-'Isi to watch her husband's business fail, knowing that her dowry, which would be her lifeline if her husband were to die or divorce her, was slipping away too. So she called in the debt. (As other documents show, Babatha found herself vulnerable in exactly this way.)

In short, it was the bold personal and business decision of one Nabatean woman, 'Amat-'Isi, that forced the Nabatean official Archelaus to request another enterprising Nabatean woman, 'Abi-'adan, to allow him to rescind his purchase of her orchard, which she did, presumably because she had another buyer waiting in the wings, namely Shimon. And it was Shimon who bequeathed the orchard, together with its complex documentary history, to his enterprising daughter Babatha.

Esler's book has the twists and turns of a detective story, but its biggest surprise is the people into whose world we have been permitted to peer. Women, at least the upper-middle-class Jewish and Nabatean women of Babatha's circle, turn out to have been major financial players in this world. They bought and sold property, financed ventures from which they stood to gain, and even protected their interests at the risk of legal and marital conflict when things did not go according to plan. Babatha's resourceful foresight, together with Philip Esler's lawyerly scholarship, have granted us a glimpse into a fascinating social world that defies our preconceptions and calls out for further study.

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What If Everyone Is Right?

BY AVI SHILON

Milkud 67: ha-rai'onot me-acharei ha-machloket she-kora'at et Yisrael
(Catch 67: The Ideas Behind the Controversy Tearing Israel Apart)
by Micah Goodman
Kinneret Zmora-Bitan Dvir, 224 pp., 97 NIS

In his last speech as an active member of the Knesset, David Ben-Gurion warned his country's political establishment about a dilemma into which he feared it was likely to fall:

> The Six-Day War created new trends or what seem to be new ones: [that of] lovers or seekers of peace, and [possession of] the whole land of Israel. I don't know to which of them I belong. I was for both things all my life, and I've been in many parties. . . . These two things, peace and the whole land of Israel, as long as they were attainable and possible, I supported them wholeheartedly . . . and therefore I don't see any contradiction between these two things. It's not two parties but two different situations.

What Ben-Gurion meant to say was that people's attitudes toward the territories taken in 1967 should not be ideological or theological. The disposition of these territories was a practical question, and the decision about them should depend on what was realistically possible. What mattered most was ensuring the existence of the state, the nature of the peace that would be offered to Israel in exchange for a withdrawal, and the demographic situation.

Almost 50 years later, the publication of a new, best-selling book by Micah Goodman, *Milkud 67* (Catch 67), shows just how right—and how wrong—Israel's first prime minister was. Ben-Gurion was certainly right to fear that Israel would be split into two, as it has been, over the question of what, in April of 1970, were still newly acquired territories. But he was wrong to dismiss this difference of opinion as unnecessary, since one's stance with regard to the territories is never simply a matter of tactics. When an Israeli says that he is for, or against, the division of the land, he inevitably says many things about his identity, culture, world view, degree of religiosity, and more.

Catch 67, whose title is an obvious riff on Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, is about the implications and consequences of Israel's control, since 1967, of, if not exactly the whole Land of Israel, then at least those parts of it that made up the Palestine Mandate until 1948. Goodman's book is one of the rare instances in which a work of serious non-fiction becomes a genuine best-seller, and deservedly so. In Israeli bookstores on the 50th anniversary of the Six-Day War, Catch 67 plumbs the ideological and historical depths of the arguments of both the right and the left, treating them with equal respect.

In June parliamentarians Ayelet Nahmias-Verbin and Yehuda Glick invited Goodman to discuss his book in the Knesset. What is particularly striking

What Goodman emphatically rejects is the idea that Jewish law should be the determining factor.

is that this invitation came jointly from representatives of the two camps into which Ben-Gurion did not wish to see the country split. Nahmias-Verbin, a member of the Zionist Camp (formerly the Labor Party), first entered politics in the 1990s under the aegis of Yitzhak Rabin and is an ardent supporter of the two-state solution; Glick, a member of Likud, is an American-born Orthodox rabbi best known for his forceful advocacy in recent years of Jews' rights to worship on the Temple Mount. Only as brave and impressive an attempt as Goodman's to address all the arguments for and against withdrawal in a deep and serious manner, anchoring them in Jewish history and philosophy, could evoke such an unusual bipartisan response. Goodman himself lives in the West Bank town of Kfar Adumim, but, as he explained in an interview with Isabel Kershner of the *New York Times*, "I would rather not be called a settler. It's where I live, not who I am."

A soldier from Jordan's Arab Army stands guard in Jerusalem, December 1956. (Photo by Howard Sochurek/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images.)

In a small country with its fair share of public intellectuals, Micah Goodman is an extraordinary figure. He holds a PhD in Jewish philosophy from the Hebrew University and has an impressive ability to make complex works of Jewish thought accessible and relevant to the Israeli public. His three previous books about Judaism, including one translated into English under the title *Maimonides and the Book That Changed Judaism,* have all found readers and reviewers from a variety of perspectives. Secular and liberal readers appreciated a religious standpoint that did not threaten them, while people from the religious camp were pleased to see Goodman revive public discussion of Jewish classics.

Goodman has a somewhat unusual background that may in part account for his readiness to try to understand both sides: His mother was born into a devout American Catholic family. One of her uncles was a personal assistant to Pope John Paul II, but she converted to Judaism, became an Orthodox Jew, and immigrated to Israel with her husband following the Six-Day War. Goodman grew up in Jerusalem, received a religious education, and later obtained a doctorate in Jewish philosophy at the Hebrew University. In an interview with the *"Walla!"* website three years ago, following his receipt of the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies' Liebhaber Prize for Promotion of Religious Tolerance, he said that "as a child I thought that every Jewish child has a grandmother who speaks to Jesus."

No less erudite than his earlier books, Catch 67's most basic insight is that what separates Israelis and Palestinians, first and foremost, are feelings of fear and humiliation deeply rooted in history. The Israelis are stronger, but the experience of the Jews in the diaspora has inclined them to be afraid that their adversary, in the current case the Palestinians, is always just waiting for an opportune moment to attack. The Palestinians, for their part, feel humiliated, not only because of the IDF's control of the territories but more fundamentally because of the low status of Muslims in the world since the decline of Islamic civilization. In other words, according to Goodman, the conflict is a religious one but not theological. It is a result of the historical experiences of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims.

Goodman is less concerned, however, with religious history than he is with political history, and in the first part of his book he explains how the Israeli right and the Israeli left have come to their present positions. According to his account, the blend of territorial maximalism and political liberalism that once characterized the right boiled down in the face of intifadas and demographic challenges to liberalism pure and simple. But when such third-generation "princes" as Ehud Olmert, Tzipi Livni,

and Dan Meridor thus abandoned the "Greater Land of Israel" part of their heritage, they didn't leave the field empty: "A different ideological group came to dominate the right and breathed a new life into it: the messianic religious right." The conception of the whole land of Israel as one that had been promised to the Jews by the international community gave way, or rather returned, to the idea of the land promised by God. Goodman writes that while "at the outset, the dominant group on the right placed human rights at the center of things, by the end of the 20th century the dominant group on the right placed redemption at the center of things."

Goodman's account of what has happened on the right is accurate enough, even if he gets some historical details wrong. Thus, he presents Vladimir Jabotinsky's 1910 article *"Homo homini lupus"* as evidence of his belief in man's untrustworthy nature. This, he says, underwrote the Revisionist party founder's certainty that the British would eventually betray the Zionists. He overlooks, however, the extent to which Jabotinsky actually persisted in placing his hopes in the British. He also ignores that the fact that when Menachem Begin, Jabotinsky's eventual successor, proposed in 1938 to launch "military Zionism," which would lead to direct conflict with the British, it was Jabotinsky who objected and said that he still believed in the conscience of the world.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak, President Bill Clinton, and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat at the opening of the Camp David summit, July 11, 2000. (Photo by Avi Ohayon, courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office.)

As for the left, Goodman argues that from the 1920s to the 1970s it didn't make peace a central goal: The great shift in the ideological focus of the left took place in the 1970s. The left relinquished its dream of the model socialist society and took up the dream of peace: "Instead of solidarity among workers there would be solidarity among nations."

Goodman is correct to point to ideological change on the left, but I think that what has actually occurred is rather different than what he describes. From the outset, the socialist left sought to reach an agreement with the Palestinian workers on the basis of shared class interests. It likewise believed that the entire population of Palestine would benefit from the economic prosperity that the Jews would bring to the land. Only after the anti-Jewish riots in 1929 did the mainstream of the left grasp that this hope was baseless. Following the publication of the Peel Commission's report in 1937, Ben-Gurion led the left to favor partition as the only practical basis for compromise.

When Goodman turns from the ideological evolution of Israel's political parties to their current positions with respect to the most pressing issues facing the nation, he is equally attentive to both sides. The right, he acknowledges, is correct to insist that there is no going back to the 1967 lines, since Israel needs control over the highlands overlooking its coastal plain, where the bulk of its population lives:

> A descent of the IDF from the mountains of Judea and Samaria would create a vacuum that could draw into it all the chaos of the Middle East, and situate it on the edge of Tel Aviv.

Yet the left is also correct when it claims that it will be impossible to preserve Israel as a Jewish and democratic state without separation from the

Palestinians. Although he carefully labels the Palestinian Arabs' high birth rate a demographic "problem," and not, as is so common in Israel today, a "time bomb," Goodman is deeply worried that the Jews will soon cease to be a majority in their own land. He does, to be sure, give plenty of attention to "alternative demographers" on the right who maintain that both the numbers of Palestinians today and their birth rate are lower than is generally believed. But even if they are correct, Goodman argues, and the number of Arabs on the West Bank is 1.65 million and not 2.3 million, "can one absorb such a large Arab population without rocking the State of Israel?" Preserving Israel as measured by its stance toward minorities, foreigners, and others who are different. The relations between the State of Israel and the Arabs who are under its jurisdiction afford the people of Israel an opportunity to fulfill the biblical vision, but they also place before it a challenge that one can fail to meet. Military government of a civilian population, which has continued for decades, since the Six-Day War, is an Israeli religious failure. The prophetic vision of a powerful society that is sensitive to the weak is shattered every day by the IDF's policing of the barriers in the territories.

What is problematic from the point of view of the Bible also contradicts the original spirit of "occupation" of the lives of the land's non-Jewish inhabitants as is compatible with Israel's strategic needs.

Goodman's solution is based on deep thought and analysis, and he is not the only one who believes that at the present time there should be no expectation of a comprehensive peace. But it is hard to ignore the fact that at bottom, although Goodman emphasizes that this wasn't his intention, he seems to end up agreeing with Benjamin Netanyahu's decision not to decide. Moreover, as he himself admits, none of the Palestinians with whom he has spoken has agreed to accept a limited agreement of the sort he has proposed.

Israeli soldiers stand guard at a checkpoint during clashes south of Hebron, August 16, 2016. (Photo by Wisam Hashlamoun/Flash90.)

"the national state of the Jewish people depends not only on maintaining a Jewish majority but on maintaining a solid and strong Jewish majority," and that would cease to be possible if the Arab population of the state were to be practically doubled.

Goodman doesn't hesitate to use the word *kibbush* (literally conquest, but in the Israeli lexicon the equivalent of "occupation") to describe Israel's presence in Judea and Samaria, and he is perfectly prepared to call the occupation immoral—but only in a qualified sense. It is immoral, he says, to hold sway over the land's non-Israeli inhabitants, who like all people have the right to govern themselves. But the West Bank itself cannot be deemed to be "occupied," since Israel took control of it in a defensive war against Jordan. And Jordan itself had seized it in a war—and not a defensive one—against Israel in 1948. Israel is under no obligation, therefore, to return the territories, since "a world in which there is no price to pay for aggression is a dangerous world, one in which bullies don't have to face any risks."

What Goodman emphatically rejects is the idea that Jewish law should be the determining factor here. Goodman maintains that halakha itself gives priority to considerations of security and must take its bearings by them. After expressing a strong historical attachment to the land, he reminds his readers that ownership of it is conditional.

The return to the land of the prophets also has to be a return to the vision of the prophets, and an Israeli society that fulfills the biblical tidings is Zionism. Herzl, in his *Altneuland (Old-New Land)*, states that "all people deserve a homeland." Doesn't Zionism contradict itself, therefore, when "it enslaves another people"?

Goodman concludes the second part of his book with a quick summary of the ways in which everyone is in the same boat:

> Presence in the territories fulfills Zionism and goes against Zionism; retreat from the territories fulfills prophetic Judaism but chips away at the national identity; a presence in the territories protects Israel geographically but threatens it demographically. It seems that everyone is right, and because everyone is right, they're all trapped.

If Goodman had ended his book at this point, he would probably still have received applause from both ends of the spectrum. But he chose to leave his intellectual "comfort zone" and present a practical solution of his own. What he proposes is a limited arrangement in which Israel would withdraw its military presence as much as possible from most of the territories in order to grant the Palestinians as much freedom as possible without allowing for a completely independent state. At the same time, Goodman says, Israel must continue to hold on to the Jordan Valley as its eastern border. This would enable it to maintain its defensive position in those parts of Israel necessary for its security but end as much of its

Goodman's book has met with a storm of discussion and criticism in Israel. Undoubtedly the most significant of the responses to his book came from a figure who plays a notable part in it: former prime minister Ehud Barak. Somewhat astonishingly, the man who sought—and failed—to achieve an end to the conflict when he was prime minister in 2000 descended to the pages of *Ha'aretz* to publish a long review of Catch 67 in May 2017. In the essay, he accused Goodman of creating a false symmetry between the left and the right and characterized him as being, despite his posture of impartiality, wittingly or unwittingly, a rightist in disguise. Barak's main argument was that Israel could, in fact, defend itself even if it were to withdraw from the territories, but in the absence of such a withdrawal there is no hope for sustaining a Jewish and democratic state. According to Barak, the demographic problem is a strategic one. The security problem is technical and has tactical and technical solutions.

Naturally, Barak's criticism caused a stir and generated further interest in the book. Goodman was not intimidated. "Why does Barak say that I have a right-wing agenda?" he asked a week later. "Because I am ready to take the right's arguments seriously. Why do right-wingers say that I am a leftist? Because I take seriously the arguements of the left as well." He went on to observe that "denying the security dangers of a territorial withdrawal sounds no less absurd to most Israelis than denying the demographic problem sounds to Barak."

This wasn't the only confrontation in which Goodman found himself. A review in the popular Israeli newspaper *Yediot Achronot* also blamed him for being a right-winger in disguise, while the indubitably right-wing minister of education, Naftali Bennett, deplored Goodman's sympathy for the arguments of the left on Facebook, though he also praised the book's depth.

At one point in Catch 67, Goodman recollects that the Talmud preferred the house of Hillel to the house of Shammai, not because its adherents were more correct in their halakhic opinions, but because they were willing to listen to the arguments of the other side before expressing their own position. In doing so, he is reminding his fellow Israelis, who like to argue more than they like to listen, of an old but still refreshing lesson. Needless to say, Goodman's book won't bring an end to what has long been our most urgent national conversation, but it does demonstrate, by both precept and example, how best to participate in it.

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From the Great War to the Cold War

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

Toward Nationalism's End: An Intellectual Biography of Hans Kohn
by Adi Gordon
Brandeis University Press, 344 pp., $40

That Hans Kohn regularly felt "unfulfilled" after his immigration to the United States in 1934, unable to make up for "lost years" and "constantly preoccupied with missed opportunities," is a puzzle. For, as Adi Gordon shows in his fine new biography, *Toward Nationalism's End*, by the time he reached America the 43-year-old Kohn had done a great deal more than the next guy.

An active member of the fabled Zionist student association Bar Kokhba in pre–World War I Prague, Kohn had just completed his university courses when the war began. He eagerly joined the Austro-Hungarian infantry and was quickly captured by the Russians, in whose prisons he remained (despite a bold attempt to escape) for more than three years. Kohn didn't waste his time in jail. Not only did he learn Russian, he also studied Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, and Italian, and significantly improved his French and English. "With utmost patience," he wrote home at the time. "I have taught myself political economy (*Nationalökonomie*) and [about] the social problems." (Along with their replies, his family was able to send him books.) When Kohn wasn't studying, Gordon tells us that he "created a parallel Zionist college of sorts. This college, in which Kohn was the prominent lecturer, catered to several hundred POW-students."

In May 1918, the Siberian prison in which Kohn was interred came under the control of the Czech Legion, a force composed of captured Czechs and Slovaks who had switched sides and continued, after the Russian Revolution, to fight alongside their former captors against the Bolsheviks. Still a Czech prisoner in 1919, Kohn helped to establish a socialist collective consisting of 189 Zionist inmates that went by the Hebrew name of Nemala (ant). Before long, however, the Czech Legion released him, and he became not only a citizen of Czechoslovakia but one of its employees, a deputy librarian at the Legion's headquarters in far-flung Irkutsk—and an editor of a Russian-language Zionist newspaper on the side.

Finally out of Russia, in 1920, Kohn became a nationalist activist on a larger stage. For a year and a half he worked for the Committee of Delegations that represented Jewish interests at the Paris Peace Conference. He then moved to London, to work for the Zionist Keren Hayesod (Foundation Fund), where he replaced none other than Vladimir Jabotinsky as the head of the press and propaganda section.

In 1925, together with the rest of the Fund's main office, Kohn moved to Jerusalem. He "never intended," though, as Gordon tells us, "to become a full-time Zionist functionary." In the ensuing years, Kohn wrote prolifically on current events for German and Hebrew newspapers, and published books on the history of Zionism and Jewish political thought, including a 400-page biography of his mentor Martin Buber. His even longer *A History of Nationalism in the East* "analyzed nationalism between Egypt in the West and India in the East, with regional chapters on Turkish, Persian, Afghani, and Arab" nationalist movements. The book earned accolades not only in Germany, where it was published, but from both the *Times Literary Supplement* in Great Britain and *Foreign Affairs* in the United States.

Quite apart from—and in some respects at odds with—his official Zionist work in Palestine, Kohn played a key role in Brit Shalom, the famous Jerusalem-based circle of Central European intellectuals, including Gershom Scholem, Hugo Bergmann, Martin Buber, and others, who favored the establishment of a binational state rather than a Jewish one. Brit Shalom's opposition to Jewish rule over Arabs was not, however, quite enough for Kohn, and he pressed in 1925 and 1926, unsuccessfully, for the association to take a more forceful and public stance. At the same time, he became an active member of the War Resisters' International, the Netherlands-based pacifist organization. This was an unstable mix of loyalties for a man living in a highly combustible environment, especially when the inevitable explosion took place, as it did in the riots of 1929. Convinced by the Arab attacks on the Jews that Zionist settlement in Palestine could be continued only through an unjustifiable recourse to bayonets, Kohn resigned from his position at Keren Hayesod and soon made preparations to leave the country.

Convinced by the 1929 Arab attacks on the Jews that Zionist settlement in Palestine could be continued only through an unjustifiable recourse to bayonets, Kohn resigned from his position at Keren Hayesod and made preparations to leave the country.

Prague Zionist student organization, Bar Kokhba, February 1913. Hans Kohn, the chairperson, is in the second row, seated directly behind the table. (Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute.)

In November 1933 Kohn finally found an academic post in the United States. If he still felt unfulfilled, even after Smith College hired him (following what seems to have been a near miss at Yale), it was because he had had to sever his ties with a movement to which he had devoted decades of his life and a land he still loved. His malaise was compounded by Hitler's rise to power and the fact

Self-portrait by Hans Kohn, from his Krasnaya Rechka prison notebook, 1917. (Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute.)

that he now found himself in a country that he had long regarded, in Gordon's words, "as a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah." Yet it was, he believed, unlike Palestine, a place where there was still room for hope.

Kohn's grudging and qualified approbation of the United States eventually turned into a kind of American patriotism. The former socialist became a liberal and a defender of capitalism, and his pacifism gave way, in the face of Nazism, to an embrace of "the use of force as part of America's responsibility" to protect the world from totalitarianism. Together with such luminaries as Thomas Mann, Reinhold Niebuhr, Eric Voegelin, and Lewis Mumford he battled American isolationists, right up to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Kohn continued to publish voluminously both during the war and after it. His most enduring work, as Gordon rightly notes, was his *The Idea of Nationalism* (1944), which consisted, as Gordon writes, of "almost 600 pages of deftly argued and deeply researched engaging historical analysis, followed by an additional 150 pages of eye-opening notes on sources in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, Dutch, Polish, Czech, and other languages." For a generation, this book remained, according to Gordon, "the gold standard" in nationalism studies, noted above all for its famous and highly influential distinction between the reason-based and inclusive "civic nationalism of the West," which Kohn admired, and the myth-laden and combative "ethnic nationalism of the East," which he deplored.

The Zionism to which he once adhered clearly fell into the latter category for Kohn, and he continued to write critically about it and to lobby actively against it. Among other things, he starred at the first annual conference of the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism in 1945 and sought, the following year, "to keep the American Jewish Committee from becoming pro-Zionist in the wake of the Holocaust." In May 1949, two days after Israel was admitted into the United Nations,

> Kohn packed up all the Zionist documents he had been collecting over the years: rare materials from Bar Kochba, unique documents of his Zionist activity as a prisoner of war, protocols of the Brith Shalom Association, and his extensive personal correspondence with Martin Buber and others. He sent the materials to the library of Hebrew Union College, the reform Jewish seminary. In his revealing letter to the college's president, Kohn explained why he had donated the collection to that institution . . . Kohn wanted the documents to be "accessible in a library which is connected with the problems of Jewish history and of the Jewish ethos, and yet will undoubtedly maintain the standards of the American liberal tradition."

When he gave these materials away, Kohn expressed the hope that they would be of interest to future historians of Zionism. But he also hinted at the possibility of a better future: "Who knows," he wrote, "whether after some decades, some young Jews, doubtful about the values of nationalism and of statehood, might not find comfort in the doubts and struggles of a past generation, even in its (perhaps temporary) defeat."

In the same year that he got rid of his Zionist library, Kohn moved from Smith to the City University of New York, where he taught until his mandatory retirement in 1962, after which he spent eight years rotating among American and German universities. He never stopped writing big books on subjects ranging from pan-Slavism to American nationalism. When he wasn't ensconced in his study or a classroom, Kohn fought (in print and in think tanks) in the Cold War, which he regarded for most of its duration as a struggle against an effort "to destroy or undermine Western Civilization and strength." If he made a singular contribution to this ideological battle, it was in showing the ways in which the Soviet Union's purportedly "panhuman" ideals constituted a thin disguise for a pan-Slavic imperialism that pre-existed the communist regime.

Kohn's work at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in the 1950s brought him together with then–Harvard professor Henry Kissinger to organize a conference that focused on "the moral and intellectual matrix out of which the North Atlantic community can grow." But by the late 1960s disillusioned by the Vietnam War, Kohn ceased—in private, at any rate—to idealize the United States. After Kohn's death in 1971, the Israeli professor of philosophy Hugo Bergmann, his lifelong friend, wrote in his diary of "Hans Kohn's disappointment with president [Lyndon B.] Johnson and his politics. The American air force demanded the war against

China. This shattered the ideals of Hans."

The facts of Kohn's life are so extraordinary that it almost seems as if the first half of one remarkable figure's biography had been spliced together with another's in the second part. The later years of Kohn's life are reminiscent of those of some other European-born transplants who didn't quite take to the soil of Palestine or Israel and ended up as leading figures in American academia, people like the philosopher Hans Jonas, in Kohn's day, or, more recently, Daniel Kahneman or Saul Friedländer. But there is one major difference: None of these people, however critical of the Jewish State he became, ever turned his back on Israel the way Kohn did. He never even went back to visit.

Adi Gordon's biography is excellent, though it doesn't quite tell us everything we might want to know about Kohn's singular path through life. There is, for instance, almost nothing in it about Kohn's wife and only the briefest reference to his affairs with other women (which he discussed, Gordon tells us, quite candidly in his diaries). But there is plenty in *Toward Nationalism's End* to enable us to make sense of Kohn's initial attraction to what he eventually termed "ethnic nationalism," his eventual repudiation of it, and his adoption—but only, in the final analysis, as a means to an end—of American "civic nationalism."

The middle-class family into which Kohn was born in Prague was, by his own description, a highly assimilated one, and he had only a minimal Jewish upbringing, which may not have included any religious education at all. Like his friends from similar backgrounds in Bar Kokhba, Kohn was in search of something that the older generation had lost. For these young people, Gordon writes, the Jewish Question "was the personal one, grounded not in antisemitism and persecution but rather in an inescapable sense of emptiness, fragmentation, and inauthenticity." Zionism attracted them because it had "the allure of primordiality." Instructed by the then-young and charismatic philosopher Martin Buber, they initially hoped for the "transformation of the diasporic Jew (*Golusjude*) into an elemental Jew (*Urjude*)" through his return to "the homeland of his blood." Many of the Bar Kokhba Zionists, including Kohn, soon began to question the absolute necessity of a return to the Jews' ancestral soil in order to effect the desired transformation of the people. But they never ceased to affirm "a Jewish oriental primordiality grounded in the blood" that led them to reject "the claims of a singular occidental modernity, which they saw as threatening Judaism."

The Judaism of Kohn and his comrades was by no means a traditional one. They wanted, in Hugo Bergmann's words, to "rejuvenate fossilized Judaism," but precisely what that meant to them before 1914 is not at all clear from either their own writings or Gordon's analysis of them. In the case of Kohn, in particular, it was only in a letter that he sent in 1917 from his Siberian prison to his friends in Bar Kokhba that he began to spell out his fundamental convictions. Ahad Ha-Am, he wrote, was right: "justice is Judaism's primary trait" and therefore also the "yardstick" by which Zionism has to be measured.

By 1919, after the war had ended and he had witnessed first-hand the deleterious effects of colonialism in the eastern parts of Russia, Kohn had

decided what constituted the requirements of justice, and was prepared to articulate what "would remain the hallmark of his theory of nationalism." He distinguished

> between the benign and malignant: between true nationalism, on the one hand, and its degeneration into the ideology of the nation-state, on the other hand. Whereas he still saw in nationalism noble qualities and functions that had to be protected, he now believed that the ideology of the nation-state was inherently destructive and needed to be challenged.

If the Zionist movement were to take the shape of a true nationalism, it would thus have to spurn statist ambitions and focus on the development of a Jewish homeland that did not act "like a 'nation-state' (*Staatsvolk*) toward the Arabs" of Palestine, who constituted, after all, the large majority of the country's population at the time. While still stuck in Siberia, Kohn issued what was "probably the first clear Zionist call for a multinational—or, rather, a binational—state in Palestine." Only by this means, he believed, could Zionism uphold Judaism's basic principle of justice and fulfill "the Jewish messianic mission."

Over the next decade, Kohn tried to anchor his world view more thoroughly in Jewish tradition. In his 1924 *The Political Idea of Judaism*, which clearly echoes Hermann Cohen's *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism*, Kohn made selective use of traditional texts to depict Judaism as a blend of "the idea of human unity and that of political justice." What bound the Jews together and characterized them was now, for him, no longer blood and land but ideals, for which Palestine would be the testing ground. As he put it in an interview published in the London *Jewish Chronicle* in 1925, "in reestablishing their nationhood on the soil where their original conceptions of life were evolved," the Jews "should not create a state like all other states . . . Palestine must become Jewish, not by imposing Jewish nationality upon any other race, but as a unifying entity among the peoples according to the ideas of Justice and brotherhood and humanity, which the highest Jewish thought [has] evolved." When Kohn finally concluded that Zionism was failing the test, he too was done with it.

From this time on, Kohn was less inclined to focus on the highest Jewish thought than on what he considered to be the lowest, which he termed "primitive Judaism," increasingly identifying it with "racism and tribal ethno-nationalism." He sometimes even contrasted this form of Judaism unfavorably with the more universalistic Christian religion. In 1939, of all years, he "had no qualms about stating, 'It is an historical irony that Hitler today is leading the German people back to the attitude of primitive Judaism.'" The humanist values that Kohn had once sought to locate or at least to situate within the Jewish realm he now understood to be rooted in the philosophy that he had rejected when he first turned, as a youth, to Zionism: liberalism.

The former socialist became a liberal and a defender of capitalism.

It was only as a vehicle for the implementation of liberalism, or what he deemed "the concept of political liberty and the rights of man," that Kohn endorsed what he believed to be the reason-based, contractual, and ethnically neutral "civic nationalism" that emerged in America, in particular. "Through the Western idea of nationalism," he came to believe, "in the end all people will share 'the faith in the oneness of humanity and the ultimate value of the individual.'" And thus, in the very end, there will be no need for separate nation-states at all. In the meantime, however, through World War II and the Cold War that followed, there were totalitarian threats that had to be met, and the drawbacks of even the best sorts of nation-states—including their unfortunate reliance on military force—had to be taken in stride. That's what Kohn believed, until Vietnam, at any rate.

Hans Kohn and his students at Smith College in an undated photo. (Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute.)

Adi Gordon is an Israeli scholar teaching at Amherst College, not far from Smith, where Hans Kohn once taught. He is also, it seems, one of those young Jews of a later generation, anticipated by Kohn, who has had his doubts about the values of nationalism and statehood, and has plunged into the papers Kohn donated to the Hebrew Union College in search of illumination. Gordon certainly gives Kohn his due, but he has not become his disciple. He criticizes him, on occasion, for such lapses as allowing his "Cold War idealism" to blind him to America's faults and permitting his preoccupation with the Palestinian refugee problem to keep him from focusing on other, larger refugee issues, including "those in India, Pakistan, and Korea, to say nothing of the Soviet bloc." He rightly dismisses some of Kohn's works, including *The Political Idea of Judaism*, as "unpersuasive, half-baked countermyths," and he never endorses his binationalist ideas.

Gordon does, however, regard Kohn as a useful intellectual resource. "Writing about Kohn," he tells us, at the very end of his book,

> forced me to think anew about the ideologies of my place and time, both as an Israeli and as someone who grew up during the Cold War . . . Furthermore, even if many of Kohn's formulas have not stood the test of time, the questions he raised persist. His Sisyphean struggle with nationalism is now ours.

Hans Kohn deserves to be remembered as an outstanding member of an astonishing group of Central and Eastern European–born Jewish historians and political theorists who wrote extensively and penetratingly about nationalism and played significant parts in the histories of a variety of different national movements. His binary distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism was a key development in the study of nationalism and remains helpful, even if contemporary scholars focus more on its deficiencies than its utility. But I doubt that a return to Kohn's writings or a recollection of his career will help us now, as Jews. This is, in part, because I am disinclined to believe that anyone who has separated himself from the community in the way that Kohn did can remain relevant. It's not just that he turned against Zionism; he rejected Judaism and Jewishness altogether. In the end, as Gordon observes, Kohn "described Jewishness as devoid of any intrinsic value, as something merely to be tolerated: 'There is no reason to be proud of being a Jew or a Christian or a Turk.'" In this connection, it's also worth remembering that, as Brian Smollett has pointed out, Kohn brought up his son Immanuel (named after Kant) "in the New England establishment with little to no Jewish context or education," just as he himself had been raised in Prague.

It is, in the end, impossible to see what Kohn has to contribute to ongoing reconsiderations of Zionism that we aren't regularly hearing from other uncompromising opponents of ethnic nationalism and defenders of the wholly impractical idea of a binational Jewish-Arab state. Nor can we hope to hear anything helpful about being American Jews in the 21st century from someone who had no qualms at all about the complete absorption of the American Jewish community into the "melting pot." For all of his experience and accomplishments (not least during the Cold War), Hans Kohn is one of those extraordinary figures whom we can safely leave behind us.

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Patriotism and Its Discontents

BY A. E. SMITH

The Patriots: A Novel
by Sana Krasikov
Spiegel & Grau, 560 pp., $28

The Patriots, Sana Krasikov's debut novel, opens with a startling inversion of one of the most closely held of American myths: the great ingathering of the world's immigrants. It's 1934 and New York–born Florence Fein, an idealistic Brooklyn College graduate, is leaving America for the young USSR. Standing on the deck of a ship in New York harbor, she looks down at crowds of Danes, Germans, and Poles waiting to board, all of them going back to their homelands in search of work. For Florence, it's like "watching an old Ellis Island film reel flipped by the Depression into reverse: masses of immigrants . . . herded backward through that great human warehouse as Lady Liberty waved them goodbye."

Florence is determined to fit in, to be worthy of the extravagant "peace to the people, land to the peasants" promises of her adopted homeland. At first, she succeeds. Affecting "proletarian respectability," Florence is reassured by the rudeness and ill-humor of the Moscow streets that she is "no longer regarded as a delicate, confused alien but a bona-fide Soviet." For a time, it seems that Florence can be a patriot too. She marries Leon Brink, another American Jew pursuing social justice, finds herself a job in the vast Soviet bureaucracy, and moves into a 1930s *kommunalka* (communal apartment). But Florence's utopianism doesn't last long. Not only do the realities of everyday life—the shabbiness, the endless lines—start to wear on her, she comes to realize that beneath the "behemoth abstraction of the great Russian *narod* [people]" lies "its all-embracing ignorance and malice, the grand scale of its pettiness, its envy."

As disillusionment takes hold, Florence contemplates returning to the United States. But, abandoned by the U.S. government, her U.S. passport confiscated, she is manipulated into becoming an informant for the NKVD (a forerunner of the KGB). "We hope," says the sinister Comrade Subotin, in a tour de force of doublethink, "that as a loyal citizen this is something you could do sincerely." As the Great Terror gives way to the Great Patriotic War, and, ultimately, to the final bloodletting of the Stalin era, Florence betrays friends and colleagues. Her husband disappears into the whirlwind, her son grows up in a state orphanage, and she herself ends up in the Gulag. For Florence, the cost of patriotism, to say nothing of belonging, is devastating.

The irony implicit in *The Patriots* is that while many Jews embraced the Russian revolutionary cause from the very beginning—four of the seven members of the first Bolshevik Politburo were Jews—the revolution did not embrace them for long. For Russian Jews, the revolution represented liberation from centuries of tsarist oppression. For diaspora Jews such as Florence and her husband it held out the promise of a just society in which all people—workers and peasants, Jews and Gentiles—would at last be equal. What they didn't reckon with was the deep vein of anti-Semitism undergirding Russian culture and Russian history. It wasn't excised in the great changes that birthed the USSR, merely disguised, and not particularly well.

While many Jews embraced the Russian revolutionary cause from the very beginning, the revolution did not embrace them for long.

Sana Krasikov. (Photo by Alexis Calice.)

It is Sana Krasikov's understanding of this great truth of Russian history that gives rise to some of the most affecting parts of her novel. After the Nazis invade the Soviet Union, Florence is evacuated to Kuibyshev, on the Volga, where "after years of evading peacetime terror," she emerges "into the relative safety of war." She and Leon are put to work translating Soviet war reportage into English so that it can be reprinted in American newspapers.

Florence's work brings her into contact with the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, a relationship that forces both Florence and the reader to reflect deeply upon the "hidden history" of the USSR. Undoubtedly the Soviet Union's greatest wartime propaganda coup, the committee brought together the most celebrated names in 20th-century Yiddish art and literature—Peretz Markish, Itzik Feffer, David Bergelson—all under the tutelage of the great Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels. In 1943, the Soviet Union sent the committee on a lengthy tour of Allied countries, where it raised millions of dollars in financial and material aid for the Soviet war effort and generated an outpouring of sympathy for the huge (and genuine) sacrifices being made by the USSR, the Red Army, and the Russian people. But even as they basked in the adulation of American Jews, Mikhoels and Feffer understood how "this public ceremony of adoration would be repaid with a private ceremony of vengeance once they returned home."

Repayment was not delayed. Almost as soon as the war was over, Stalin began his campaign against "rootless cosmopolitans" (yet another in the endless list of code words for "Jew") that culminated in the so-called Doctors' Plot, a second Shoah averted only by Stalin's death in 1953. One of the first to go was Mikhoels, beaten to death by secret policemen and then run over by a truck to make it look like an accident. Krasikov describes Mikhoels lying in his coffin, "his mutilated features made up with greasepaint as if for one last role." Florence, attending this "ritual of sanctioned absurdity" called a state funeral, looks up at the roof of the Moscow Jewish Theater. A lone fiddler, coatless in the January wind, is playing a dirge in memory of Mikhoel's role as Tevye the Dairyman. It is an astonishing moment: "The fiddler, whoever he was, continued to play his strange requiem into the evening, long after the last of the mourners was gone." With this one haunting image, familiar yet unfamiliar, Krasikov manages to evoke, for Florence and for us, not only an entire culture but also to lament the brutal sacrifice of that culture on the altar of patriotism and belonging.

Florence's life illustrates the capricious cycles of Russian history. Released from the camps after Stalin's death and reunited with her son, Julian, the "rehabilitated" Florence eventually finds a modest job in a foreign-language bookstore. But the cautious hopefulness of the Khrushchev thaw gives way to the neo-Stalinism of the Brezhnev era. Julian, a brilliant engineering student, runs afoul of the strict Soviet quota system and goes from being a "promising doctoral candidate to being another Jew denied a degree." Julian finds opportunity denied him in the USSR in the Carter administration's pragmatic offer to exchange American grain for Soviet Jews and flees the slowly dying USSR with his family. Florence finds herself right back

where she started, walking the streets of Brooklyn as her mind alternately defends her original flight to the illusory promise of Soviet freedom and floods with guilt for the compromises she made. At the end of her life she finds a semblance of satisfaction, perhaps even peace, as a sort of den mother to the legions of Soviet émigrés who are starting to fill the streets and walk-up apartments of New York's outer boroughs.

Julian, meanwhile, returns to Russia in 2008. His son and Florence's grandson, Lenny Brink, also goes back to the country he left as a child, hoping to make his fortune in the Wild West Russian economy of the first decade of the 21st century. When Lenny falls afoul of the Russian legal system, Julian's efforts to help his son pull him into a moral landscape that is both twisted and familiar. Meeting with his "fixer," a wealthy businessman, Julian watches the man pull back his cuff to reveal a gold Rolex, but what he really wants Julian to see is his gangster's calling card: "a faded purple tattoo of a card with an upside-down spade. 'This I got in Khabarovsk [a notorious outpost of the Gulag]. Now, *that* wasn't comfortable. But wherever we are, we must learn to be comfortable.'" Julian may be compelled to find his comfort amidst the same kinds of compromises that his mother did.

Krasikov is a good storyteller, and she has deftly created compelling characters. *The Patriots* is both readable and thought-provoking, but it is longer than it needs to be, and its shifting timelines and narrators can be confusing. Some anachronisms and redundancies distract. I am sure, for instance, that nobody at the famous 1959 American National Exhibition in Sokolniki Park in Moscow was sporting "gelled" hair. Brylcreemed, perhaps!

But these are minor complaints. Krasikov, who was born in Ukraine and raised in the Republic of Georgia, is probably too young to personally remember the privations and indignities of Soviet life, but she recreates them skillfully for her readers while exposing the moral darkness that lay at the heart of the Soviet enterprise.

With this one haunting image, familiar yet unfamiliar, Krasikov manages to evoke, for Florence and for us, not only an entire culture but also to lament the brutal sacrifice of that culture on the altar of patriotism and belonging.

Krasikov's meditation on patriotism and belonging, on compromise and guilt, echoes the great Russian voices—Vasily Grossman, Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova, Varlam Shalamov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn—who chronicled their almost unimaginable times, but who are now largely forgotten.

"Patriotism," Samuel Johnson famously said, "is the last refuge of a scoundrel." *The Patriots* could easily have been a polemic. Instead, Krasikov chooses to evoke the unutterable sadness of the last century of Russian history, so intimately bound up with Jewish history. Krasikov's Russia, a country she clearly knows well and loves deeply, has survived revolution, war, Stalin, and the leaden stagnation of the Brezhnev years, only to find itself run by an interchangeable cast of gangsters, grifters, and, once again, secret policemen. Patriots all, no doubt, but scoundrels through and through.

A Soviet Union propaganda poster by Viktor Iwanowitsch Goworkow, 1936, "thanking the beloved Stalin for a happy childhood." (Photo by Elizaveta Becker/ullsteinbild via Getty Images.)

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The Lowells and the Jews

BY STUART SCHOFFMAN

Robert Lowell, Setting the River on Fire: A Study of Genius, Mania, and Character
by Kay Redfield Jamison
Alfred A. Knopf, 560 pp., $29.95

Loving Robert Lowell
by Sandra Hochman
Turner Publishing, 252 pp., $16.99

In 1979, Harvard's literary magazine, the *Advocate*, ran a tribute by the poet Richard Tillinghast to his late mentor, entitled "Robert Lowell in the Sixties":

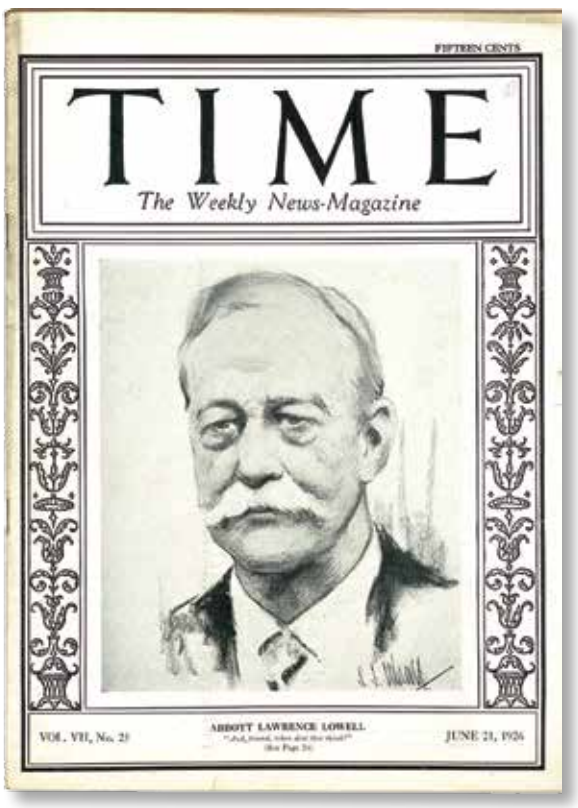
> I picture him at Harvard slouched in a leather chair, a penny loafer dangling from one foot, shoulders scrunched up toward his massive head—his hands framing a point in the air . . . one of many True cigarettes between his fingers.

That snapshot is spot on how I remember Lowell, the one time I ever saw him. He was holding court at a Friday night "Table Talk" at Harvard Hillel. Fall 1968 is my educated guess, senior year. He seemed in a good mood. I had no idea he was famously bipolar. He was on lithium then, between manic attacks, as I've now learned from Kay Redfield Jamison's *Robert Lowell, Setting the River on Fire*, her exhaustive, empathetic account of a genius at war with himself. I remember not a word of what he said that night, save for one big thing: Robert Lowell, the most famous poet in America, icon of the antiwar movement, consummate Boston Brahmin, was especially glad to speak with a Jewish group because, he drawled, "I'm an eighth, you know."

I was startled, delighted. Who knew? Montaigne, Cervantes, and now him too? And the delicious irony! For Harvard Jews, the name Lowell brings to mind the poet's distant cousin, Abbott Lawrence Lowell (class of 1877), who tried to keep Jews from crashing the hallowed gates. Samuel Eliot Morison's *Three Centuries of Harvard* (1936) provides a chart of 14 "Lowell Dynasty" alumni dating from Rev. John Lowell, class of 1721. A. Lawrence Lowell, a political scientist, was named president of Harvard in 1909. He believed in eugenics and Nordic superiority, and was a vice president of the Immigration Restriction League, founded in 1894 by three young Harvard graduates. The league's efforts bore deadly fruit in 1924, when President Calvin Coolidge signed the Johnson–Reed Act, which barred the "golden door" to Jews later seeking refuge from Hitler's Europe. In 1926, Lowell made the cover of *Time*, where he was lauded as an innovator. "The best type of liberal education in our complex modern world," he was quoted, "aims at producing men who know a little of everything and something well." No mention was made of his prejudice. Yet when he died at age 86 in 1943—a different era entirely—the obituary in *Time* told a fuller story:

> He was roundly damned for protesting the appointment of Louis D. Brandeis to the U.S. Supreme Court for "lack of judicial temperament," for proposing a quota for Jewish students at Harvard as an anti-anti-Semitic move during the Ku Klux rampage of 1922, for barring Negroes from freshman dormitories.

An "*anti*-anti-Semitic move"? That's not the way it is remembered by Harvard Jews, but that's how he saw it. In 1900, Jews made up 7 percent of Harvard's



Abbott Lawrence Lowell on the cover of* Time *magazine, June 21, 1926. (*Time *Magazine Archives.)

entering class; by 1922, the figure was 22 percent. This influx of smart, ambitious Jews from immigrant families disconcerted Lowell. On June 17, 1922, the *New York Times* ran a story headed "Lowell Tells Jews Limit at Colleges Might Help Them." It began with an indignant letter sent to Lowell by a Jewish attorney from Cleveland, Alfred Benesch (class of 1900), who invoked the names of Jacob Schiff and Felix Warburg, hinting that Jewish donors might withhold their largesse if a quota were imposed. Lowell replied that the proposed measures were good for the college and also for the Jews:

> There is, most unfortunately, a rapidly growing anti-Semitic feeling in this country, causing—and no doubt in part caused by—a strong race feeling on the part of the Jews themselves. . . .
>
> If every college in the country would take a limited proportion of Jews, I suspect we should go a long way toward eliminating race feeling among the students . . .

Benesch, in response, took offense at Lowell's claim that Jewish "race feeling" was the cause of anti-Semitism. He pointed out that by Lowell's logic, the way to eliminate anti-Semitism was to prohibit Jews entirely. In the event, the Harvard faculty rejected Lowell's quota plan, but new admissions guidelines, which privileged the ambiguous categories of "character" and "fitness," drove Jewish numbers below 15 percent by the 1930s.

Recent research has unearthed Lowell's role in the "Secret Court" that hounded Harvard homosexuals in 1920. He also kept his distance from his flamboyantly mannish, cigar-smoking sister, who won a posthumous Pulitzer for her poetry in 1926. Still, Amy Lowell defended her older brother in a letter of 1922 to a Jewish friend, the poet and anthologist Louis Untermeyer:

> You must not confuse my brother's point of view with that of the extremists. He likes the Jews himself personally, as I do, but he feels very strongly that there should not be segregations of Americans into various racial strains. He is much averse to keeping Jews out of the college clubs and much averse to their forming Jew clubs on their own. He thinks they should all mix together and have no distinction . . .

Extremists in 1922 meant the Klan and Henry Ford, whose newspaper series "The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem" had hundreds of thousands of readers each week. The Lowells were more subtle. "Private schools are excluding Jews, I believe," Lowell cautioned Benesch, "and so, we know, are hotels." Translation: Jewish alumni who don't want Harvard to go that route had best acquiesce to a quota on Jews.

When I arrived in 1965, fresh from the Yeshivah of Flatbush, Harvard was again one-quarter Jewish. My dormitory was adjacent to Memorial Church, and the ringing of its two-and-a-half-ton bell (personally donated by A. Lawrence Lowell) would knock me from bed at 10 a.m. and propel me to Lowell Lecture Hall just in time to hear Robert Lowell's close friend, the playwright William Alfred, recite *Beowulf* in his dazzling tour d'horizon of English lit. My senior thesis, supervised by the Brooklyn-born historian of immigration Oscar Handlin, dealt with status anxieties among New York's Jewish elites in the late 19th century. Upon hearing Robert Lowell's profession

of Jewish ancestry, I rushed to Widener Library to consult Malcolm Stern's *Americans of Jewish Descent: A Compendium of Genealogy* (1960). Sure enough, his father's mother was a granddaughter of Major Mordecai Myers, born in 1776, the son of Jewish immigrants from Hungary and Austria.

Lowell House, majestically located on the banks of the Charles River, its tower boasting 17 bells purchased from a Russian monastery, was named for President Lowell. The future poet Robert Traill Spence Lowell IV, a 1935 graduate of St. Mark's School, citadel of Boston privilege, went on to Harvard and lived in Lowell House. He enjoyed the company of Cousin Lawrence, by then retired. "Ours was an old family," he told his future biographer, Ian Hamilton, in 1971:

> It stood—just. Its last eminence was Lawrence, Amy's brother, and president of Harvard for millennia, a grand fin de siècle president, a species long dead in America. He was cultured in the culture of 1900—very deaf, very sprightly, in his eighties. He was unique in our family for being able to read certain kinds of good poetry. I used to spend evenings with him, and go home to college at four in the morning.

All the same, Harvard didn't suit Robert Lowell. He wrote poetry, but it was rejected by the *Advocate*. "Harvard didn't mean so much to me," he told a television interviewer in the 1960s. "I stayed there a year and a half." He was bored, he explained: "I wanted some exemplar of modern poetry and couldn't find one there." He escaped to Nashville to study with the poets Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, then transferred to Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, where Ransom had joined the faculty, graduating in 1940. "I often doubt if I would have survived without you," Lowell wrote Ransom many years later. In *Robert Lowell, Setting the River on Fire,* Kay Redfield Jamison describes Ransom as "the father and teacher he had desired but not had."

Jamison's book is not, she says, a biography but rather "a psychological account of the life and mind of Robert Lowell; it is as well a narrative of . . . [his] manic-depressive illness. . . . My interest lies in the entanglement of art, character, mood, and intellect." Jamison, a professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins, gained access to Lowell's medical records, unlike previous biographers. She herself has struggled with manic depression, as she described two decades ago in her acclaimed memoir *An Unquiet Mind.*

Jamison's study of Lowell has been widely lauded by reviewers, and for good reason. Sandra Hochman's recent memoir, *Loving Robert Lowell*, has been roundly ignored, also for good reason, though it does provide a different kind of insight. Her breathless story begins in 1961, when Hochman, 25, a budding poet, was sent by *Encounter* magazine to interview Lowell at the Russian Tea Room. He was 44 then, a lapsed convert to Catholicism, married to the Kentucky-born writer Elizabeth Hardwick. Hochman was separated from her Israeli violinist husband, who lived in Paris, and a passionate love affair ensued, ending badly. "The reason I am writing about him," Hochman said in a recent Q & A with *Foreword Reviews*, "is because we had a beautiful relationship and because he's so famous, people want to know as much as they can about him." But the interview didn't touch on what some people might want to know most: the Jewish angle. Hochman, a talented, troubled Jewish rich kid, brought out the Brahmin's inner Jew. *Loving Robert Lowell* is a narcissistic, name-dropping book, but touching too, and a rare window on Lowell's need to be someone he was not. "I wish I was Jewish," he told her. Hochman quotes—or paraphrases—Lowell as follows:

He was an only and unwanted child, rebellious, a prep school bully whose enduring nickname was "Cal," short for Caligula.

> At Harvard, I was always on the fringes. . . . My father wrote a letter to me telling me I was not allowed to disgrace the Lowell family by leaving Harvard. My uncle Horace Lowell, a real anti-Semite if there ever was one, was president of Harvard, and I had to stay there.

Portrait of Mordecai Myers in uniform by John Wesley Jarvis, ca. 1810. (Courtesy of the Toledo Museum of Art.)

Okay, so he wasn't an uncle, and his name wasn't Horace. Is this clear evidence of Hochman's unreliability? Or a poetic hint that her memoir is true the way Lowell's autobiographical poetry was true? "There's a good deal of tinkering with fact," as he told the *Paris Review*, and yet "there was always that standard of truth which you wouldn't ordinarily have in poetry—the reader was to believe he was getting the *real* Robert Lowell."

He was an only and unwanted child, rebellious, a prep school bully whose enduring nickname was "Cal," short for Caligula. "It took Lowell's parents most of his youth to recognize . . . [his] oppositional behavior," writes Jamison, and that "the more tightly they tried to control him the more defiant he became." They took him to his first psychiatrist at age 15. "He never was a natural child," his mother Charlotte, a domineering woman of *Mayflower* stock, told one of his doctors.

While still at Harvard, Cal announced his plans to marry a young woman his parents deemed inappropriate. A fight ensued, and Lowell knocked his father Robert to the floor. Ian Hamilton, author of a widely read 1982 biography of Lowell, dwells with relish on this and myriad other outrageous episodes in his life. Jamison faults Hamilton for sensationalism, arguing that he missed the admirable, courageous Cal, who transmuted his destructive illness into great art. But she too misses a crucial element. Her authoritative, wordy book, eloquent and humane, ignores Lowell's fascinating spark of Jewish identity. Still, amid her myriad renditions of the poet's mental states is a one-liner that reverberates like a Harvard church bell: "From childhood, Lowell felt himself to be of a different tribe from his parents." That's what he was saying that night at Hillel.

Lowell's mother died on a trip to Italy in 1954. Shortly thereafter he was hospitalized for mania for the fourth time (of 20) in his life. His doctors recommended he try writing his life story as therapy. Some of that output remained unpublished when he died, at age 60, in 1977. In a piece called "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium," first published in 1987 in the *New York Review of Books*, he wrote:

> I am writing my autobiography literally "to pass the time." I almost doubt if the time would pass at all otherwise. However, I also hope the result will supply me with swaddling clothes, with a sort of immense bandage of grace and ambergris for my hurt nerves.

The brilliant result was *Life Studies*, which broke poetic ground in 1959 with its liberated technique and "confessional" content and won the National Book Award. "I wanted a style and rhythm that could say anything that conversation or prose could say," he later explained. Flanked by 23 poems was the book's centerpiece, "91 Revere Street," a prose memoir of his boyhood home. It began and ended with a portrait of a Jew.

In 1986, the *Times* art critic John Russell reviewed a New York gallery show called *American Paintings From the Toledo Museum of Art*. "I could have done," he sniffed, "without the portrait by William Morris Hunt in which a lugubrious old person called Francisca Paim da Terra Brum da Silveira is made to look like Dante in drag. . . . But there are also some wonderful surprises. I had never before heard of John Wesley Jarvis, but his portrait of Mordecai Myers, dated around 1813, looks as if Myers had stepped straight out of a novel by Stendhal." Several copies existed of this portrait, and one of them hung at 91 Revere Street, Boston, on the border between Beacon Hill and immigrant Boston, where the future poet lived from 1924 until 1927. Lowell's memoir begins:

> The account of him is platitudinous, worldly and fond, but he has no Christian name and is entitled merely Major *M.* Myers in my Cousin Cassie Mason Myers Julian-James's privately printed *Biographical Sketches: A Key to a Cabinet of Heirlooms in the Smithsonian Museum*. The name-plate under his portrait used to spell out his name bravely enough: he was Mordecai Myers. The artist painted Major Myers in his sanguine War of 1812 uniform with epaulets, white breeches, and a scarlet frogged waistcoat. His right hand played with the sword "now to be seen in the Smithsonian cabinet of heirlooms." The pose was routine and gallant. The full-lipped smile was good-humoredly pompous and embarrassed.

A full facsimile of Cousin Cassie's obscure book, published in 1908, is available online. Chapter One has a sepia version of the painting of M. Myers (no Christian name) in uniform. He was born in Newport, wrote Cassie, where his father was "a friend of the Reverend Ezra Styles [sic], afterward President of Yale College." Lowell saw fit to quote those words verbatim, presumably for emphasis, perhaps with a knowing wink, since Stiles was a Puritan Hebraist who famously befriended Jews. M. Myers, Cassie wrote, was wounded in the War of 1812, served as a New York state assemblyman, and was later elected mayor of Schenectady. Lowell recounts these facts, but is more interested in the painting:

> Undoubtedly Major Mordecai had lived in a more ritualistic, gaudy, and animal world than twentieth-century Boston. There was something undecided, Mediterranean, versatile, almost double-faced about his bearing which suggested that, even to his contemporaries, he must have seemed gratuitously both *ci-devant* and *parvenu*. He was a dark man, a German Jew—no downright Yankee, but maybe such a fellow as Napoleon's mad, pomaded son-of-an-innkeeper-general, Junot, Duc D'Abrantes; a man like mad George III's pomaded, disreputable son, "Prinny," the Prince Regent. . . . Mordecai Myers was my Grandmother Lowell's grandfather. His life was tame and honorable. . . . My mother was roused to warmth by the Major's scarlet vest and exotic eye. . . . Great-great-Grandfather Mordecai! Poor sheepdog in wolf's clothing! In the anarchy of my adolescent war on my parents, I tried to make him a true wolf, the wandering Jew! *Homo lupus homini!*

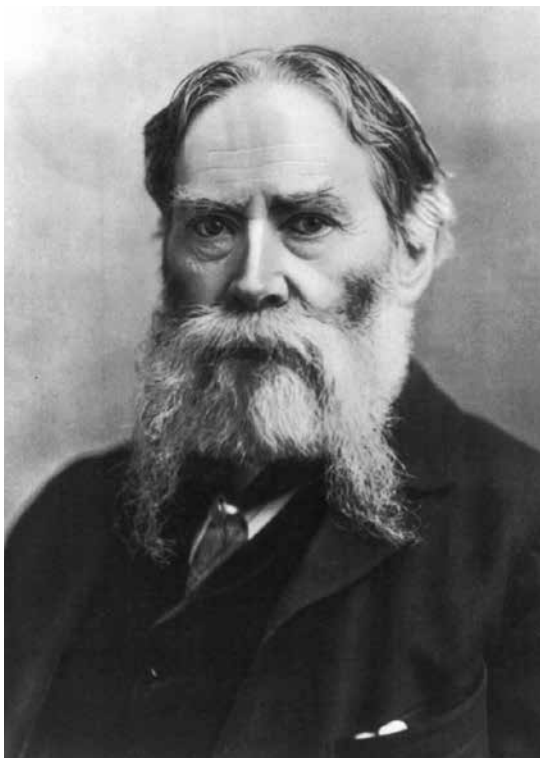
Myers appears here as both a has-been and an upstart. He's perhaps a madman. But most of all, a wandering Jewish wolf, a weapon in the war against Lowell's Brahmin parents. The Roman proverb *Homo lupus homini* means "man is wolf to man" and was quoted by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

"I've been gulping Freud and am a confused and slavish convert," Lowell wrote Hardwick in 1953. Closely read, Lowell's "91 Revere Street" is a small Freudian masterpiece. He writes of Lowell family snobbery, his mother's disdain for his "unmasterful" father, her nagging him to leave the Navy for a better-paying civilian job. The mother is "roused to warmth" by the exotic Mordecai Myers, but not by her husband. Of his father, he wrote: "His opinions were almost morbidly hesitant, but he considered himself a matter-of-fact man of science and had an unspoiled faith in the superior efficiency of northern nations." As Sandra Hochman puts it, unvarnished:

> "So you were angry with your parents?" I asked Cal, looking into his beautiful cat's eyes which had flecks of yellow. "Yes. Not only angry, but their mediocre minds and their philistine tastes, not to mention their prejudices against Jews and Negroes, made me sick."

A scene from the penultimate page of "91 Revere Street" slyly celebrates Lowell's Jewish heritage. The house is filled with Myers furnishings inherited from Cousin Cassie. The poet remembers:

> When I shut my eyes to stop the sun, I saw first an orange disc, then a red disc, then the portrait of Major Myers apotheosized, as it were, by the sunlight lighting the blood smear of his scarlet waistcoat. . . . Great-great-Grandfather Myers had never frowned down in judgment on a Salem witch. There was no allegory in his eyes, no *Mayflower*. Instead he looked peacefully at his sideboard, his cut-glass decanters, his cellaret—the worldly bosom of the Mason-Myers mermaid engraved on a silver-plated urn. If he could have spoken, Mordecai would have said, "My children, my blood, accept graciously the loot of your inheritance. We are all dealers in used furniture."



James Russell Lowell in an undated photo. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.)

Here is how Jamison reads this pregnant passage: "Lowell contrasted the Puritan legacy left him by the early Lowells and Winslows with the lighter, more recent one of his great-great-grandfather Myers." She does not mention that the apotheosized Myers was a Jew, which is why, of course, he never judged a Salem witch, or saw the world through Christian allegory—and dealt in used furniture.

But surely Lowell's graciously accepted Jewish inheritance is a critical piece of his psychological furniture. "I'm one-eighth Jewish and seven-eighths non-Jewish," he once told the Anglo-Jewish critic Al Alvarez. "The two thinkers, non-fictional thinkers, who influence and are never out of one's mind are Marx and Freud." Was that his "lighter" legacy?

Lowell's "91 Revere Street" first appeared in the fall of 1956 in *Partisan Review*. By odd coincidence, that same October Edmund Wilson published an essay entitled "Notes on Gentile Pro-Semitism" in *Commentary*, another organ of the liberal Jewish intelligentsia:

> The Gentile of American Puritan stock who puts himself in contact with the Hebrew culture finds something at once so alien that he has to make a special effort in order to adjust himself to it, and something that is perfectly familiar. The Puritanism of New England was a kind of new Judaism, a Judaism transposed in Anglo-Saxon terms. . . . When the Puritans came to America, they identified George III with Pharaoh and themselves with the Israelites in search of the Promised Land. . . . I have recently been collecting examples of the persistence through the 19th century of the New Englander's deep-rooted conviction that the Jews are a special people.

Robert Lowell was an heir to that mindset. Among Wilson's New England case studies was his great-great-uncle James Russell Lowell, the distinguished 19th-century poet, abolitionist, and American ambassador to England. As we learn from Jamison, his mother, Harriet Brackett Spence Lowell, was incarcerated in 1845 at the McLean Asylum for the Insane near Boston, where her direct descendant Robert Lowell was hospitalized four times in the 1950s and 1960s. Wilson wrote in *Commentary* that James Russell Lowell had an "atavistic obsession" with Jews, a "mania on this subject." His evidence was an unsigned piece in the *Atlantic Monthly* that reported an encounter with the ambassador in 1883:

> He detected a Jew in every hiding-place and under every disguise, even when the fugitive had no suspicion of himself. To begin with nomenclature: all persons named for countries or towns are Jews; all with fantastic, compound names, such as Lilienthal, Morgenroth; all with names derived from colors, trades, animals, vegetables, minerals; all with Biblical names, except Puritan first names; all patronymics ending in *son* . . . In short, it appeared that this insidious race had penetrated and permeated the human family more universally than any other influence except original sin. He spoke of their talent and versatility, and of the numbers who had been illustrious in literature, the learned professions, art, science, and even war, until by degrees, from being shut out of society and every honorable and desirable pursuit, they had gained the prominent positions everywhere. . . . Finally he came to a stop, but not to a conclusion, and as no one else spoke, I said, "And when the Jews have got absolute control of finance, the army and navy, the press, diplomacy, society, titles, the government, and

> the earth's surface, what do you suppose they will do with them—and with us?" "That," he answered, turning towards me, and in a whisper audible to the whole table, "that is the question which will eventually drive me mad."

"Though Lowell admired the Jews," commented Wilson, "he conceived them as a power so formidable that they seemed on the verge of becoming a menace. In this vision of a world run entirely by Jews there is something of morbid suspicion, something of the state of mind that leads people to believe in the *Protocols of Zion*." More than most, Wilson understood the treacherous interplay of anti-Semitism and its sneaky twin, philo.

Robert Lowell variously described his forebear as an "urbane man of letters," a "spry deflater of the outsider"—e.g., Whitman and Mark Twain—and "a poet pedestalled for oblivion." When Lowell spoke with the *Paris Review* at his home on Boston's Marlborough Street, the interviewer, Frederick Seidel, noticed two portraits of poets on the walls of his study: the elder Lowell and a more notorious anti-Semite, Ezra Pound.

At age 19, Lowell had written Pound from Harvard, boldly requesting tutelage in Italy. "All my life I have been eccentric," he began. "Your *Cantos* have re-created what I have imagined to be the blood of Homer." Pound, an infamous fascist, made anti-American radio broadcasts from Mussolini's Italy, for which he was locked up for treason. He spent 12 years at St. Elizabeths psychiatric hospital in Washington D.C., where Lowell visited him. But Pound's Jewish conspiracy theories were more than Lowell could bear. As he wrote to him in 1956: "I love you, laugh with you, know you are a great poet . . . Still I have no mind for your gospel, and don't let us talk about the Jews. I have several on my family tree, and . . . but let's drop it."

Lowell was obsessed with the Holocaust. In 1953, living in Amsterdam, he wrote the poet Randall Jarrell, a close friend from Kenyon days, that he had just read "twenty volumes of the Nuremberg trials," as well as Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. But Cal was also drawn to tyrants, and morbidly fixated on Hitler. According to Jamison, in the 1970s he read *Mein Kampf* aloud to his third wife, Caroline Blackwood, telling her that Hitler was a better writer than Melville. In his manic phases he sometimes believed he *was* Hitler, though at other times it was Napoleon, Alexander the Great, Homer's Achilles, Dante, Shakespeare, Jesus Christ, or the "Jewish Messiah."

Sandra Hochman's memoir reveals Lowell's chilling capacity to lurch from Jew-lover to the opposite. At his request, she made him a Seder. "He loved wearing the yarmulke I gave him. What the hell? Cal was now a Puritan, Boston Brahmin, lapsed Catholic, and Jew. In other words, a poet." He promised to divorce his wife and marry her, but she didn't know that this was a familiar pattern. Jamison links such manic affairs with Lowell's yearning for rebirth and regeneration, noting that they were typically followed by hospitalization. At the climax of Hochman's book, Cal throws a cocktail party at a friend's town house. In attendance were Norman Mailer, William Styron, and W. H. Auden. Lowell drank too much champagne and announced their engagement. Then he started screaming that Stalin was worse than Hitler. Guests quickly began leaving, as if they "heard

lightning and ran to avoid the storm." Unlike Hochman, they all knew about his psychotic episodes. When everyone was gone, Lowell attacked her:

> I could not believe what he was doing. He was clicking his heels like a Nazi and goose-stepping toward me. Cal lunged at my throat, throwing me down on the floor. . . . The angel was gone. Lucifer took the angel's place . . . "I'm Hitler and you're a Jew, and I'm going to kill you," he said, putting his strong hands around my neck. I managed to lie still until he took his hands off my neck, and then he passed out. . . . For a terrible moment, I thought he was dead.

Did it happen? It certainly could have. He fought often with his first wife, the novelist Jean Stafford, and once tried to strangle her.

Following the Hochman affair Lowell was hospitalized for a month at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia for manic-depressive psychosis. He returned to Hardwick; they bought an apartment at 15 West 67th Street, and he commuted to teach at Harvard. "New York's a much more exciting city than Boston," he told V. S. Naipaul. "It's a Jewish city: about a third of the city is Jewish and the talent is Jewish . . . Most of my friends are Jewish, and the people I've learned most from, and that I like best, in New York are Jewish. It's quite strange that this tiny little minority should have such talent, and isn't anyway typical of Jews, I think, through history."

In 1963, Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* was panned in the pages of *Commentary* and *Partisan Review*. Lowell and Hardwick attended a soirée devoted to the controversy, presided over by Irving Howe. Lowell's frank letter to his fellow poet Elizabeth Bishop exposes the limits of his philo-Semitism:

> Hannah wasn't there and most of the talk went against her. One was suddenly in a pure Jewish or Arabic world, people hardly speaking English, declaiming, confessing, orating in New Yorkese, in Yiddish, booing and clapping. . . . Well, it was alive, but very rash, cheap, declamatory etc. a sort of mixture of say Irish nationalists and an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting with contending sides.

Capable of violence, Lowell was repelled by it. He had been jailed for draft refusal in 1943.

But the day after "the little New York outburst," he continued, the sides had met, and "there seemed to have been a catharsis, and everyone was friendly and relieved that what had been brewing for months had somehow boiled off. There's nothing like the New York Jews. Odd that this is so, and that other American groups are so speechless and dead."

In the fall of 1964, Lowell's stage play *The Old Glory*, based on stories by his muses Hawthorne and Melville, opened in New York. To mark the occasion, *Life* magazine ran a long feature on the poet, from which two of his quotes stand out:

> Jewishness, and not just of the New York variety, is the theme of today's literature as the Middle West was the theme of Veblen's time and the South in the Thirties. These regions have burnt out, and now we're lucky to have the Jewish influence. It's what keeps New York alive; not only writers and painters but also the good bourgeois who support the arts. . . .
>
> Do I feel left out in a Jewish age? Not at all. Fortunately, I'm one-eighth Jewish myself, which I do feel is a saving grace. It's not a lot of Jewish blood, but I think it would have been enough to come under the Nuremberg laws. My Jewish ancestors, oddly enough, were named Moses Mordecai and Mordecai Moses.

These lines cry out for commentary. Why the social scientist Thorstein Veblen and not a literary figure? I'm guessing that Lowell recalled Veblen's famous essay of 1919, "The Intellectual Pre-Eminence of Jews in Modern Europe," and identified with its thesis of Jewish excellence born of marginality. Why "Mordecai Moses" when the Lowell great-great-grandfather was actually named Mordecai Myers? And who's this Moses Mordecai?

In a poem called "Searchings," first published in *Notebook 1967–68*, he wrote: "I dreaming I was sailing a very small sailboat, / with my mother one-eighth Jewish, and *her* mother two-eighths, / down the Hudson, twice as wide as it is, wide as the Mississippi . . ." According to Malcolm Stern's genealogy book (now updated and online), Moses Mordecai, son of Jacob and Rebecca, was born in New York in 1785. He moved to North Carolina, married Ann Willis Lane, and begat Margaret Mordecai, who married John Devereux, whose daughter Mary married the *Mayflower* descendant Arthur Winslow, Robert Lowell's grandfather. Thus Lowell's mother Charlotte Winslow was the great-granddaughter of Moses Mordecai, making her an eighth Jewish. So Robert Lowell was one-sixteenth Jewish on each side, an eighth in all. But to qualify for the Holocaust is a "saving grace"? Did he even meet the Nuremberg criteria? Technically, maybe not. But for the mad, genius poet, this "very small sailboat" on the Hudson was enough to keep him afloat on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

On June 2, 1967, Lowell made the cover of *Time*. "Something important and complex happens in the poetry of this complicated man," opined the writer of the long profile. Meanwhile, his New York Jewish friends were mobilizing for Israel. On June 7, 1967, a major ad appeared in the *Times*, signed by 54 intellectual stars including Alfred Kazin, Irving Howe, and Robert Penn Warren, urging President Johnson to intervene and "maintain free passage" in the Gulf of Aqaba. Lowell had refused to add his name. "This war," he told the *Times*, "should never have happened; for this Russia and America, the suppliers of weapons, are to blame." Lowell's biographer Ian Hamilton adds a telling tidbit: In a letter of June 4, 1967 to his Kenyon classmate, the Tennessee writer Peter Taylor, he wrote sardonically: "I am pretending my great-grandmother Deborah Mordecai was a Syrian belly dancer." He took a different tone in a letter of June 14 to Elizabeth Bishop: "Did the late war scare you to death? It did me while it was simmering. We had a great wave of

New York Jewish nationalism, all the doves turning into hawks. Well, my heart is in Israel, but it was a little like a blitz krieg [sic] against the Comanches—armed by Russia."

Capable of violence, he was repelled by it. He had been jailed for draft refusal in 1943. His book *Lord Weary's Castle*, for which he won a Pulitzer at age 30, included a poem called "At the Indian Killer's Grave." It was prefaced by a quote from Hawthorne, about "the veterans of King Philip's War, who had burned villages and slaughtered young and old, with pious fierceness, while the godly souls throughout the land were helping them with prayer." In the fall of 1967, Lowell was a central figure in the march on the Pentagon, chronicled by Norman Mailer in *The Armies of the Night*:

> Robert Lowell gave off at times the unwilling haunted saintliness of a man who was repaying the moral debts of ten generations of ancestors. So his guilt must have been a tyrant of a chemical in his blood always ready to obliterate the best of his moods.

And then, in March 1969, he went to Israel. A few weeks prior to Lowell's departure, Isaiah Berlin sent a long, anxious letter to his friend Yaacov Herzog, director general of the Israeli prime minister's office. "I wonder who conceived this idea," Berlin wrote from New York. "I saw Elie Wiesel yesterday, and he expressed extreme concern." If not carefully planned, warned the Oxford philosopher, Lowell's visit could be "grotesque":

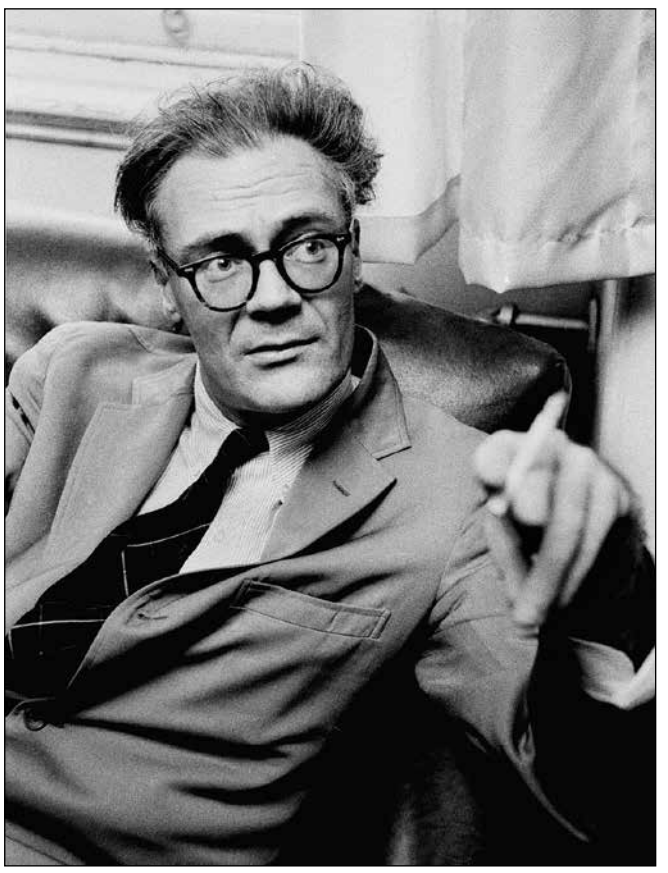
> [A]s you must know, he goes off his head periodically in winter, and although he is a wonderfully clever, fascinating, touching, distinguished and in every way remarkable man . . . [he] is the hero of the anti-Vietnam movement now, so the usual mechanical treatment which is accorded to such visitors . . . will produce appalling results. Do not think I exaggerate, for I am not exaggerating. Can you do anything to stop the Foreign Office from attaching some mechanical young woman to him who will din the glories of the country into his ears patriotically, sincerely and disastrously? . . . I shall no doubt be here when he comes back, and I anticipate, if not the worst, certainly not the best—and remember that his most intimate friend in New York is Miss Arendt, whose view on Eichmann etc. he shares entirely.

Berlin urged that Lowell meet with "doubters and unorthodox persons" as well as poets, specifically recommending Gershom Scholem. "What he really needs is a left-wing kibbutz, or an army camp for a week, talking freely to simple boys and their commanders." Jamison neglects the trip entirely, which is fairly astonishing: Not only was Lowell steeped in the Bible, he thought he might die in the Holy Land. He wrote Hardwick from Jerusalem on March 6, 1969:

> Dearest a million miles away Liz:
> I never knew I'd miss you so. You go around this queer indescribable country, [. . . from] armies I & 7 II [sic] pointed toward the Syrian & Jordanian borders, to a club of friends of Isaiah Berlin's, to fooling [sic] utterly at home, Yiddish joking [with] a college president, to the failed Jewish English professor at Iowa in whose gentle hands I am—
> But I have the shakes. . . . God, have mercy on me may I not die far from you! . . .
> I'll see a doctor in a few minutes. I only pray to God that I see you and Harriet again, dearest!

Not only was Lowell steeped in the Bible, he thought he might die in the Holy Land.

Three days later, he wrote again: "Dear Heart: . . . 4 days ago I went thru a trauma . . . Not so much trouble—just high blood pressure, trembling of foot and hand . . . Thrilling perplexing country—Hakeldama, the Field of Blood for always. . . . All my love, Cal."



Robert Lowell in Boston, Massachusetts, 1964. (Photo by Steve Schapiro/Corbis via Getty Images.)

In Christian tradition, Hakeldama is the site in Jerusalem's Valley of Hinnom where Judas Iscariot hanged himself, hence named "Field of Blood." No wonder Lowell seized on the image. Did he set foot there? Ian Hamilton tells us next to nothing about his activities in Israel. Fittingly, the fullest account we have comes from a book of Hebrew poetry. The Jerusalem poet Harold Schimmel, born in New Jersey, educated at Cornell, made aliyah in 1962 and began writing in Hebrew. He had overlapped with Lowell in Boston and New York, and spent time with him in Israel. In 1986, he published *Lowell*, a book of 100 Hebrew sonnets in free verse, the last third of which are set in Israel. "You had a weakness for Jewish women," Schimmel wrote, citing Sandra Hochman by name. At Kibbutz Ayelet Hashachar, gin and tonic in hand at 10:30 a.m., "You spoke of your 'natural inclination to Jews.'" The Sea of Galilee: "'How can it be so small?'" "In Sde Boker you visited BG"—the English letters appear in the Hebrew line—and discussed "Dayan and Golda," history, and the Bible. Visits to Meah Shearim, Holy Sepulchre, Abu Ghosh, Nazareth. "Your secret refuge": the Golden Chicken restaurant in East Jerusalem. A tour of the Israel Museum with Teddy Kollek. A dizzy spell at Masada. At a small gathering, "You pinched the poet / Lea Goldberg in the kitchen she complained about / the *chutzpah* of visiting gentiles who drink themselves silly . . ." Did that actually happen? It does sound like Lowell.

In early April 1969 Isaiah Berlin wrote from New York to an Oxford friend, Maurice Bowra: "Lowell has been to the Holy Land, and although it was anticipated that he would incline towards the Arabs on general left-wing grounds, he appears to have adored the Jews." Lowell's book *History*, published in 1973, bears out Berlin's assessment. By then Lowell was living in London, divorced from the long-suffering Hardwick, and newly married to the beautiful, alcoholic Anglo-Irish writer and heiress Caroline Blackwood, whose previous husbands were Jews: the English painter Lucian Freud and Israel Citkowitz, an American pianist and composer. *History* is arranged chronologically, beginning with the Bible: Adam and Eve, King David and Abishag, Solomon and his thousand wives. "Judith" manages to link the Holofernes story with "New York / where only Jews can write an English sentence, / the Jewish mother, half Jew, half anti-Jew, / says, *literate, liberalize, liberate!*" After the Bible come three sonnets called "Israel 1," "Israel 2," and "Israel 3," which conflate antiquity and the modern Jewish State. In the first, he wrote: "The vagabond Alexander passed here, *romero* — /. . . This province, still provincial, prays to the one God / who left his footmark on the field of blood . . ."

In the second sonnet, he wrote:

> The sun still burns in Israel. I could have stayed there
> a month longer and even stood conscription,
> though almost a pacifist, and still unsure
> if Arabs are black . . . no Jew, and thirty years
> too old. I loved the country, her briskness, danger,
> jolting between salvation and demolition . . .
> Since Moses, the long march over, saw the Mountain
> lift its bullet-head past timberline to heaven:
> the ways of Israel's God are military . . .

"Jolting between salvation and demolition"—the manic-depressive core of the Israeli and Jewish story. How could a man like Robert Lowell not identify with the Jews? Recall Major Myers in his scarlet waistcoat and Lowell's fascination with blood, his own not least. Think of him kindly in the end: a *romero*, a wandering Puritan pilgrim, one-eighth Jewish, in fitful pursuit of his promised land.

Stuart Schoffman worked as a staff writer for Time *in New York and a screenwriter in Hollywood before moving to Jerusalem in 1988. His translations from Hebrew include books by A. B. Yehoshua, David Grossman, and Meir Shalev.*

Swimming in an Inky Sea

BY SARAH RINDNER

If All the Seas Were Ink: A Memoir
by Ilana Kurshan
St. Martin's Press, 320 pp., $26.99

In August 1923, at the first parliamentary meeting of the Orthodox group Agudath Israel, in Vienna, Rabbi Yehuda Meir Shapiro of Poland inaugurated the Daf Yomi learning program. Shortly thereafter, thousands of religious Jews began the project of studying one full page (front and back) of Talmud a day for seven and a half years, the amount of time it takes to complete 37 tractates—2,711 pages—of the Babylonian Talmud. Ambitious Torah learning projects were nothing new for Eastern European Jews; the difference here was the scope and pace of the project, as well as, perhaps, its democratic spirit: the rabbinic canon for everyone, or at least all religious Jewish males.

When Rabbi Shapiro proposed the Daf Yomi project, detractors suggested that such a course of study would necessarily be both cursory and superficial. Full-time yeshiva students rarely study the *daf*, instead diving deep into specific tractates. Yet for tens of thousands of Jews all over the world, many of them busy with work and family, Daf Yomi study has become an integral part of each day.

For Ilana Kurshan, a young editor recently uprooted from New York to Jerusalem following a man she would marry and divorce in a year's time, Daf Yomi study began as a way to move forward: "If every day I turned a page, then eventually a new chapter would have to begin." As her lyrical and erudite memoir *If All the Seas Were Ink* illustrates, the practice became an unexpected source of beauty and inspiration. Kurshan, a hyper-literary, ideologically egalitarian, hopeless romantic (in her words), doesn't fit the typical profile of a Daf Yomi participant. She started her project at the suggestion of a running partner, a friend who enjoyed "hanging out in bars, reading paperback thrillers, and staying in shape," but who, in an only-in-Jerusalem moment, tossed off a casual "Did I tell you? I've started learning a page of Talmud a day" as they were running uphill toward the Knesset.

Kurshan approached her Daf Yomi study as a young scholar, a translator, and a "lover of texts." Starting with tractate Yoma, her Gemara fills up with marginal notes indicating points of confusion, notes of surprise, boxed summaries, and references to books she'd read as an undergraduate at Harvard and as a graduate student at Cambridge. Yet her induction into the intricacies of traditional Jewish learning ends up providing her with more than a self-help regimen for a broken heart, more than the thrill of intellectual achievement, but with a "tree of life" to which she can cling through her sadness and isolation while living in Israel with few friends or family. Kurshan's seven years of Talmud study also guide her through a second chance at love and the birth of three children with her new husband. *If All the Seas Were Ink* is an intricately written captain's log of her voyage through the Babylonian Talmud, from tractate Yoma through tractate Shekalim.

Kurshan's memoir gives us insightful contemporary readings of talmudic passages while demonstrating how life can accrue added richness when set against the backdrop of the Talmud. Kurshan shows us the mutually dynamic relationship between life and text. Thus, in discussing Yoma, which deals with the highly involved priestly Temple rituals of Yom Kippur, she frames it in the language of lost love:

> [T]he Talmud is often regarded as a highly unromantic text, particularly when it comes to the transactional nature of marriage. But this is only because, for the rabbis, the object of longing was rarely wives, or even other women. Rather, when the rabbis wax most poetic, they are frequently speaking about the Temple, which was destroyed generations before the Talmud's inception.

Kurshan's first marriage, like the Second Temple, ended in flames. These flames are both figurative and literal, since there was an actual brushfire in the struggling couple's backyard on one particularly tense Shabbat evening. Kurshan shares a famous talmudic passage to illuminate the experience. Taken from the tractate Sotah, it revolves around the fact that the Hebrew word for man, *ish*, and the Hebrew word for woman, *isha*, are essentially the same except for the presence of the letter "hey," traditionally representative of God's name. Without the "hey" both names share the same Hebrew letters as *aish*, which means fire. According to the Talmud, "If a man and woman's union has merit, the divine Hey will reside between them; if not, a fire will break forth and consume them." (Sotah, 17a)

At a smoke-filled reception for a publisher, Kurshan finds herself dreaming "of the clouds of God's glory that accompanied the Israelites throughout their desert wanderings."

Ilana Kurshan. (Photo by Debbi Cooper.)

As the days of learning cycle into months and years, the texts Kurshan is immersed in both serendipitously reflect and set off her experiences. A work trip to the international book fair in Frankfurt while she is ensconced in the middle of the tractate Sukkah, which literally means "booth," provides a surreal vision in which the booksellers' booths become the Israelites' Sukkot in the wilderness. At a smoke-filled private reception for a German publisher, the writer finds herself dreaming "of the clouds of God's glory that accompanied the Israelites throughout their desert wanderings." From a talmudic debate between Rabbi Akiva and Rabban Gamliel about the halakhic permissibility of building a sukkah on a ship (Sukkah, 23a) Kurshan jumps into a meditation on her own instability and sense of rootlessness. Fortunately, Rabbi Akiva rules in support of Kurshan's precarious position. Even Matthew Arnold is roped into the conversation; in "Dover Beach" the world lacks certitude, and yet, "[t]he sea is calm tonight." Reading these reminiscences, it is sometimes hard to evaluate where memoir ends and imaginative re-enactment begins. One suspects that for Kurshan, who has become comfortable in the vivid and highly allusive literary world of the Talmud, the difference is immaterial.

Kurshan's iconoclastic approach to Talmud study, which would likely be more at home in a University of Iowa writing workshop than an Agudath Israel convention, means that her communities of fellow Daf Yomi-ites are ephemeral, when they exist at all. When Rabbi Meir Shapiro invented the Daf Yomi project, he imagined it as a project of unification:

> What a great thing! A Jew travels by boat and takes gemara *Berachot* [the first volume of the Talmud] under his arm. He travels for 15 days from Eretz Yisrael [the land of Israel] to America, and each day he learns the *daf*. When he arrives in America, he enters a *beit midrash* [study house] in New York and finds Jews learning the very same *daf* that he studied on that day, and he gladly joins them. Another Jew leaves the States and travels to Brazil or Japan, and he first goes to the *beit midrash*, where he finds everyone learning the same *daf* that he himself learned that day. Could there be greater unity of hearts than this?

Kurshan quotes this speech approvingly at the outset of her memoir and is touched by this vision of Jewish unity. Yet she also likens herself to the Irish airman in W. B. Yeats's famous poem, who flies according to a "lonely impulse of delight." When Kurshan joins an early morning Daf Yomi study group in an Orthodox synagogue in Jerusalem, she is welcomed courteously by the other participants, yet when the men proceed to pray Shacharit together after they study, she heads to the local pool.

Kurshan's solitary pursuit is underlined in the chapter corresponding to tractate Hagigah, which deals with the commandment to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on the three major holidays. Standing in line to check in on an El Al flight from London to Israel on the eve of Passover, she describes herself as surrounded by "flocks of Hasidic men in black and white who were squawking through their beards and flapping their dress bags in a frenzy of preflight excitement." Although this may be a subtle nod to the aviary nature of some of the sacrificial offerings described in Hagigah, or to the very fact of flying on an airplane, one finds it hard to believe that there is any other ethnic or religious group that she would ever so blithely characterize as an animal species (in this case, penguins). As the line moves slowly, Kurshan, like the men around her, opens her Gemara to study:

> Absorbed in my learning, I was somewhat oblivious to what was going on in front of and behind me. Perhaps I ought to have noticed the flurry among the Hasidic men, who peered out over the tops of their books and glanced in my direction. Perhaps I should have listened to them whispering in Yiddish and noticed the nervous glances exchanged beneath raised eyebrows. But my head was buried in those matters that are wondrous and concealed and hidden.

Ben Sira's quote about the wondrous and concealed and hidden is on the page before her, and Kurshan imagines the men around her quoting approvingly its last line—"Examine that which is permitted to you; you have no business with hidden matters"—as confirmation that she has "had no business studying Talmud." Even here, Kurshan feels a twinge of the connection Rabbi Shapiro hoped Daf Yomi would create among Jews. Once on the flight, many of her fellow passengers open the same talmudic volume. Catching the eye of one of them who she seems to think is looking at her with suspicion, she remarks, "I could only think about how we were both—at least literally—on the same page."

Seven and a half years is a long time, and there is a detectable change as the precocious quality of the memoir's earlier pages transitions to softer tones of humility and gratitude. Throughout her memoir, Kurshan craves fellowship, describing its absence quite movingly. She ultimately finds it in her husband, who becomes her ideal *chavruta*, or learning partner, as well as in her budding family.

At the outset of the book, Kurshan states that "by the Talmud's standards, I am a man rather than a woman." As an independent, self-sufficient modern woman, she can hardly relate to the Talmud's assumptions about gender, which she regards as "historical curiosities." Yet toward the end of the book, in her chapter on the tractate Berachot, Kurshan explores the rabbinic treatment of the biblical prayer of Hannah in 1 Samuel, and finds in it a template for her own prayer as a new mother trying to find a time and way in which to address God. In fact, the rabbis of the Talmud turn to Hannah as a paradigm for all prayer. How one squares Kurshan's earlier statement of "I am a man" with the subsequent delicate unpacking of Hannah's prayer is left to the reader to resolve.

Approximately 90,000 Orthodox Jews gather to celebrate Daf Yomi, the completion of seven and a half years of study of the entire Talmud, MetLife Stadium, New Jersey, August 2012. (Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images.)

In her introduction, Kurshan writes that the "Talmud is a text for those who are living the questions rather than those who have found the answers." Yet Kurshan's journey into the Daf Yomi helps her make certain religious discoveries:

> True, I can't prove the existence of God . . . Likewise, I cannot explain why following each and every commandment has the effect of making me a better person and the world a better place. But the totality of living a life infused with reverence for God and the study of God's Torah has enriched me in ways I can only begin to fathom.

At the end of the book, Kurshan returns, quite appropriately, exactly to where she began: tractate Yoma, as she begins the cycle of Daf Yomi once more. To complete a cycle of Torah or Talmud is always to recognize how much more there is to learn. In reading of her return to Yoma and the beginning of the cycle, I was reminded of my grandfather, a Holocaust survivor who owned a grocery store and finished the Daf Yomi cycle seven times before he passed away.

Kurshan drew the title of her book from *Akdamut*, an 11th-century Aramaic poem by Rabbi Meir bar Yitzhak:

> God's eternal glory could not be described even if the heavens were parchment, and the forests quills; if all the seas were ink, as well as every gathered water; even if the earth's inhabitants were scribes and recorders of initials.

If All the Seas Were Ink is consistently insightful and often profound. Yet the places where it shines most are where it reflects the vastness of life and the depth of Jewish learning that lies beyond its pages.

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Perish the Thought

BY MICHAEL WEINGRAD

Is Theory Good for the Jews?: French Thought and the Challenge of the New Antisemitism
by Bruno Chaouat
Liverpool University Press, 288 pp., $120

Bruno Chaouat's mordantly titled book on how postmodern theorists have responded to the upsurge in European anti-Semitism over the last two decades makes for dispiriting reading. *Is Theory Good for the Jews?* reviews the ways in which fashionable intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic have not only failed to grapple coherently with ramifying hatred and violence in their societies, but have often joined the anti-Semitic chorus, especially when Israel is the target. The book's pathos derives not only from Chaouat's detailed and morally cogent analyses of a rogues' gallery of contemporary academicians. It also reflects the admirable honesty with which Chaouat, a professor of French at the University of Minnesota who describes himself as "an unrepentant Theory addict," asks whether a life devoted to "Theory" may have been a mistake. In the book's preface he quotes Proust's famous anticlimax in which the protagonist of *Swann in Love* muses: "To think that I've wasted years of my life, that I've longed to die, that I've experienced my greatest love, for a woman who didn't appeal to me, who wasn't even my type." Chaouat dares to ask whether, given the moral autism of so many of Theory's luminaries when confronting the basic political questions of our time, his own romance with it has been a similar waste.

Let us not leave these questions hanging, as Chaouat mournfully does. The answer to the book's title is straightforward: No, Theory is not good for the Jews (or, for that matter, anyone who cares about intellectual and moral clarity). And, yes, there are probably better ways to spend one's life than marinating in postmodernism's silly conceits and tin-eared jargon. And yet, if Chaouat hesitates to draw such unambiguous conclusions he has nevertheless performed a service here by chronicling a range of Theory's recent intellectual and moral failures and how they continue to revolve around Jews, the Holocaust, and the State of Israel. This is worth knowing about since, to adapt Trotsky's warning, Jews may not be interested in Theory, but Theory is very interested in Jews.

For those who have not spent time in a university humanities department since the 1980s, Theory—also commonly referred to as French theory, postmodern theory, or critical theory—is, as Chaouat puts it, a set of "theoretical discourses permeated by the legacy of Nietzsche and Heidegger," which includes "deconstruction, as well as structuralism, post-structuralism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis," in addition to postcolonial theory and more or less distant cousins such as the neo-Marxist writings of the Frankfurt School thinkers. Its totems include Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, who have been at least as influential in the American academy as in France or Europe more generally. Theory's frequent markers are a radical skepticism about the existence of truth and stable meaning in human communication; a conviction that the civilization of the West and the institutions of liberal modernity are not to be significantly distinguished from totalitarian barbarism; a fascination with the supposedly liberatory powers of violence, degradation, and sexual extremity; and a famously obscure manner of expression.

No less characteristic of Theory is its focus on the Jews. As I wrote more than two decades ago, when I was still recovering from Theory's thrall:

> Every major contemporary French theorist has made some study of or pronouncement upon the Jews and their place in the West. This means that in literature and cultural studies [departments], where the influence of French post-structuralist thinkers is so immense, with many of the most widely read works of Theory focusing on aspects of Jewish history and thought, a strange sort of "postmodern Jewish Studies" has become a central part of the scholarly discourse.

I noted then that in this discourse "the Jews themselves become ethereal, reduced usually to a single philosophical principle or merely symbolic value that is put forth as their 'essential nature.'" A well-known example from that time comes from Chaouat's famous teacher Jean-François Lyotard, whose 1988 book *Heidegger et "les juifs"* put "the Jews" in quotation marks to indicate that they are really the principle of semantic and philosophical indeterminacy, that which no system of thought can contain. Lyotard and other theorists, whether Jewish or not, meanwhile seemed to know vanishingly little about the details and actual substance of Judaism and Jewish history. Such abstractions tended more often than not to be nothing other than recrudescences of old tropes and stereotypes (Jew as pariah, Judaism as homelessness, etc.) presented as critical analysis.

Such was the lay of the academic land at that time. Chaouat's book picks up the story from there, analyzing the utterances of theorists and their fellow travelers since September 11 and the upsurge of violent, jihadist anti-Semitism in Europe. Inevitably, we encounter Berkeley professor Judith Butler, who has been at the vanguard of academic boycotts against Israel and considers Zionism a criminal perversion of Judaism. Chaouat takes her to task for, among other things, her misrepresentations of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, whom Butler accused of racism because of an interview in which Levinas maintained that Israelis, like all people, have an ethical obligation to protect themselves and their families from terror. Butler, along with Slavoj Žižek, Santiago Zabala, and Gianni Vattimo, is a contributor to the 2014 volume *Deconstructing Zionism: A Critique of Political Metaphysics*, which Chaouat shows to contain conspiracy theories about September 11, depictions of Jewish peoplehood as a unique metaphysical evil, and a range of hoary anti-Jewish tropes employed to critique Israel and exculpate its enemies. The quality of thought therein, momentarily unmasked of theoretical abstractions, may be seen in the contribution of Vattimo, emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Turin and a member of the

European Parliament (and a vocal sympathizer of Hamas). Vattimo expresses his hope that:

> The bloody racist politics of the State of Israel have begun to push the American Jewish community—its better part, certainly, starting with Chomsky—to take note that the very praiseworthy and profundity of the Jewish tradition [sic] is only so much putrid, hot air from which one must free oneself in order to avoid spilling blood on account of the Tomb of Rachel, of the Temple grounds, or of the sacred rights of the Jews to the Promised Land.

Writing elsewhere, a disciple of Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, helpfully suggests that both Palestinians and Israelis abjure all national self-determination since, in Agamben's understanding, peoplehood inevitably leads to Nazism, while the Palestinians today embody the moral ideal of Jewish powerlessness.

This likening of Zionism to Nazism is, of course, a trope that has extended far beyond the theoretical precincts of the academy. In 2010 Stéphane Hessel, an aged Jewish hero of the French resistance who had survived Buchenwald and Dora, published a brief, best-selling screed titled *Indignez-vous!* (translated into English in 2011 as *Time for Outrage!*) in which he retrospectively pronounced the German occupation of France to have been "relatively harmless" when compared with supposed Israeli depredations in the West Bank. The book was published in English and helped inspire the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Granted, the Zionists of Israel may be demons in human form, but perhaps these intellectuals have a word to speak on behalf of the Jewish communities of Europe, targets of an ongoing wave of jihadist violence? Alas, Derrida himself, even when interviewed in 2001, was unable to perceive a burgeoning anti-Semitism rooted not in the right but in the anti-Israel left and France's Muslim population. His student, deconstructionist Bernard Stiegler, meanwhile blames recent massacres of French Jews on, in Chaouat's formulation, "consumerism, the entertainment industry, and the cynicism of the financial elites." As Chaouat says, such "sociological readymade" analysis is "a serious obstacle to understanding the resurgence of antisemitism." He might also have noted that among anti-Semites themselves, there is little doubt as to who runs the entertainment industry and constitutes the financial elite.

Chaouat shows how various postcolonial theorists justify or ignore Muslim anti-Semitism, seen as a legitimate response to European colonialism. Indeed, as Chaouat writes, a number of French writers are less concerned with Muslim attacks on Jews than on the political threat posed by those European Jews who have shown a willingness to decry anti-Semitism even when exhibited by Muslims, and to defend Israel against those who would see the Jewish state destroyed. In the world of Theory, such dissidence marks these Jews as apologists for imperialism, fascism, and, yet again, an Israeli holocaust directed at the Palestinians.

Chaouat traces some part of these inversions to Theory's abstraction of Jews and Jewishness into symbols, fungible moral tokens easily transferred into other bank accounts. It is little surprise that intellectuals who see Jews only as deterritorialized outsiders have little use for actual flesh-and-blood Jews, let alone those with a nation-state. But Chaouat also sees an important ideological shift in Theory's increasing identification of Jews with Nazis, and of Palestinians, Muslims, and other Third World groups with (formerly noble) Jews. Prior to the 1990s, he argues, postmodern theorists tended to celebrate violence and the transgression of liberal norms for their own sake. Georges Bataille, for instance, another of Theory's foundational thinkers, believed that crucial metaphysical truths were to be encountered in violent limit-experiences, whether joyful and ecstatic or agonized and degrading, but in any case largely unyoked from any practical politics. In contrast to the good old postmodernism, as it were, today's theorists have taken what Chaouat characterizes as a "moralistic turn." Rather than championing the kind of amoral aestheticism, beyond good and evil, of Bataille, postmodern theorists now prefer to support projects of resistance and political violence on behalf of what they see as downtrodden groups. If Jews and Israelis, who are

Bruno Chaouat. (Photo by Nancy Gail Johnson.)

now defined as white colonialists or even Nazis, must be thrown under history's bus as part of this utopian project, so be it.

To which one might respond, isn't all of this a problem not of Theory but of the radical left more generally? After all, Israel-bashing, anti-Semitic conspiracy, hatred of the West, and crude visions of anti-capitalist revolutions and Third World uprisings may be found in England's Labour Party as well as America's English departments. Chaouat does eventually place his subject, albeit passingly, in the context of the global left. Noting Judith Butler's infamous 2012 characterization of Hamas and Hezbollah as progressive social movements, he concludes:

> The radical left, finding itself bereft of yesterday's proletariat, has now invested its hopes in former colonized peoples and the figure of the migrant. It views current political struggles through the messianic lenses of the past.

Indeed, the anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism of postmodern intellectuals, their fetishization of the Palestinians and violent jihadists, have less to do with new readings of Derrida than with long-standing features of left-wing political ideology. If you believe that liberal democracy is not to be cherished but overthrown, if you believe that moral value attaches not to personal choice but to group affiliation, if you believe that such groups divide nicely into oppressors and oppressed, and if you believe that such oppression is manifest in ever more subtle yet insidiously ubiquitous forms through which the powerful subjugate the masses—then anti-Semitism is likely to be a feature, not a bug, of your world view. If Theory distinguishes itself from other precincts of the intellectual left it is mainly by offering a more rarefied vocabulary with which to express these convictions.

For all his analytical acuity and moral passion, Chaouat leaves the broader historical and philosophical context of Theory's relation to the left largely unexplored. Similarly, for a book that focuses primarily on academic figures, Chaouat's analysis is silent about basic features of academic life that would contribute additional understanding to the ideological shifts he treats. Most fundamental in the American context is the virtual erasure of non-leftist faculty from the humanities. Studies show that what had already been a decades-long minority position of conservatives within academia, starting in the 1990s, began to approximate the population density of unicorns. It seems likely that the mainstreaming of anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism is not unconnected to the wildly lopsided political culture of the academy. After all, we are now more than two generations removed from an academic culture that manifested a robust commitment to the norms of liberal democracy and was familiar with the classical texts underwriting this commitment. If, by contrast, the typical ideological menu today mainly offers choices between, say, a Foucauldian or a Derridean radicalism, or between Nietzsche's or Marx's overthrow of the West—and you've been exposed to little else—it can hardly be surprising if your political judgement becomes a tad skewed.

While valuable and trenchant, Chaouat's book resembles other recent attempts by left-liberal Jewish academics to push back against their more militantly radical colleagues—for instance, the 2014 volume *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel* or the recent (and, for the moment, successful) campaign to stop anti-Israel boycotts by the Modern Language Association. One applauds these efforts, but viewed from outside the truncated political spectrum of today's professoriate they can seem both belated and somewhat pyrrhic: old-fashioned liberals asking their radical colleagues not to be marched off the same gangplank as were their conservative colleagues, and faculty who support Israel's continued existence pleading for Jewish membership in the club of the aggrieved.

It is a final, telling indictment of Theory that Chaouat's critique of it derives more political and moral insight from his detours into novels by Philip Roth, Boualem Sansal, and Michel Houellebecq than from any theoretical text he cites. One might have wished that Theory were today solely a matter of 1980s trivia, at most an exercise in period nostalgia like the television show *Stranger Things*, albeit scarier and less entertaining. Alas, as Chaouat's book shows, it is still very much with us.

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Joseph the Righteous

BY JONATHAN KARP

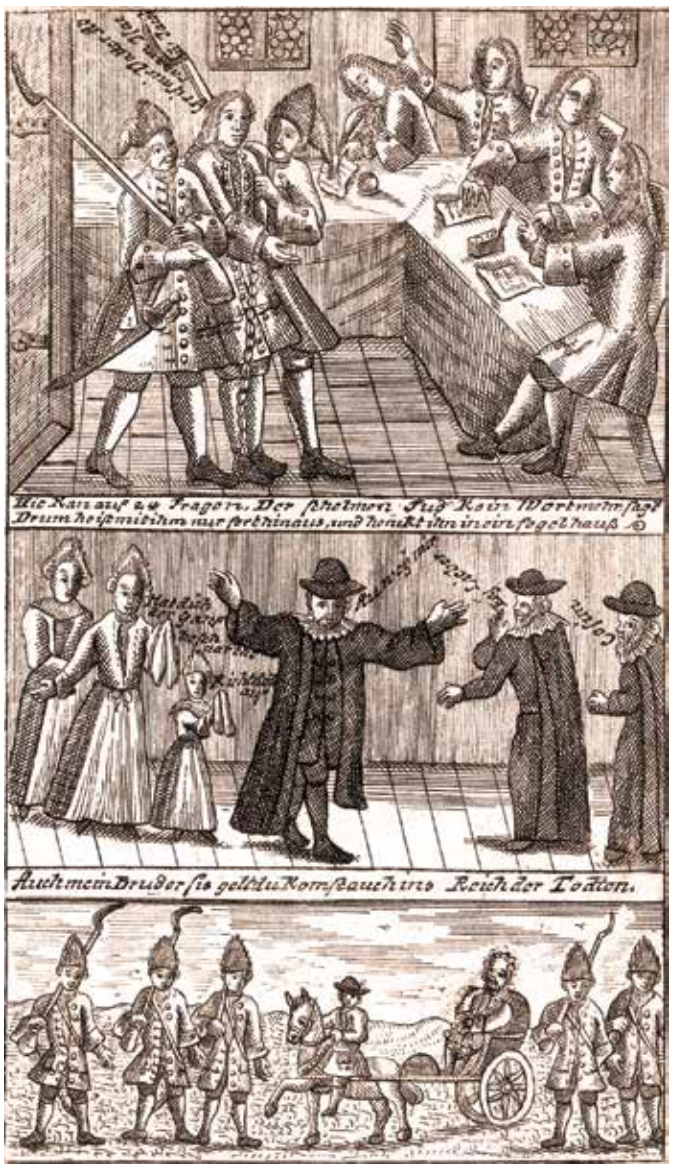
The Many Deaths of Jew Süss: The Notorious Trial and Execution of an Eighteenth-Century Court Jew
by Yair Mintzker
Princeton University Press, 344 pp., $35

In keeping with his book's title, Yair Mintzker hasn't written a life of Joseph Süss Oppenheimer, the famous "Jud Süss" whose sensational rise and sudden, catastrophic fall in the German Duchy of Württemberg came to epitomize the perilous careers of court Jews in early modern Central Europe. Given the numerous published biographies of Oppenheimer, particularly the influential 1929 study by Selma Stern as well as more recent exhaustive reconstructions by historians Barbara Gerber and Hellmut G. Haasis, this is wise. Instead, Mintzker gives us what he somewhat ponderously calls a "polyphonic history" in which he presents Oppenheimer's yearlong investigation, trial, and execution, in 1737–1738, from the conflicting perspectives of his contemporaries.

Mintzker rightly insists that despite the extensive research of previous scholars Oppenheimer himself has remained an elusive figure. This is not because he was particularly mysterious or wished to cover his tracks, but rather because the extant documents stemming from the period of his ordeal simply do not allow him to speak in his own voice. But Mintzker does much more than expose the biased nature of the sources that have colored our inherited view of Jud Süss. He does something quite remarkable: He affords us detailed and often surprisingly sympathetic accounts of those who shaped Oppenheimer's image to suit their own interests, needs, and perspectives.

It is true that, at times, this Rashomonic approach leads Mintzker to lose sight of his stated narrative purpose, so smitten is he with uncovering the curious details of these individuals' lives. In fact, Mintzker is intermittently aware of this tendency and even occasionally defensive about it, but he needn't be. For if at times Oppenheimer serves merely as the occasion, or the pretext, for these portraits, the result is no less fascinating.

Joseph Süss Oppenheimer was one of the later representatives of the phenomenon of the "court Jew," which had its roots in the 16th century and flowered in the period following the Thirty Years War. The proliferation of large and small states following the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, along with the war's decimation of population and property, created an urgent need on the part of Central Europe's new rulers for capital and credit. Jews, who had been excluded from most of Central Europe by the time of Luther's death in 1546 (and in many places much earlier), were now invited in small numbers to come back as creditors, financiers, minters, crown merchants, and military suppliers. They weren't popular, which isn't surprising given that they were both stigmatized aliens and willing tools of new absolutist states which were seeking to bypass the fiscal authority of estates, guilds, and other traditional institutions. This made the court Jew and his retinue entirely dependent on the ruler's protection—and uncertain continued favor.



Scenes from Joseph Süss Oppenheimer's trial. Top to bottom: Interrogation by the inquisition committee; Jews bewailing Oppenheimer's fate; Oppenheimer transported to the execution site. (WLB, Grafische Sammlung.)

Mintzker uses the term court Jew quite loosely to encompass even fairly modest merchants. But the popular mind associates this type with such striking figures as Leffmann Behrens, who became the unofficial finance minister to Prince-Elector George Louis of Hanover (later King George I of Great Britain), or mightier still, Samuel Oppenheimer, the financier and military supplier of the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, whose logistical genius proved crucial in routing the Turks amassed at Vienna's gates in 1683. Like Joseph Süss, Samuel Oppenheimer's services to the state did not in the end avail him. An angry mob and an ungrateful emperor despoiled his estate and seized his fortune before the dust could settle on his grave. But Joseph Süss with his miserable fate stands out even in comparison with such wealthier and more powerful predecessors—and not only because of the notorious film the Nazis made about him in 1940.

For one thing, during his rise Joseph Süss all but failed to pay the kind of lip service to traditional Jewish religious observance that the Jewish community expected of court Jews. Worse still, his aristocratic pretentions, numerous reported affairs, and overt political interventions threatened the fragile security of Württemberg's fledgling Jewish population. In spite of these things, Oppenheimer's refusal to renounce Judaism on the eve of his execution turned him into a genuine if unlikely martyr for some contemporary Jews. And his earlier insistence on residing outside of Frankfurt's famous ghetto as well as his religious skepticism and haughty arrogance toward Gentile authority have won him the grudging admiration of many modern Jews.

Oppenheimer enjoyed five successful years as the court Jew of Duke Carl Alexander of Württemberg. But on the very night in 1737 that his patron suddenly passed away, he, "his servants, and many other court officials were arrested, and soon a special inquisition committee was convened in order to investigate the court Jew's 'atrocious crimes.'" His accusers blamed him for the sidelining of old councilors and the creation of "a secret cabinet whose members he himself had advanced despite their notorious characters." Their 80-page summary of the incriminating "facts" concluded, however, with less political and more damning charges:

> He nourished himself only on robbery and treachery, and indeed often made it known throughout the land how he lived almost like a prince, engaging in prostitution, fornication, and possibly also incest, all extremely insolently, and sometimes even with Christian women.

There is, indeed, no denying that Oppenheimer had his share of Christian mistresses, but the yearlong investigation into his misdeeds was essentially a frame-up. Even some Christians expressed doubts about his guilt at the time. Duke Carl Alexander's son went so far as to label his trial a "judicial farce."

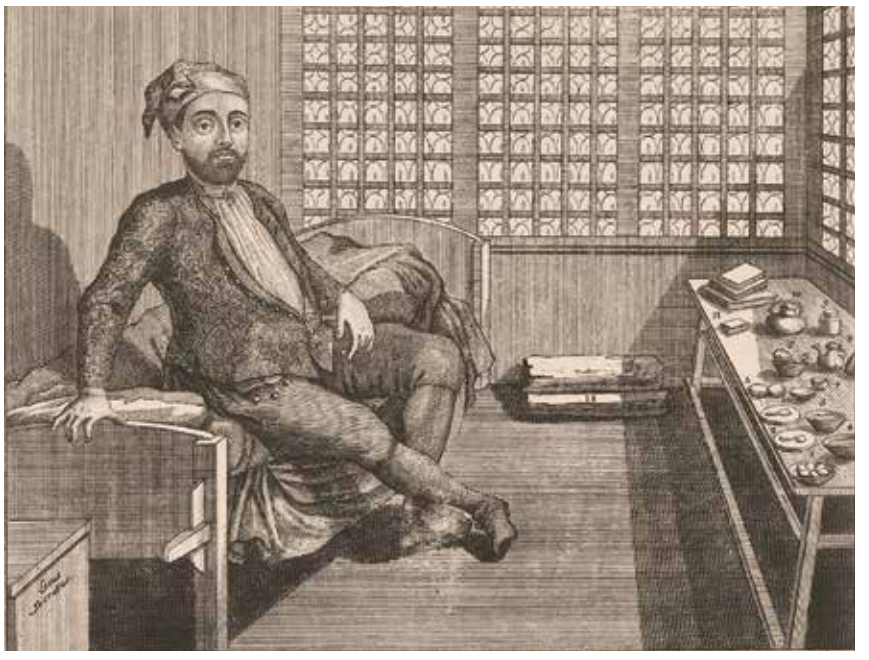
Mintzker himself agrees, but his purpose is

not to debunk the trial so much as to follow its crosscurrents. He does this by devoting a chapter to each of four figures who in different ways were connected with the proceedings: Philipp Friedrich Jäger, the legal inquisitor assigned to interrogate and draw up charges against Oppenheimer; Christoph David Bernard, a Jewish convert who wrote a pamphlet claiming to record his conversations with the condemned prisoner

The court Jew and his retinue were entirely dependent on the ruler's protection—and uncertain continued favor.

and his failed efforts to get him to accept Christ; Rabbi Mordechai Schloss, a Jewish business rival who sponsored a hagiographic Hebrew-Yiddish pamphlet about Oppenheimer after his hanging; and finally, David Fassmann, an adventurer, serial liar, and later best-selling author of numerous "dialogues of the dead," reminiscent of the classic Steve Allen 1970s television show, *Meeting of the Minds*, in which famous and infamous past notables came together in the afterlife to argue and gossip. Unlike the other three, Fassmann was not involved in the trial, nor did he know Oppenheimer personally (although Oppenheimer appears to have owned at least one of Fassmann's books). But Fassmann was intrigued by Oppenheimer's precipitous fall and featured him in successively less flattering portrayals in three of his dialogues. How the members of this motley assemblage made use of Oppenheimer's trial comprises the real core of this engaging book.

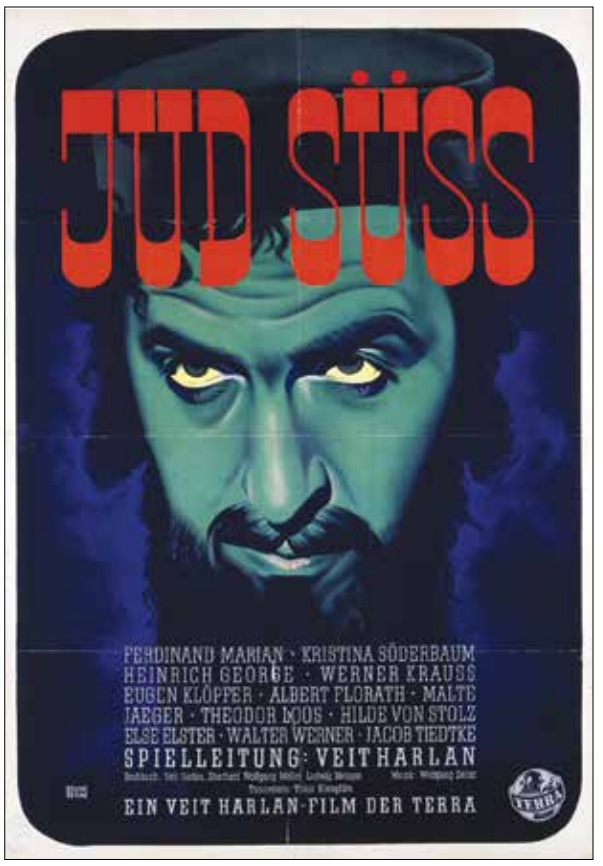
The chapters on Bernard, and especially those on Jäger and Schloss, are superbly rendered. Mintzker is not only a masterful historical researcher, he is a penetrating psychologist. His portrait of Jäger is a damning reconstruction of a zealous prosecutor determined to find a smoking gun where none existed. This was not just out of a misplaced sense of duty but in order to try to fulfill his own youthful promise that had, by the time of the Oppenheimer investigation, begun to fade. Though he resists reducing any of these personalities to social types, Mintzker rightly situates Jäger's hatred of Oppenheimer in the context of the declining fortunes of his professional class, the learned bureaucratic stratum of premodern Germany whose traditional privileges were by then eroding. But more precisely, Mintzker ties Oppenheimer's ordeal to the sensational trial of the previous duke's ex-mistress, three years earlier, in which Jäger had humiliatingly failed to win a conviction, in part due to Oppenheimer's intervention. To guarantee that he would not make the same mistake twice, Jäger personally interrogated Oppenheimer on 45 separate occasions. He knowingly violated judicial norms he had sworn to uphold through the misuse of evidence and the badgering of witnesses, and he even pushed hard for judicial torture when some of the other investigators proved more squeamish. As with many in his position, before and since, personal ambition and righteous indignation (much more than anti-Semitism, according to Mintzker) were inextricably entwined in Jäger's furious campaign to see Oppenheimer hang.



Joseph Süss Oppenheimer. (WLB, Grafische Sammlung.)

Given that he paper trail on Rabbi Mordechai Schloss is skimpier than on Jäger, Mintzker's reconstruction of the complex motives behind his efforts to vindicate Oppenheimer after his execution seem even more impressive. Schloss had been a court Jew in Württemberg and had his share of problems as well. In 1729 he and his son Moshe had been imprisoned for a month because of a fellow Jew's complaint about the inferior quality of the wallpaper they delivered**.** Oppenheimer's rise to power, a few years later, seems to have coincided with his own fall from grace. When he was called before the committee that was investigating Oppenheimer, Schloss "insisted that 'he does not want to say anything that might hurt Süss, God forbid, because Süss had done him neither harm nor good.'" In almost no time, however, he shifted his ground and claimed "that Oppenheimer had always been a person about whom 'no one had anything good to say.'" By the end of his deposition, he "supported the claim that Oppenheimer had stolen from the prince's own purse as well as from the state's and the estates' coffers."

Despite the key role he played in destroying Oppenheimer's life, Schloss helped his soon-to-be son-in-law publish a book called *The Story of the Passing of Joseph Süss, May the Memory of the Righteous Be for a Blessing.* "It is," Mintzker tells us, "the only document we know of that was composed by Jews in the immediate aftermath of the execution, and it told Oppenheimer's story from an overall very sympathetic perspective." *The Story* depicts Oppenheimer as a sinner who sincerely repented in prison and "whose soul departed in sanctification of the Lord's name."



Poster for the first screening of* Jud Süss*, a Nazi propaganda film, 1940. (Courtesy of Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.)

What was Schloss up to? "The stark contrast between Schloss's September deposition and the post-execution account could indicate a sense of guilt on Schloss's part," but *The Story* might point to other things as well. Its account, for instance, of "Joseph the Righteous," as Oppenheimer is called in the text, made even semieducated Jewish readers think of the biblical Joseph:

> Some of the Yiddish accounts of Joseph's story portray him as a victim of false allegations. They emphasize that it was Potiphar's wife who tried to seduce Joseph, not the other way around. If Schloss and Seligmann tried to invoke this particular interpretation in *The Story*, they engaged in what we may roughly call the inversion of the inquisition committee's account: rather than Oppenheimer being a rapist (as Jäger, for instance, tried to suggest), Schloss and Seligmann represent him as an innocent victim of rape allegations.

Although he is a specialist in early modern German history, Mintzker understands the principal texts and touchstones shaping premodern Jewish mentalities, as this suggestion and his further reflections on the esoteric meaning of *The Story* amply demonstrate. He recognizes that Jewish vulnerability in this period was not only a function of overt anti-Semitism but of the way in which the legal status of Jewish communities could depend on the economic utility and shifting fates of individual court Jews. "What held their community together," he astutely notes, "was not harmonious consensus or common practices, but individual and highly insecure commercial opportunities at a prince's court. Theirs was above all a community of risk." Reframing the story of Joseph Süss as that of the biblical Joseph helped the Jews of Württemberg cope with that risk.

The single serious flaw in *The Many Deaths of Jew Süss* is the author's insistence that what is really a virtuoso scholarly performance is also a methodological breakthrough. Mintzker seems to have convinced himself that the kind of historical perspectivism he has practiced here is virtually unprecedented. Modern historical writing, he argues, has remained tethered to an outmoded 19th-century realist style, when historians really should write more like "Woolf, Faulkner, Joyce, and Beckett." Perhaps it is in pursuit of this goal that Mintzker punctuated his narrative with stilted dialogues in which an imaginary reader challenges the author to defend his interpretations. Unfortunately, this doesn't give one a sense of high modernist dialectical tension, it only guarantees that, one way or another, Mintzker emerges triumphant from every argument.

In the book's conclusion Mintzker advances a final claim that even while patently contradicting his initial premise admittedly cannot be denied. The variety of perspectives of Joseph Süss Oppenheimer that Mintzker has explored, with all their ineliminable distortions, do give us revealing glimpses of the actual man in all his human pathos. That is a worthy enough accomplishment.

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Journeys Without End

BY MICHAEL KIMMAGE

The Untold Journey: The Life of Diana Trilling
by Natalie Robins
Columbia University Press, 424 pp., $32.95

Diana Trilling was a celebrated 20th-century writer, a literary critic, an essayist and memoirist, and an energetic participant in her era's countless ideological controversies. She was also the wife of Lionel Trilling, who could be described as the greatest mid-century American critic. Theirs was an intellectual marriage. It was creative and fraught, and from their private conversation arose two distinct public careers, though, according to biographer Natalie Robins, Diana Trilling was not just a discussant and editor of her husband's work. She was an unacknowledged co-author, a muse who sat behind the typewriter.

Robins develops this thesis throughout *The Untold Journey: The Life of Diana Trilling*. Robins's title is an allusion to an allusion to an allusion. Lionel Trilling borrowed the title of his 1947 novel, *The Middle of the Journey*, from the celebrated first line of Dante's *Divine Comedy* about finding oneself in a dark wood at the middle of life's journey. Diana Trilling, in turn, punned on the title of her husband's novel in the title of her memoir of their marriage, *The Beginning of the Journey*, published after his death in 1975. Diana's journey was not exactly untold; indeed, she was fond of telling it, but never has her story been so extensively narrated as it is in *The Untold Journey*.

Lionel Trilling and Diana Rubin were both born to middle-class Jewish families in 1905. They met in New York in their early twenties and married in 1929. Lionel launched an illustrious academic career at Columbia in 1932, rising to eminence in the late 1940s through essays on politics, society, and culture that were equally timely and timeless. Drawing on interviews with Diana as well as on extensive archival material, Robins argues that by the mid-1930s, Diana Trilling was already her husband's writing partner.

Proximity to Lionel helped Diana begin her own career, and for some three decades the two Trillings shared a limelight that was not quite identical but never entirely separate. When Lionel passed away in 1975, Diana became even more productive, publishing two books and scores of essays. She died a well-known figure in 1996.

For Robins, the Trillings' marriage was a vehicle of unending psychic tension. Notoriously abrasive, Diana was once banned from a grocery store in her New York neighborhood. She suffered from depression. So too did her husband, who was prone to lacerating self-doubt and private fits of rage. Sharing a fascination with Freud and the possibilities of therapy, they placed their child, James, in analysis when he was just seven years old. "'Which of us was sicker?" Diana plausibly wondered about herself and Lionel.

Robins makes Lionel's psychological sickness the backbone of her biography. At the conclusion of her book, she paraphrases the argument of a 1999 *American Scholar* essay by James Trilling, "My Father and the Weak-Eyed Devils," in which James retrospectively diagnosed his father with attention deficit disorder (ADD), a serious judgment Robins accepts at face value. (It is difficult to think of a 20th-century writer whose prose showed fewer signs of deficient attention.) Had Lionel Trilling been a healthier man, he might not have had such terrible writer's block; he might have depended less on the ministrations of his gifted wife, and, consequently, might have resented his wife less. Theirs might have been a less tortured journey, although Robins rightly doubts that Diana Trilling "would have accepted an ADD diagnosis." Freudian that she was, "neurosis was her verdict of choice."

For some three decades the two Trillings shared a limelight that was not quite identical but never entirely separate.

Lionel and Diana Trilling in an undated photo. (Courtesy Diana Trilling Papers/Columbia University.)

The Untold Journey is a document of our own therapeutic culture, and as such it is a missed opportunity. The Trillings were much larger than their psychological difficulties. They stood at the center of an extraordinary 20th-century milieu, rooted in New York City and awash in art and ideas. They lived through political and intellectual upheavals, and, in the process, fashioned unique authorial voices, most alert and alive at the point where fiction and nonfiction meet. Lionel's literary-intellectual journey has been evaluated many times. Diana's has not. It deserves a wider latitude than it receives in this somewhat claustrophobic biography.

Diana, who traveled in Europe as a child, was the product of "well-to-do metropolitan Jewish society." Both she and Lionel were the children of Eastern European Jewish immigrant families, but theirs was not the world of the working-class *Yiddishkeit* so lovingly recreated by Irving Howe. The world of Diana's and Lionel's fathers was more genteel and more assimilated. Diana attended Radcliffe College; Lionel went to Columbia. Robins goes so far as to note Diana's "secret desire to be a Catholic." Yet they married in a traditional Orthodox ceremony and retained an enduring sense of themselves—morally and culturally—as Jews.

As with Lionel, Diana's true religion was art. Their first apartment was in Greenwich Village, where they lived across the street from Edmund Wilson.

Untethered to academia, Diana was less wedded to high culture than her husband. She was eager to extract the social and political insight contained within contemporary works of fiction and cinema and in the lives of those producing these works.

Her political evolution was remarkable. She graduated from the apolitical 1920s into the intensifying radicalism of the Red Decade. She and Lionel would attend political meetings at 16th Street and Irving, during which they stood and sang "the International with clenched fists raised in the air." In her radical heyday from 1930 to 1932, Diana served as a secretary for a communist front organization, brushing up against the Soviet espionage activities that would be obsessively revisited by Senator McCarthy and his acolytes in the 1950s.

By 1945 Diana was an outspoken liberal anticommunist. The 1930s had immersed her in the personal as political and in the political as personal, which made her an intriguing commentator on second-wave feminism. She was a "family feminist" in her self-description, willing to defend the traditional family, while at the same time a pioneer of women's rights. The contradictions and richness of her position were on full display when she appeared on stage with Norman Mailer and Germaine Greer for a raucous 1971 debate on feminism in New York's

Town Hall, which became the subject of a documentary by D. A. Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus called *Town Bloody Hall*, and, more recently, a play.

This was politics as pure theater, and Diana Trilling had a crucial role as a representative of the older generation and qualified defender of Mailer. At the debate, she made an amusing case for human complexity and limitations in revolutionary times, arguing that "as an added benefit of our deliverance from a tyrannical authority in our choice of sexual partners, or in our methods of pursuing sexual pleasure, I could hope we would also be free to have such orgasms as in our individual complexity we happen to be capable of." Hers was one of the least zany performances.

Diana was adamant, finally, about not being a neoconservative. She did not endorse either Richard Nixon or Ronald Reagan, and it was, in part, politics that destroyed her friendship with Midge Decter and Norman Podhoretz, a beloved student and protégé of Lionel's. Likewise, Diana's affection for Irving Kristol and Gertrude Himmelfarb, who had been political allies in the 1950s, dimmed in the 1970s.

Although Diana may have co-authored Lionel's books and essays, as Robins claims, there is one circumstance that complicates the story, rendering Robins's theory of co-authorship less certain and less meaningful. Lionel was one kind of writer: elliptical, cerebral, allusive, a teacher who drew the reader forward toward unexpected conclusions precisely because the teacher's words were not the last word. He was a clear-headed virtuoso of ambiguity. For Lionel Trilling, to provide an answer was to violate the question. Only Lionel Trilling could have written a book of essays titled *The Opposing Self*, and only he could have prefaced it with the following words: "I speak of the relation of the self to *culture* rather than to *society* because there is a useful ambiguity which attends the meaning of the word culture."

Diana Trilling at work, September 28, 1976. (Courtesy of the Bettman Archive.)

"The modern self," he goes on, "is characterized by certain powers of indignant perception which, turned upon this unconscious portion of culture, have made it accessible to conscious thought." What begins in the first person quickly cascades into a series of widening abstractions (meaning, culture, the modern self) which modify one another, seasoned with the delightful antinomies of a power of perception that is indignant, of the cultural unconscious lending itself to conscious thought, and of an ambiguity that is, of all things, useful.

This was not Diana's style. She had aspired to be an opera singer in her youth, and she knew how to project her voice, which was direct, intimate, concrete, and opinionated. She was an observer who did not mind weighing in or levying judgment. If the beat-generation poets were too unkempt for polite society, she would say this out loud and in print, as she did in her marvelous 1959 essay about a poetry reading of Allen Ginsberg's, "The Other Night at Columbia."

> For me, it was of some note that the auditorium smelled fresh. The place was already full when we arrived; I took one look at the crowd and was certain that it would smell bad. But I was mistaken. These people may think they're dirty inside and dress up to it. Nevertheless, they smell all right. The audience was clean and Ginsberg was clean and Corso was clean and Orlovsky was clean.

Diana had aspired to be an opera singer in her youth, and she knew how to project her voice, which was direct, intimate, concrete, and opinionated.

Here, the sensory perception frames the author's own awkward squareness, exaggerated to the point almost of campiness, while at the same time satirizing the beat-generation poets who champion the dirty and the disheveled and the dangerous but are nevertheless shockingly clean. This is literary criticism without any abstraction at all.

Diana Trilling's best writing was often about her personal experiences. It was writing that moved through vividly captured details: the six martinis that Lionel consumed before dining with the Kennedys at the White House, the exotic customs and dress of Camp Lenore and her remembered childhood summers in the Berkshires, her descriptions of the luxurious kitchens Radcliffe students enjoyed in the 1960s compared to the formal teas she and her classmates attended in the 1920s.

In assessing Diana as a writer, Robins alights on an observation that deserves more sustained attention and analysis: Her essays belong to the genre of New Journalism, blending reportage with cultural commentary and doing so exuberantly in the first person. After all, Diana was friends with Norman Mailer and Truman Capote, two eminent practitioners of New Journalism. (Diana and Lionel attended Capote's legendary Black and White Ball at the Plaza Hotel, where Lionel, age 61, danced the night away.) She was also friends with William F. Buckley Jr., whose journalism was no less personality-driven than Capote's or Mailer's.

As a stylist, Diana had more in common with Norman Mailer than with her husband. Her personal life lacked the violence and the anarchy for which Mailer wished to be famous, but the tableau of ideas and images, captured in first-rate prose over a long stretch of historical time, makes Diana interesting in the same way Mailer remains interesting. Ambitious New Yorkers with a front-row seat to American culture, they moved in and against the culture around them. The puzzles, pleasure, and pain of the Lionel–Diana marriage pale by comparison with the city outside their apartment door, and with the times in which they lived, all of which is vividly reflected in Diana's essays and books. She generated and loved controversy, as Mailer did and the ambivalent Olympian Lionel Trilling did not. Once the controversy was there, it could be contemplated and written about. Diana Trilling should be read and remembered as a unique character and chronicler of the American century.

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Straying from the Fold?

BY ELLIOTT HOROWITZ

Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History
by Todd M. Endelman
Princeton University Press, 440 pp., $42

Many people know that the late archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger (1926–2007), was born and raised as a Jew, but fewer know that this was also true of Jerusalem's first Anglican bishop, Michael Solomon Alexander (1799–1845), a native of Posen (now Poznań) in Prussian Poland. Both bishops make brief appearances in Todd Endelman's engagingly written and wide-ranging new book, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, but only the latter is mentioned in its chapter on "Conversions of Conviction." Unlike Lustiger, who was raised by secular Bundist parents and baptized as an adolescent in wartime France, Alexander—originally Pollack—had received a sufficiently advanced Jewish education to serve, after arriving in England, as a cantor and ritual slaughterer in Norwich, Nottingham, and Plymouth in the early 1820s.

In an earlier book, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History, 1656–1945*, Endelman noted that Alexander's baptism, at St. Andrew's Church in Plymouth, was attended by more than a thousand people. Although Alexander was included in a chapter Endelman called "The Fruits of Missionary Labors," his first exposure to the New Testament actually came from a pious Jew whose children he was tutoring. "My employer was a man of strict integrity," Alexander wrote in his spiritual autobiography, "and strongly attached to the principles and ceremonies of Judaism." It was this man who warned him about English missionaries, saying that "every Jew ought to read the New Testament, in order to be more confirmed in his own religion." This aroused Alexander's curiosity, but "not being able then to read and understand English," he instead "procured a German Bible" and was "greatly struck with the first of St. Matthew," having had "no idea that Christians knew anything of our patriarchs." The future convert "was still more struck," he later reported, "with the character of Christ, and the excellent morals which he taught."

Alexander concluded his brief autobiography by extending "sincere thanks" to his "Jewish friends, whose kindness towards me I shall ever remember," adding that despite his awareness "of being an outcast from them, yet I trust I shall never be unmindful of them before a throne of grace in my feeble prayers." Such sentiments of Jewish solidarity were not uncommon among converts such as Alexander. The Reverend Hatchard, whose sermon on the occasion of Alexander's baptism was published together with Alexander's autobiography, assured "the Christian public that with the exceptions of some verbal expressions, the whole of the above statement was composed by Mr. ALEXANDER, without the aid of any friend." The historian must, needless to say, approach such assurances with a measure of skepticism, but must also consider the danger of throwing out the sincere convert with the baptismal waters.

Two years after Heine had been baptized, he replied to a relative who inquired about his well-being, "All apostates should feel as wretched as I do."

Endelman, in his introduction to *Leaving the Jewish Fold*, states straightforwardly—a bit too straightforwardly for my taste—that "most Jews who became Christians in the modern period . . . were insincere." Later, he writes that "[w]ith few exceptions conversion was a secular rather than a spiritual act." For the majority, Endelman asserts, conversion was "a strategic or practical move, much like changing a name or altering a nose." This, of course, was hardly true of Michael Solomon Pollack, who would become Bishop Alexander, his name change notwithstanding. If we are to understand the complex history of Jewish conversion to Christianity, we must try to understand the specifically religious experience and motivations of the converts as well as the social desire to merge with the majority.

Lithograph of Michael Solomon Alexander, the first Anglican bishop of Jerusalem. (Benjamin W. Thayer & Co.)

The chapter Endelman devotes to "Conversions of Conviction" does open with an acknowledgment that "[a]mong the many Jews who became Christians in the modern period were a few who were, by their own testimony and the testimony of others, sincere converts." But the majority, he insists repeatedly, "changed their religion to escape the disabilities of Jewishness." His book is much stronger on the disabilities of Jewishness than it is on the motives for and process of conversion to Christianity. Those disabilities, as Endelman reminds us, often continued even after a formal break with Judaism had been made—either by converts themselves or by the Jewish parents who baptized them. "As Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81), Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), and thousands of less well-known converts discovered," he writes, "the world continued to regard them as Jews long after they became Christians." This social reality was exacerbated "[w]hen racial thinking became respectable in the nineteenth century." That pseudoscientific world has recently been revealed by Mitchell Hart in his valuable collection *Jews and Race: Writings on Identity and Difference, 1880–1940*. Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, one of the thinkers mentioned in that anthology, wrote, for example, that even in Heine's simplest songs there was "something at once sad and spiteful, an after-taste of tears, an acrid flavour, a sting of maliciousness, due to his origin, his education, and the position then occupied by the Jews in Germany." The poet, claimed Leroy-Beaulieu, was the "last flower" of German romanticism, but a diseased one "with an unwholesome odor; for in this German rose there lurks a worm—Judaism."

To his credit, Heine never denied that "worm." In 1827, some two years after Heine had been baptized, he replied to a relative who inquired about his well-being, "*Allen Meschumodim soll zu Mute sein wie mir*" (all apostates should feel as wretched as I do). Despite the irony, Heine often did feel wretched about his frankly mercenary conversion and expressed surprise at former Jews of independent means, such as the composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847), who took their Christianity seriously. Endelman quotes a pungent remark of Heine's about Mendelssohn, who had been baptized by his parents as a child. "If I had the good fortune to be the grandson of Moses Mendelssohn, I would never employ my talents to set the urine of the Lamb to music." The lamb in question was, of course, Jesus. Susan Jacoby, in her recent *Strange Gods: A Secular History of Conversion*, suggests that Heine was alluding to Mendelssohn's role in reviving Bach's sacred music. Indeed, in 1829 Mendelssohn organized the first public performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* since the composer's death nearly eight decades earlier, to which I would add that Mendelssohn's cantata "*Christe du Lamm Gottes*" was first performed in 1827, though published only posthumously.

In contrast to Heine, Disraeli, and Mendelssohn, none of whom ever made a secret of their Jewish origins, later in the 19th century increasing numbers of former Jews sought to hide their origins. "From the 1870s," writes Endelman, "ideological antisemitism, occupational discrimination, and social exclusion . . . combined to create an atmosphere in which increasing numbers of Jews in Europe and America experienced their Jewishness as an unbearable burden." Endelman is particularly good at using statistical evidence to demonstrate regional differences. In cosmopolitan Berlin the annual average of conversions to Christianity rose from one for every 1,500 Jews during the years 1872–1881 to one for every 650 in the following decade. In Catholic Vienna the rate was higher, "largely," as Endelman notes, "because of the absence of civil marriage." Intermarriage itself could often soothe the otherwise "unbearable burden" of Jewishness. As to the nature of that burden, Endelman aptly quotes the Jewish protagonist of Arthur Schnitzler's 1908 novel *The Road into the Open*, set in the author's native Vienna: "[W]hen a Jew behaves crudely or comically in my presence, sometimes such a painful feeling seizes me that I want to die, to sink into the earth. . . . It's exasperating that one is continually made responsible for the mistakes of others." Motivated, in many cases no doubt, by such ethnic shame, more than 3,300 Viennese Jews converted between 1897 and 1902, but even in fin de siècle Vienna other motives existed.

Endelman briefly mentions "the eccentric Joseph Wolff (1795–1862), son of a Franconian rabbi, who traveled extensively in the Near East and Central Asia for the London Society and published accounts of his harrowing adventures." Although Endelman composed the excellent entry on Wolff in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, in *Leaving the Jewish Fold* we are told nothing of his missionary activity and adventures, which would have given the reader a sense of the lived experience and career of a sincere convert and Christian missionary.

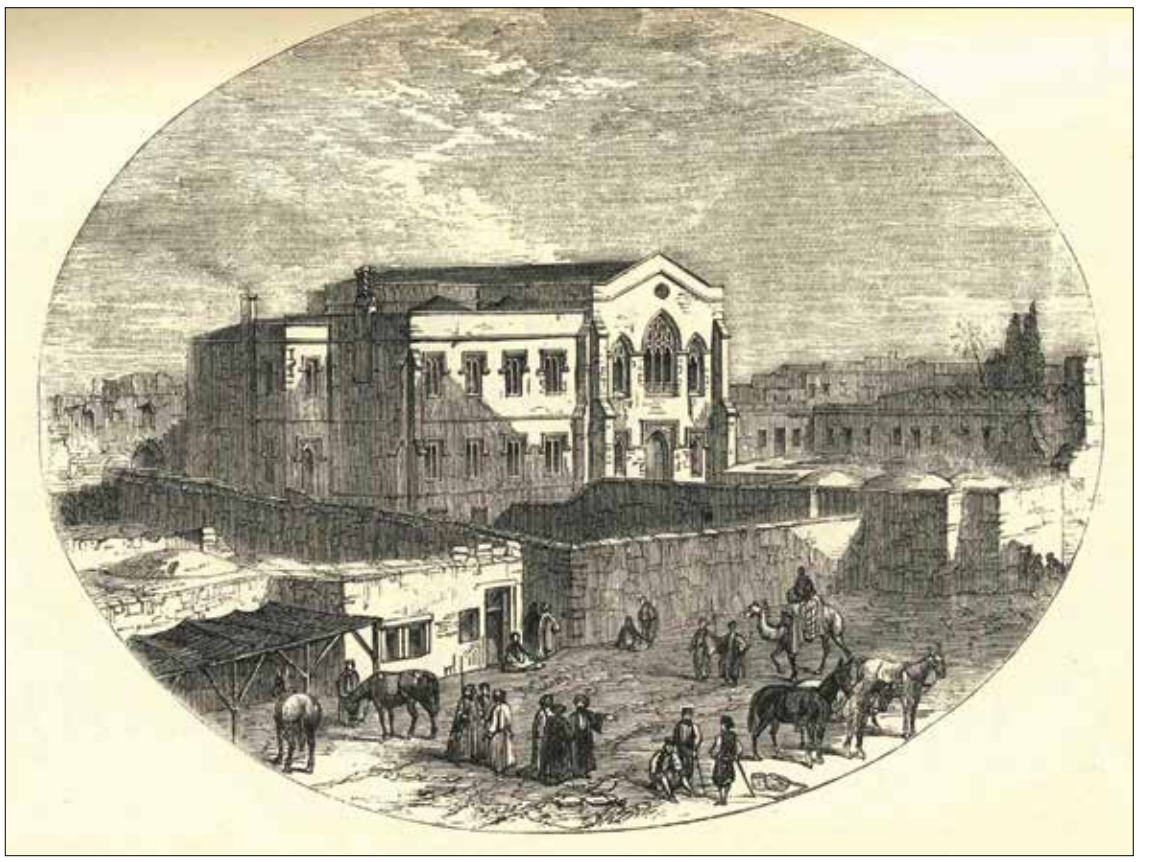
In 1821 Wolff met a young Jew named Jonas in Gibraltar with whom he debated the meaning of Jacob's blessing to Judah in Genesis 49:10 and to whom he offered a Hebrew New Testament, "but he answered me that he already had one." Instead, Jonas was given "a copy of the Psalter, and Tremellius's [Hebrew] Catechism." In September of that year Wolff arrived in Cairo, where there were many Italian Jews and where he "distributed a great many . . . Italian New Testaments." In Jerusalem, to which he soon continued, Wolff claimed to "have given Hebrew Bibles and [New] Testaments, and Tremellius's Catechism, to twenty-seven rabbies [sic]." He may, of course, have been exaggerating, and some of those "rabbies" may have taken the books in order to remove them from circulation. Indeed, in his account of a subsequent visit to Jerusalem in the late 1820s—accompanied by his new wife Lady Georgiana Walpole (sixth daughter of the seventh Earl of Orford)—Wolff acknowledged that "the Jews burnt several of the New Testaments I gave to them." Still, his writings show what modern missionaries hoped to accomplish. No less important, they also reflect the missionary practice of distributing Hebrew Bibles of the sort most 19th-century Jews had never seen. These editions, from which Rashi and other traditional commentators were absent, made it easier to debate the meaning of such controversial passages as Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49:10 and the "suffering servant" of Isaiah 53 with Jews who could not easily recall their traditional rabbinic interpretation.

Wolff quoted that famous verse in Genesis during a visit to the Ionian island of Kefallinia (Cephalonia), then under British rule, in 1828. When introduced to a Jew named Jacob, he replied "Jacob said, 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.'" He then addressed the city's Jews as a whole: "My dear Sons of Abraham! I am your brother according to the flesh, a son of Abraham . . . Your Adonai is my Adonai." Interestingly, Wolff went on to urge the Cephalonian Jews not to "believe those Christians who tell you that you have no longer to expect to be restored to your own land, or the future personal reign of the Messiah . . . upon Mount Zion," asserting that this was "a most grievous error against Moses and the Prophets, and the New Testament." He then added that he could not "pass over in silence those prophecies which speak of that same Messiah in a state of suffering before His coming in glory," or those "which have predicted your unbelief in Him." This was followed by a lengthy exposition of Isaiah 53.

Later, in Alexandria, he returned to his Christian vision of Jewish redemption: "[T]he time is approaching that our nation shall be gathered again by the omnipotent arm of the living God . . . and restored to their own land . . . not to be removed for ever." Referring repeatedly to "our nation," Wolff drew upon some of the more erotic expressions in the prophetical books concerning God's relationship with Israel, asserting that "[t]he time is approaching . . . when our nation shall be again the spouse of God, so much beloved in other times, whose desolations and afflictions . . . will move the heart of her husband . . . and reconciled to her, he will recall her to her ancient dignity, and receive her with the warmest welcome." He was, in certain respects, more of a religious Zionist than a radical assimilationist.

Wolff's repeated visits to such cities as Alexandria and Jerusalem remind us to what degree the history of Jewish conversion to Christianity in Europe—at least in the 19th century—was closely linked with the Middle East. Although *Leaving the Jewish Fold* is subtitled *Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* Endelman chose to omit "the not-unknown phenomenon of Jews becoming Muslims in the lands of Islam," which requires, he modestly asserts, "a historian with training and expertise that are different from mine." Leaving out "the lands of Islam" leads him, however, to devote insufficient attention to the many Jews, including no small number of European Ashkenazim, who converted to Christianity in the Holy Land and its environs. One suspects that they are under-represented in Endelman's study not only because their conversions took place in the Ottoman Empire, but because those conversions were rarely instances of "radical assimilation."

Alongside Joseph Wolff and Michael Solomon Alexander, another Central European–born convert to Christianity whom Endelman might have profitably treated at more length is Ridley Haim Herschell (1807–1864). He does tell us that in 1842 Herschell was instrumental in founding the (Nonconformist) British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Jews, but does not mention Herschell's journey a year later to the Middle East, described in his moving travelogue *A Visit to My Father-Land, Being Notes of a Journey to Syria and Palestine in 1843*. Of "the long-expected moment" of first seeing Jerusalem he wrote, "The feelings of



Christ Church and parsonage, mid-1800s, Mount Zion, Jerusalem.

such a moment cannot be described; they can only be faintly imagined by those who have not experienced them. Every Christian traveller speaks of the feeling as overpowering: what, then, was it to me, as at once a Christian and a Jew!"

One of the highlights of Herschell's stay in Jerusalem was being present at the baptism of four Jews in a Hebrew ceremony conducted by Bishop Alexander. A few days earlier, Herschell had met Erasmus Scott Calman, a Latvian Jew who had been baptized in England and soon afterward traveled to the Middle East, where he worked as a missionary for the London Society, mostly in and around Jerusalem. In 1840 Calman published a monograph under the provocative title *Some of the Errors of Modern Judaism Contrasted with the Word of God*. Nonetheless, in that same year he and Alexander signed a public statement composed by the missionary Alexander McCaul that firmly rejected the recent ritual murder accusation in Damascus. "We the undersigned, by nation Jews . . . but now by the grace of God members of the Church of Christ," it read, "do solemnly protest that we have never directly or indirectly heard of . . . the practice of killing Christians or using Christian blood," condemning the charge as "a foul and Satanic falsehood." Although Endelman discusses the laudable efforts by Alexander and McCaul, no mention is made of Calman, who retired to London in 1858 and upon his death in 1890 left a considerable sum, as reported in the *Times*, "to found a charity for poor and deserving Hebrew Christians of both sexes, including deserving Gentile widows of Hebrew converts."

Another fascinating figure who might have appeared among Endelman's "Converts of Conviction" is Ferdinand Christian Ewald, who was Bishop Alexander's personal chaplain in Jerusalem. In his *Journal of Missionary Labours in the City of Jerusalem, During the Years 1842-3-4* he wrote of the baptism witnessed by Herschell: "This morning, at a special Hebrew service . . . Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Benjamin, Isaac Hirsch, and Simon Fränkel, were baptized by the Bishop in the holy tongue." Eliezer, whose surname was Luria and who took the baptismal name Christian Lazarus, had experienced considerable opposition from family members—including his wife, who herself later converted. A second "Rabbi Benjamin," who became John Benjamin Goldberg, was later sent by the London Society to Cairo. The life stories of these two convert-missionaries complicate the neat dichotomy between conversion to Christianity in modern Europe and conversion to Islam in the Middle East. Both had been baptized in Jerusalem by a bishop who was, like them, of Ashkenazi background, and both remained in the region as missionaries. And, whatever their failings, neither they nor Ewald, whose heart had filled with "holy joy" at their baptisms, fit Endelman's brisk enumeration of typical Jewish converts ensnared in the nets of Protestant missionaries: "Swindlers, thieves, drunkards, whores, schlemiels, schlemazels, nudniks, and no-goodniks."

Endelman's brisk enumeration of typical Jewish converts includes "swindlers, thieves, drunkards, whores, schlemiels, schlemazels, nudniks, and no-goodniks."

It doesn't fit Isaac Hirsch, later known as Paul Isaac Hershon (1817–1888), who was also baptized by Bishop Alexander that day, either. Hershon, a native of Buczacz in Galicia, had arrived in Jerusalem by way of Constantinople and Beirut, perhaps as part of the wave of Jewish messianic expectation in 1840. After his baptism he stayed in Jerusalem, serving as superintendent of the London Society's House of Industry, which provided vocational training to converts as well as potential converts. In 1859, Hershon retired to London, where he soon published *Extracts from the Talmud, Being Specimens of Wit, Wisdom, and Learning, etc., of the Wise and Learned Rabbis*. Twenty years later *A Talmudic Miscellany* appeared, which according to its subtitle contained *A Thousand and One Extracts from the Talmud, the Midrashim, and the Kabbalah*, and two years after that *Treasures of the Talmud: Being a Series of Classified Subjects in Alphabetical Order from A to L Compiled From the Babylonian Talmud*. Hershon was still working on the second volume at the time of his death in 1888.

Hershon's continuing involvement with Jewish texts long after his conversion is far from unique. His better-known Belarusian-born contemporary Isaac Edward Salkinson (1820–1883) was baptized in London in 1849 and ordained a decade later in Glasgow as a Presbyterian minister. After serving as a missionary in Pressburg (now Bratislava) Salkinson spent his final years in

Vienna, where his friends included the great Zionist writer and editor Peretz Smolenskin. Salkinson eventually won a place for himself in the annals of Hebrew literature through his pioneering translations of works by Milton and Shakespeare. His 1871 translation of *Paradise Lost* was later described by the Anglo-Jewish scholar Israel Abrahams as "attaining almost to absolute perfection." Of his 1874 *Othello*, which appeared under the title *Ithiel ha-Kushi*, Smolenskin wrote, "To-day we exact our revenge from the English! They took our Bible and made it their own. We, in return, have captured their Shakespeare. Is it not a sweet revenge?"

Salkinson grew up near Shklov, "in an atmosphere," Endelman tells us, "of traditional piety, abject poverty, and family tension." Everything that we know of the future convert's early life is ultimately based on a chapter in S. L. Zitron's multivolume study of Jewish converts, of which both Yiddish and Hebrew editions appeared in 1923. Whereas the former, published in Vilna, carried the straightforward title *Meshumodim*, the Hebrew edition, which appeared in Warsaw, carried a more literary—and more lurid—title, which can be translated as "Behind the Curtain: Apostates, Traitors, and Deniers." It was in Smolenskin's Vienna home that Zitron, on the holiday of Shavuot, had his single encounter with the (by then) legendary apostate. Salkinson's father had been a *dayyan* (religious judge) in Shklov who suffered from a speech defect that eventually cost him his career and led to a nervous breakdown. Of all his children, it was apparently little Isaac who suffered the most from his father's frustrations. After the boy's intellectual gifts became apparent during his early *cheder* years he was taught by his father, who would, Zitron tells us, "wake him every morning at four . . . from his sweet slumber, and haul him, in winter as well as summer, to the house of study, where they would devote uninterrupted hours to Talmud and the Tosephists." For the slightest

Joseph Wolff preaching in Palestine, ca. mid-1800s.

error Isaac's father would "beat the young man, slap his face, and pull his ears." Perhaps out of an abundance of biographical caution, Endelman does not relay this story, but it may help to explain why, unlike his contemporary Hershon and other learned apostates, Salkinson entirely forsook the Talmud along with Judaism. Salkinson's abiding love was, instead, for literary Hebrew, to which he was deeply devoted. "Hebrew translation," he wrote late in life, "seems to be the only talent given me, and it I have consecrated to the Lord." It was, he continued, alluding to a passage in Matthew, "my alabaster box of precious ointment which I pour out in honour of my Saviour, that the fragrance of His name may fill the whole house of Israel." Regardless of his spiritual motivations, many members of the house of Israel admired—and still admire—Salkinson's service to the Hebrew language.

Just as Hershon's story may be compared to that of his contemporary Salkinson, so too does it bear comparison with that of his fellow Galician Israel Zoller (1881–1956), who died in Rome as Eugenio Maria Zolli. Zoller, a native of Brody, had originally arrived in Italy to study at the Collegio Rabbinico in Florence. While pursuing his rabbinical studies he also earned a doctorate at the local university. Zoller went on to serve as chief rabbi of Trieste, replacing the great rabbinic scholar Hirsch Perez Chajes (1876–1927), who had been among his teachers in Florence.

In 1930, Zoller co-edited a volume of studies in memory of Chajes. He also began publishing scholarly articles on the New Testament and early Christianity, which in itself was not startling, as Chajes's own dissertation had been on the Gospel of Mark. In 1938, Zoller published *Il Nazareno: Studi di esegesi neotestamentaria alla luce dell'aramaico e del pensiero rabbinico*, later translated into English as *The Nazarene: Studies in New Testament Exegesis*, which did not stand in the way of his appointment as chief rabbi of Rome in 1939.

Zoller is now remembered less on account of his scholarly accomplishments than his shocking conversion to Catholicism in early 1945, while still serving as Rome's rabbi. In an interview with T. S. Matthews, *Time* magazine's Rome correspondent, some two weeks after his baptism, Zoller, now Zolli, said, "I did not compare the Jewish religion to Catholicism and abandon one for the other." Rather, he "slowly, almost imperceptibly became a Christian and could no longer be a Jew." Matthews concluded that Zolli was "happy about his conversion" but "miserable about his apostasy." Although the *Encyclopedia Judaica*'s entry on Zoller/Zolli chided him for having already "abandoned the community" in late 1943 and taking refuge in the Vatican well before his conversion, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* stressed that this connection helped him to assist Roman Jews during the war. That encyclopedia also noted that "Zolli's baptism . . . was clearly an ultimate result of his ardent interest" in Christianity. What is clear, in any case, is that the Italian rabbi's conversion to Catholicism was hardly an instance of "radical assimilation," as Endelman himself would, no doubt, readily concede, though he may underestimate the significance of such sincere conversions in the modern period, as well as the extent to which such converts still identified with the Jewish people.

In 1956, Zolli's posthumously published Italian introduction to the Old and New Testaments was reviewed in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* by Christian Ceroke, a Carmelite priest. Father Ceroke asserted that "the treatment of the NT is not of the same meaty quality as that of the OT," adding (even more snidely) that "the author evidently did not possess the same degree of familiarity" with the former as with the latter. Zolli's less than total familiarity with the New Testament may perhaps be excused, however, on the grounds that he spent his last years translating the talmudic tractate of *Berakhot* into Italian. It appeared, also posthumously, in 1958.

Elliott Horowitz, who died in March of this year, was a distinguished historian who held positions at Ben-Gurion University and Bar-Ilan University, and was a frequent visitor to leading institutions in America and England. He was the co-editor of the Jewish Quarterly Review*, the author of* Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence *(Princeton University Press) and many other influential studies, and a valued contributor to the* Jewish Review of Books*. He was a deeply erudite man with a quirky sense of humor; the line below his email signature invariably identified him as a member of the "Molkho Institute for Absurdly Abstruse Research."*

Afghani Treasure

BY YOEL FINKELMAN AND OFIR HAIM

A few weeks before Rosh Hashanah sometime in the 11th century, a distraught, young Jewish Afghani young man named Yair sent a painful letter to his brother-in-law, Abu-al-Hasan Siman Tov. Life had dealt Yair a tough hand, or maybe it was just his own bad choices. Having failed in business in his hometown of Bamiyan, rumors were now spreading that he had "broken promises . . . regarding property" and that he did not truly "observe the Sabbath." Leaving these problems behind him, he had left his young wife to move some 150 miles to Ghazni and begin anew.

But even there he struggled to make a living. More importantly, he missed his family. "Anyone who marries a woman brings peace to his own mind, as it is for all people, not so that I will be sitting in Ghazni and she in Bamiyan." But, with business doing so poorly, Yair could barely make ends meet on a day-to-day basis, let alone afford the costs of travel.

In the same letter, he also addressed the patriarch of the family, Abu Nasr ben Daniel, to beg for his instruction and advice. What should he do? How could he afford to return home and reunite with his wife and family? Would he ever succeed in rebuilding his damaged reputation? Could he reconcile with the people he had hurt and who had hurt him? Deferentially referring to Abu Nasr in the third person and with an honorific title, Yair explained that, "Whatever he sees fit, I will be obedient . . . I will do what the Khwaja [Master] orders."

We do not know how his family responded or whether Yair was ever reunited with his wife and family. But thanks to nearly 300 pages of documents acquired by the National Library of Israel (NLI) over the past few years, we have a real and, at times, intensely personal look into Jewish and Muslim communities that flourished along the Silk Road some one thousand years ago, before the forces of Genghis Khan swept through the area, fighting their way westward, in the early 13th century. A favorite nephew of Genghis Khan was killed in battle in the town of Bamiyan, so he upped the ante on his already brutal practice of laying waste to everything his forces conquered. Attempts to understand almost anything about Jewish life in these areas have been stymied by lack of materials, until now.

How these 1,000-year-old pages resurfaced remains mysterious, but rumors about them have circulated for some three decades. In the past 10 or 12 years, several collections appeared in Europe and were offered to private collectors and public institutions at exorbitant, frankly preposterous prices. But there was not much of a market for these materials among private collectors, who tend to prefer the stunningly illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages and early modern period, or the more easily accessible first printed editions of otherwise-known texts. In 2013, the National Library of Israel was able to acquire 29 leaves held by Lenny Wolfe, an important antiquities dealer in Jerusalem. In 2016, NLI was able to purchase another collection of over 250 leaves from Wolfe with the help of the Davidson and Salomon foundations.

It is in some ways an unprecedented collection. We knew that there were Jewish communities in the area, often referred to as Khorasan, but we knew almost nothing about them. Their existence is attested to by only the flimsiest of evidence—passing references to Jews in works or letters by both Jews or Gentiles from other places, medieval Jewish names that reflect family origins in that part of the world, and even a few gravestones. But that's it. As one reads through these richly detailed papers, a largely unknown world slowly comes to light.

Attempts to understand almost anything about Jewish life in these areas have been stymied by lack of materials, until now.

The many highly personal letters in this collection are written in Judeo-Persian (Persian language in Hebrew characters) on clean, beige, thick paper; evidence, including but not limited to carbon dating, points to the 11th century. But there are several other kinds of documents too, which can broadly be divided into two groups. The first stems from the personal and business archive of the family patriarch Abu Nasr ben Daniel, to whom the distraught Yair had written. Abu Nasr was a well-to-do Jewish merchant and landowner. The documents in this archive are written in Hebrew, Aramaic, Judeo-Persian, and even regular Persian, and it may be the only family archive preserved in Persian lands prior to the Mongol invasion. The second set of documents is a collection of Muslim legal, financial, administrative, and even literary papers, primarily from the 12th and early 13th centuries, mostly in Persian.

Hebrew or Aramaic liturgical and religious texts are in many ways the most exciting documents to come upon. Thus, one finds two pages of a prayer book for the Sabbath that are easily legible to any reader of modern Hebrew, despite being nearly one thousand years old. With minor changes, they are identical to the prayers recited by traditional Jews today. Another two pages from the Mishnah, tractate Avoda Zara, suggest that Jewish communities in the eastern part of historical Iran might have been closer to the talmudic and rabbinic tradition than anyone previously imagined, since scholars had often assumed that these traditions had not quite made it this far east. Fragments of a legal commentary on the prohibited foods listed in the book of Leviticus, which have yet to be transcribed or analyzed, could shed light on both how these Jews interpreted the Bible and how they kept kosher.

Manuscripts from the 11th century, which came from the archive of a Jewish family that lived on the Silk Road. (The National Library of Israel.)

In addition, there are many pages of Jewish financial documents and business letters, some of which also contain personal information. The most intriguing of these are contained in two notebook fragments, scattered with notes and comments in

Judeo-Persian (perhaps they are even parts of the same notebook that were separated from one another at some point). Although these too have not been transcribed or studied in detail, they are clearly the ledger and inventory of a Jewish merchant and landowner, with a running account of his goods, sales, debts, and purchases. One page, for example, contains the revenue of the month of Marcheshvan

Two pages of a prayer book for the Sabbath are easily legible to any reader of modern Hebrew, despite being nearly one thousand years old.

in the year 1337 of the Seleucid Era (1025/1026 C.E.), listing the parcels of land owned by the family patriarch, Abu Nasr, along with the amounts of produce they yielded

The Abu Nasr collection also contains Islamic legal documents that may be the earliest such materials in the Persian language to have survived to the present day. Most of these documents concern debts in grain or in currency owed to Abu Nasr. Short notes written in Judeo-Persian on the back of them summarize the details of the legal transactions, suggesting that Jews of this region made use of Islamic law when they were conducting commercial and financial transactions. Such documents may sound dry, but they have potential to show us how 11th-century Afghani Jews and Muslims did business together and what their everyday life was like: how they bargained, what they bought, and what they ate.

The slightly later Muslim legal, administrative, and literary material will shed light on different questions. Persian culture predates the rise of Islam in the 7th century, but Islam exerted a vast influence over Persian culture in everything from the writing of Persian in Arabic script to cultural and religious practices. Linguists are fascinated by this early evidence of the Persian language, and students of literary culture are eager to compare the Arabic and Persian poetry in these collections to those of later periods.

Might these documents from the 12th and 13th centuries amount to the archive of a court, tax authority, or administrative body? If so, how did these institutions function, what kind of paperwork did they keep, and how did merchants, businessmen, and householders interact with the law and the medieval bureaucrats commanded to uphold it? Did these things change as the society and culture reconstructed themselves after the Mongol invasion?

It's not every day that a trove of documents like this appears. These documents—and more of them may yet turn up—are the raw materials for a revolution in our understanding of medieval Jews on the Silk Road.

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"Where They Have Burned Books, They Will End Up Burning People"

BY SHLOMO AVINERI

Heinrich Heine's chillingly prophetic statement that where books had been burnt people would eventually be too is now engraved on the "*Bibliotek*" memorial in the Bebelplatz square on the Unter den Linden boulevard in Berlin. This memorial commemorates the infamous May 10, 1933 book burning of more than 25,000 volumes there, which was presided over by the most intellectual of the Nazi leaders, Dr. Joseph Goebbels. Authors whose books were thrown into the flames by university students included such "enemies of the German spirit" as Karl Marx, Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, and, of course, Heine himself. The memorial, designed by the Israeli artist Micha Ullman, derives its considerable power from its mute depiction of library shelves emptied of their books. Heine's remark is a powerful and oft-quoted warning about the connection between barbarism and human evil, but its literary context has been almost entirely forgotten.

"Bibliotek" ***memorial by Micha Ullman on the Bebelplatz square, Berlin, which commemorates the Nazi burning of more than 25,000 books, May 10, 1933. (Photo courtesy of deeleea.com.)***

Heine's aphorism appears in one of his earliest works, *Almansor,* a play written during 1820–1821 and published in 1823, when he was only 26. It takes place in Granada, after the Andalusian city had been conquered by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492. The title character is a young Muslim who fled the city before its occupation by the Christians and has now clandestinely returned to try to rescue his beloved Zuleika, who has been forcibly converted to Catholicism and is now called Donna Clara. He meets with the remnants of the Muslim population in the city, who tell him about the atrocities perpetrated by the conquerors: killings, forced conversions, the introduction of the Inquisition. His friend Hassan laments how many young Muslims converted, some of them even willingly, "as the new heavens beckoned to many sinners." Finally, Hassan tells Almansor that the Grand Inquisitor Jimenez had also ordered the burning of the Qur'an in the town's square, to which Almansor responds, "Where they have burned books, they will end up burning people."

"A narrow-minded Teutonic spirit reigned there, which spoke loftily of love and faith, but was anchored in a hate of foreigners and their religion."

Thus, in a play aimed at a German, mainly Christian, audience, Heinrich Heine, born to a Jewish family in Düsseldorf, criticizes Christian Spain for the burning of the Qur'an. Modern German poets did occasionally show admiration for Islamic culture, as, for instance, did Goethe in his *West-Eastern Divan*, but Heine's lamentation stands out. It is emblematic not only of his empathy and his unusual insight into human affairs, but also, perhaps especially, of his conflicted identity as one of the first German Jewish intellectuals to enter the Republic of Letters.

Heine wrote the play at a crucial period of his personal and intellectual development. He was attending Hegel's lectures on political philosophy at Berlin University, and he had just helped to found the *Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* (Society for Jewish Culture and Science) along with a small but extraordinary group of fellow Jewish students. The *Verein* marked the first attempt to present Judaism to modern, emancipated Jews as well as to the general public not merely as a religion, but as a historically anchored culture that was worthy of study and respect, even by those who did not follow its traditional precepts. The statutes of the group were drafted by Leopold Zunz, who would go on to essentially found *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the Science of Judaism, that is, modern academic Jewish studies), Heine's close friend Moses Moser, and another friend, Eduard Gans. Gans was Hegel's disciple and assistant, and also one of the first Jewish scholars to be appointed, albeit on a temporary basis, to a teaching position at Berlin University, which was the first modern university in Germany without a medieval ecclesiastical background.

Although, in the years following the end of the Napoleonic wars and the 1815 Congress of Vienna, Heine and his Jewish friends were able to attend university and aspire to careers as German writers and scholars, these years also saw the emergence of virulent modern German nationalism. The torchbearers of this movement were the student fraternities (*Burschenschaften*), which had transformed themselves during the anti-Napoleonic wars from rowdy but insignificant medieval corporations into the spearheads of a national movement. The fraternities enacted new, nationalist statutes that explicitly excluded "foreigners," by which were meant not only French students but also Jews, who were suspected of supporting the emancipatory message of the French Revolution.

In 1817, under the guise of celebrating the 300th anniversary of Martin Luther's "95 Theses," the fraternities called for a major pilgrimage to the Wartburg fortress in Thuringia, where Luther had once found refuge from his Catholic pursuers. The authorities, who regarded the young nationalist students with suspicion, could not of course ban an event

celebrating the birth of Protestantism, but the message of the pilgrimage was clearly modern and political.

The Wartburg Festival, as it was called, was one of the first political mass demonstrations of the 19th century. Under the banner "Honor, Liberty, and Fatherland," more than 500 students made the trek to Wartburg Castle. The festive procession culminated in a torchlight parade, with speeches by a number of student leaders and university professors—and a celebratory book burning.

The first volume to be thrown into the flames was the Napoleonic Code, which had been introduced in some German states during the brief period of French hegemony. The students and their teachers saw the civil code as a symbol not only of foreign occupation, but also of the universalistic ideas of the Enlightenment and hence something antinational and anti-German. Of course, these were precisely the ideas that underwrote the equal rights that had been granted to Jews in the Rhineland and other German areas under French rule or influence. Others books consigned to the flames included works by writers and poets who had opposed German unification; among them were the books of the poet August von Kotzebue, who was murdered a short time after the Wartburg Festival by a radical nationalist student, Karl Sand. After his execution in 1820, Sand was regarded as a martyr for the nationalist cause by the *Burschenschaften*.

Another one of the authors whose books were condemned to the flames was Saul Ascher, a German Jewish philosopher and publicist who is today almost totally forgotten. Born as Saul ben Anschel Jaffe to a Berlin Jewish banking family, he was one of the first Jewish students to receive a doctorate. By

The Wartburg Festival, Thuringia, where antinationalist writings were burned, October 18, 1817. (Courtesy of Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.)

the second decade of the 19th century Ascher was famous throughout Germany for a series of popular publications in which he supported the ideas of the French Revolution and called for full civic rights for Jews everywhere. Ascher was close to the founders of the *Verein* and particularly to Heine, who wrote about him several times and visited Ascher on his deathbed in 1822, shortly before the publication of *Almansor.*

What made Ascher especially loathsome to the nationalist students was a book he published in 1815 under the title *Die Germanomanie*. Appearing at the very moment of the Germans' victory in what was then called the War of Liberation Against France, Ascher sharply criticized the nationalist and xenophobic aspects of the *Burschenschaften*, as well as of the new and popular gymnastic movement of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, which had become a mobilizing force for volunteers in the war against France. In Ascher's eyes, the legitimate German patriotism of the national movement was being perverted into a radical hatred of foreigners and Jews, as evidenced by the gymnastic movement's rejection of Jews as "lacking honor"—they were not *satisfaktionsfähig*, that is, worthy of carrying a sword, in the quasi-knightly language of these nationalist groups.

Among the reasons the Wartburg Festival was greeted warmly in academic circles was the fact that one of the main speakers at the book burning was a respected philosopher, Jakob Friedrich Fries. A Kantian, who had just moved from Heidelberg to Jena, Fries was a prolific writer on logic, mathematics, anthropology, and psychology (and also, as it happened, the assassin Karl Sand's teacher).

In 1816 Fries had published an essay "*Über die Gefährdung des Wohlstandes und Charakters der Deutschen durch die Juden*" (On the Danger to the Welfare and Character of the Germans by the Jews), in which he argued that the Jews endangered the spirit and future of the German nation. He went on to suggest a number of steps that the German states should adopt against this danger. Among them were a total ban on Jewish immigration to Germany, encouraging Jewish emigration from Germany, a ban on intermarriage between Jews and Christians, prohibiting Christian servants (and especially maids) from working in Jewish households, and last, and perhaps most

shocking to Jews who believed that they had entered German civil society and even the European Republic of Letters, making Jews wear a distinctive mark on their clothes. The similarity to the 1935 Nuremberg Laws is stunning, as is the resemblance between the 1817 Wartburg Festival and the 1933 book burning.

When his character described a Qur'an burning in *Almansor*, then, Heine fully intended for the playgoers to think of contemporary events. The memory of the Wartburg Festival lingered in

Others books consigned to the flames included works by writers and poets who had opposed German unification.

German public consciousness for many years. In Hegel's preface to *The Philosophy of Right* (the book which came out of the political philosophy lectures that Heine had attended), he specifically took his colleague Jakob Friedrich Fries to task for the part he played at Wartburg. Two decades later, in 1840, Heine recalled it in an essay on his friend the political thinker and satirist Ludwig Börne:

> Illuminated by torches, at Wartburg things were said and done befitting the Middle Ages. . . . A narrow-minded Teutonic spirit reigned there, which spoke loftily of love and faith, but was anchored in a hate of foreigners and their religion. Out of their ignorance the participants could not imagine anything better than burning books.

Less than two years after the Wartburg Festival, the so-called Hep Hep Riots (named after the rallying cry of the rioters), which were the first anti-Jewish pogroms in modern Europe, swept through dozens of German cities. In these riots, which lasted sporadically for almost three months, Jews and Jewish shops were attacked, often by German students. The shock among German Jews was enormous. Indeed, the reaction among Heine's circle was precisely the setting up of the *Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden*, which they saw as an attempt to counteract resurgent anti-Jewish feeling among the German learned classes, as well as to encourage pure historical research.

Obviously, there was an intrinsic tension between the *Verein's* two aims, and it should not come as a surprise that the *Verein* did not last long, its founders and members going their separate ways. Others, like Eduard Gans, found themselves facing difficult choices. He was without doubt Hegel's most outstanding student, and it was the great philosopher himself who secured his temporary appointment at Berlin University. But when the issue of a tenure appointment as full professor (*Ordinarius*) came up, his Jewishness was a stumbling block. Under Prussian law, university professors were civil servants (*Beamte*) and had to belong to a Christian denomination. Despite Hegel's solicitations and the efforts of Gans's own father, who as a banker was the financial adviser of some high-ranking officials, the law could not be bent. After many hesitations, in 1825 Gans converted to the Lutheran Church and was appointed to the post of professor at Berlin University. When Hegel died in

The poet Heinrich Heine, by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, ca. 1831. (Hamburg Kunsthalle.)

1831, he succeeded him in his prestigious chair of philosophy and became the editor of the first edition of Hegel's complete works.

Heine was furious when he heard about the conversion of Gans, his erstwhile colleague in the *Verein*, whose aim after all was to cherish and preserve Jewish culture and identity. In his fury, Heine penned an acerbic short poem titled "To an Apostate":

> And you crawled towards the cross,
> That same cross which you detested . . .
> Yesterday you were a hero,
> But today you're just a scoundrel. [*Schurke*]

The bitter irony is that later that same year, Heine himself, also after much agony and some morbid thoughts of suicide, converted. He later famously dismissed his baptismal certificate as a mere passport, a "ticket of admission to European culture."

As for the play *Almansor*, it was put on stage on August 23, 1823, at a provincial theater in Braunschweig. The performance caused a tumult, and after the last scene a small riot broke out, in which voices were heard shouting that someone should put an end to "this nonsense by the Jew Heine." There never was a repeat performance, but Almansor's famous reply to Hassan, "Where they have burned books, they will end up burning people," retains its terrible resonance.

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Upon Such Sacrifices: King Lear and the Binding of Isaac

BY NOAH MILLMAN

"Which of you shall we say doth love us most?" Is it ironic that the tragedy of *King Lear*, perhaps the most devastating in the English language, begins with a father's plea for love? The question certainly surprises his court, which is anxious over the disposition of the kingdom.

Here is the situation. Lear, feeling his decline, looks to prevent future strife by settling his succession now. But he does not simply settle. He doesn't incline to Albany, as his faithful vassal Kent tells us he thought he had and which would have been seen as only right and natural since Goneril, Albany's wife, is Lear's firstborn. Nor does he directly vest all in his youngest and dearest, Cordelia, which, had he done so, would have left her sisters gnashing their teeth while France and Burgundy overleaped each other in striving for her hand. Instead, he poses a test:

> Tell me, my daughters—
> Since now we will divest us both of rule,
> Interest of territory, cares of state—
> Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
> That we our largest bounty may extend
> Where nature doth with merit challenge.

His favor will incline toward love. But first, that love must be manifested. How can love be demonstrated to a father's—and a monarch's—satisfaction? His older daughters offer Lear the cloying words they think he wants. "Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter"; "No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour"; "I profess / Myself an enemy to all other joys"; and so on. Cordelia wonders how to follow these extraordinary exhalations, and counsels herself to "Love, and be silent." And when it is her turn to speak, the words she makes of silence are:

> CORDELIA
> Nothing, my lord.
>
> KING LEAR
> Nothing!
>
> CORDELIA
> Nothing.
>
> KING LEAR
> Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.
>
> CORDELIA
> Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
> My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
> According to my bond; nor more nor less.

Far from being rewarded for her truth, her spoken silence unleashes a howling void that, by the end of the play, has swallowed nearly all the world, leaving only a wasteland of wolves for the righteous Edgar to rule and the loyal Kent to wander.

It seems an extravagant consequence, even for the legend of an ancient king. Why should the very fate

Why should one foolish, fond old man's feeling of rejection threaten to dissolve creation into chaos?

of the world depend on the outcome of such a silly test? Why should one foolish, fond old man's feeling of rejection threaten to dissolve creation into chaos? I've seen at least a dozen productions of the play, but this central question has remained a puzzle to me. Until I reflected that, once upon a time, another, greater king posed an even more terrible love test for a father and his child.

The first instance of the verb for love in the Hebrew Bible is in Genesis 22:

> And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him: "Abraham"; and he said: "Here am I." And He said: "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." (Gen. 22:1–2)

Thus begins the story of the *akedah*, the binding of Isaac. It's a story that has harrowed both Jewish and Christian commentators for more than two thousand years. And before it is anything else, it is a story of love, of the sacrifice of love, and of the sacrificial nature of love. And, as the story has it, the fate of God's kingdom, the world, hinged on whether it was passed.

The *akedah* prompts different questions than *King Lear* does, not of how so much tragedy could have sprung from a foolish love test, but how the God of all creation could have put his faithful servant to such an unconscionable test in the first place. And so there is a long interpretive tradition that labors to elide that fact in increasingly creative ways. Surely God never intended Isaac to be a sacrifice—the boy was merely to be present at the sacrifice! How could Abraham have thought otherwise, when God had already sworn that it was through Isaac that his promise to Abraham would be fulfilled? Or, alternatively, surely Abraham never doubted that God was merely testing him—after all, Abraham tells Isaac himself that God would provide a lamb to substitute!

By such means, commentators have sought to relieve the unbearable tension the story reveals at the heart of our relationship with God. Perhaps the best evidence of the fundamental unpersua-

Tapestry depicting the sacrifice of Isaac, the King's Great Bedchamber, Hampton Court Palace. (Courtesy of the Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017.)

siveness of such readings is in the role the *akedah* plays in the traditional liturgy. Thus in the daily morning prayers, the story is read to remind God of Abraham's unfathomable faithfulness: "Just as our forefather suppressed his mercy for his only son and wished to slaughter him in order to do Your will, so may your mercy suppress your [justifiable] anger . . ." What merit would there have been if Abraham had merely misunderstood God's command—or understood it correctly but knew that he didn't really have to fulfill it?

The *akedah* is also read from the Torah on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. Thus, as we prepare to face God in judgment, we read the primal story of parental and divine love in its most terrifying and all-devouring form. And yet in one of the most moving prayers of the day, *Ha-yom Harat Olam* (Today Is the Birthday of the World), we pray:

> Today all creatures stand in judgment, whether as children or as servants. If we merit consideration as children, have mercy on us as a father has mercy on his children. If as servants, our eyes beseech You to be gracious unto us in judgment, O revered and holy One.

And we close the service with *Avinu Malkeinu*—a plea for mercy not only from our king, but from our father.

This is the way we approach God when we want to emphasize the most fundamental level of our relationship. We ask God to consider us as children, and be merciful as a father is, not a master: with partiality toward the unique value of our own selves. But this is the love that Abraham had for Isaac and that he believed God had for both of them as His chosen servants. And it is this, even this, that God demanded Abraham sacrifice to prove his total love for Him, when He commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son.

That is the central, unresolvable tension of the *akedah* when I read it by the light of Shakespeare's tragedy, as if Shakespeare were a writer of midrash. Can we merit God's consideration as children only if we give God that which Lear demanded of Cordelia—love Him with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our means, reserving nothing for ourselves, for others, or for the world? And if so, then what is left of us to receive that consideration?

William Shakespeare was certainly familiar with the story of the binding of Isaac, and not only because of his deep cultural familiarity with the Bible and access to the Geneva translation. Medieval dramatists had repeatedly depicted Abraham's trial on stage; the typical version explicitly brought out the understanding of Isaac as the great typological forerunner of Christ, and the substitution of the ram as prefiguring God's substitution of His own son for humanity.

But the *akedah* also had particular resonance in early modern England. Hampton Court, where Henry VIII resided, included a magisterial tapestry depicting Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, and this was not happenstance. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his beloved was the paradigmatic instance of the subject's total obedience, the complete subordination of his will and his interests to those of his sovereign. Moreover, in a country where the king not only ruled by asserted divine right but had made himself the head of the church, the space between royal and divine command had shrunk almost to non-existence.

Cordelia Comforting her Father, King Lear, in Prison, ***by George William Joy, 1886. (Courtesy of the Leeds Museums and Galleries, U.K./Bridgeman Images.)***

Shakespeare actually alluded to the *akedah* in a scene in *Richard II*, as Ken Jackson demonstrates in his recent book *Shakespeare and Abraham*. It is a comic scene in which the Duke of York denounces his own son, Aumerle, before the newly crowned King Henry IV, demanding that Aumerle be put to death for treason even as the king offers him mercy. What is being satirized here is precisely the psychological situation created by the demands of absolute fealty to the monarch. In a sense, York is testing whether Henry Bolingbroke *is* the king, whether he *will* demand loyalty in the most absolute terms, because this is what royal authority *means*. This is reminiscent of the scenario described in a midrash on the *akedah*. The angel has stayed Abraham's hand, and Abraham has seen the ram, and sacrificed it. But now Abraham turns to heaven and protests that he *still* needs to sacrifice Isaac, else his intention will not have been fulfilled, and it might have been thought that he never intended to fulfill it. For the command to be withdrawn is to put into question either the authority of the one who commands or the loyalty of the one who obeys. Our sympathies in Aumerle's scene are unequivocally with the natural bond between father and son. But what happens when the sovereign and the father are one and the same, as is the case in King Lear?

King Lear is not usually thought of as having a relationship with the story of Abraham, though a suggestive connection was made by King James I himself. Before ascending to the English throne, James VI of Scotland wrote a political guide, *Basilikon Doron*, for his eldest son advising him never to divide his kingdom (as Lear does) but "make your eldest son Isaac, leaving him all your kingdoms." Instead, the most common point of biblical reference for *King Lear* is Job—because of his extravagant suffering, his demands for justice, the storm against which he rages, and, not incidentally, his trio of daughters (though Job was happier there than Lear was). But just as Richard II and King Lear have a clear kinship—two kings who abdicate, suffer, discover their humanity thereby, and come to wonder how political authority can survive the knowledge that the king is but a man—Job himself, though not an Israelite, is a version of Abraham.

Job's story begins as Abraham's climaxes: with a test. Will he remain righteous when God punishes him for no reason? There is even a midrash in which Abraham's test originates in an argument with Satan that mirrors the frame story of Job. Job, like Abraham, passes his test. He does not follow his wife's advice and "curse God and die," nor does he succumb to the false comforts of his friends, who urge him to blame his own sinfulness for his suffering. Instead, he suffers for his fidelity. This is very close to Abraham's own agony, but Job did not have to wield the knife. Similarly, Lear's suffering in abdication is akin to Richard's, but, unlike Lear, Richard did not decide upon his own destruction.

Why does Lear need to prove his daughters' love? He knows his youngest daughter's devotion. I have never seen a production in which Lear is in any way fooled by his two older daughters' false comforts. He already knows that Cordelia loves him truly and that Goneril and Regan exaggerate their affection. What, then, is the purpose of the trial?

Well, what is the purpose of Abraham's trial? God, even more than Lear, surely knows the depth of Abraham's devotion. From God's perspective, the command cannot be posed in order to see whether Abraham will be willing to perform the terrible deed. Rather, the purpose can only be to teach Abraham something by going through the experience of preparing for sacrifice, right up to the point the knife is raised, and to teach succeeding generations through the story of his deed.

So, too, I would suggest, with Lear. The love test is almost always staged as a bit of theater: Lear knows what he is going to do, and he thinks he knows what Cordelia is going to do. He has orchestrated this as a teachable moment for his daughters and for his court, a lesson in what love looks and sounds like—love for a father and love for a king, which are, in Lear's case, one and the same. He would give her all, and he expects that she will demonstrate a love commensurate with that gift: a love that matches all with all. But Cordelia refuses to follow the script. "Love, and be silent," she tells herself—what is the salience of this silence? I cannot help but hear an echo of Abraham's own silence in the face of the divine command, a terrible silence that envelops the crisis within which Abraham is caught.

Midrash fills up Abraham's silences—for example, by way of explaining the prolixity of God's original command. "Take your son," God commands, and Abraham, in the famous midrash quoted by Rashi, replies, "I have two sons." "Your only son" is elicited in reply, "each is the only son of his mother [Sarah and Hagar]." "The one you love"—"but I love both of

them." Only with the name "Isaac" does Abraham run out of ways to escape. But all of this midrashic elaboration only underlines what is missing from the original biblical text: any sign of what Abraham is feeling.

Although Cordelia begins her speech with a literal "nothing," she does not stand upon that silence, but interprets it for her father and his court:

> Good my lord,
> You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I
> Return those duties back as are right fit,
> Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
> Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
> They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
> That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
> Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
> Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
> To love my father all.

For this, Cordelia is banished and disowned—and we, like the loyal Kent, are appalled. But in this reaction, we are reading Lear as something less than what he knows himself to be, that is, as less than a king. We should take the moment, and Lear's intentions, more seriously. And reading Lear by the light of the *akedah* is a way in.

What has God asked Abraham to sacrifice when He calls for Isaac to be set forth as a burnt offering? Remember the three ways God describes him: your son, your only one, whom you love. Isaac is Abraham's son, the continuance of his own name. Isaac is unique, the vessel through which the entire world is promised blessing and redemption. And Isaac is Abraham's beloved. Isaac is the child of Abraham and Sarah's old age, the fulfillment of all of God's promises to Abraham since He took him out of Ur of the Chaldees. And this—all that God has given him—is what God demands Abraham surrender, to prove his obedience—his love—for God, his ultimate father.

The principle here is terribly simple, and one that Satan's cynical argument about Job makes explicit. If we obey God in expectation of reward, then our love of God is not pure. So to prove that our love is pure, and not transactional, we must be willing to sacrifice everything—indeed, everything that God Himself promised us—on the altar of our devotion. If we do less than this—if we reserve anything for ourselves, for our own futures, for our destinies on earth—then we have proved ourselves unworthy of those very blessings that were promised.

Cordelia's response to her father turns this equation on its head. She is to be wedded to a great prince and will inherit the choicest portion of her father's kingdom—if she demonstrates total and complete love. This is the transactional love that the *akedah* rejects, a prize for a price. Her response is that if she demonstrates that total love—and implicitly values that inheritance and that marriage at nothing—then the entire ceremony of king and court and of her courtship is pointless. It is not her love that must be total, but his, her father's—total enough to give her a kingdom knowing she will not return it.

But if we empathize unequivocally with Cordelia's resistance, what do we make of Abraham's obedience? And more troubling still, what do we make of Cordelia's own tragic end?

I have been very free in my associations until now, moving fluidly between apparently competing identifications. If *King Lear* can be read as a version of the *akedah*, then where is God and who is Abraham? *Meshalim*, allegorical stories that elucidate a biblical text, generally follow a one-to-one correspondence, and where "a king of flesh and blood" is posited, he is usually a stand-in for God. Following that allegorical logic, Lear, who poses the test, is God. But then, who is Abraham? A child or a father?

It is precisely God's absence in *King Lear* that sheds clarifying light on Abraham's trial.

There is no way to perfectly match up a story with three parties—God, Abraham, and Isaac—and one with two—Lear and Cordelia. But consider the story instead from Isaac's perspective. God does not speak to him but to his father. And he is tested as surely as Abraham is. A wide variety of *midrashim* fill in the voids of Isaac's own silence, but the biblical text gives us only the one question: Where is the lamb? From Isaac's perspective, God and his father are as one in this moment of trial, and he must have either faith in the rightness of his own slaughter or faith that God will not demand what He appears to be demanding. Is this not similar to Cordelia's own dilemma when faced with her father's love test?

Colm Feore as King Lear and Sara Farb as Cordelia at the Stratford Festival, Ontario, 2014. (Photo by David Hou.)

Moreover, from both a medieval and an early modern perspective, the line between the monarch and the divinity was blurry. The medieval Christian ideology of the king's two bodies held that while the king was in one sense just a man, he was also, numinously, the kingdom in himself. This idea clearly informs Shakespeare's play; much of Lear's physical suffering can be read as the king experiencing in his actual body the afflictions of the body of state. He grows most God-like on stage precisely when he is powerless in exile from his kingdom and from his children.

But it is precisely God's absence in *King Lear* that sheds clarifying light on Abraham's trial. Where, after all, does the impulse to sacrifice the firstborn originate, but in a sense of primal gratitude? The womb is open, but we cannot take credit for opening it. Who, then, deserves the first fruit? And with promises as extravagant as those embodied in Isaac, how could anyone accept them without first offering to give them back? For Abraham, Isaac is his relationship with God—the living embodiment of all of God's promises. Even if Abraham had not heard God's command, he would have known the awesome implications of having been granted Isaac in the first place.

And so *King Lear*, in which God's presence is occluded and the monarch stands alone with a test of his own devising, is a useful lens through which to see Abraham's crisis. Lear is a king, God's regent on earth. Like Abraham, he is a legendary patriarchal figure. Finally, he is a father, and it is not so simple to divorce from fatherhood that illusion of true continuity, that one's living legacy owes total obedience in gratitude for their very life, because only in this fashion does one's own life continue beyond one's death.

This is the burden that both Isaac and Cordelia bear. Isaac's own willingness to be sacrificed is a frequent theme of midrash and commentary, from an interpolated dialogue with his half-brother Ishmael that fills in the backstory to the opening words of the *akedah*, "after these things" (Ishmael brags of how much blood he shed when he was circumcised as a teenager, and Isaac retorts that he will shed far more blood on Mount Moriah), to exhortations by Isaac to his father to bind him fast, so that any involuntary struggle on his part does not result in a less-than-perfect cut with the knife, invalidating the sacrifice.

And by the play's end, Cordelia also shows her love to be absolute. That husband for whom she reserved half of her love, she leaves behind in France, returning armed to rescue her father from her cruel sisters. When they meet again, and Lear says he knows she does not love him, but that she has cause not to, she replies—in a line that can fail to make you weep only if you have no heart at all—"No cause, no cause." And when their arms do not avail, and Lear and Cordelia are captured, Lear tells her not to despair, because now they truly have all that they need, which is each other. In describing their future life together in prison, he uses the language of human sacrifice:

> KING LEAR
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
> And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
> Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
> And take upon's the mystery of things,
> As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,

In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,
That ebb and flow by the moon.

EDMUND
Take them away.

KING LEAR
Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense.

Lear and Cordelia go together to their doom as Abraham and Isaac climbed up Mount Moriah side by side.

But only Cordelia dies. God's angel stays Abraham's hand at the final moment, while Edmund's reprieve comes too late for Lear's poor fool. Cordelia's death came as a shock to Shakespeare's first audiences. All the signs pointed to *King Lear* as a romance rather than a tragedy, situated somewhere between *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, a story of sundering and reconciliation, turning the father's heart to the children and the children's hearts to the father.

King Lear does contain something like that romance in the story of Gloucester and his sons Edgar and Edmund. There are biblical echoes here as well: Gloucester's coming to sight through blindness and illegitimate Edmund's trickery employed to win an inheritance over his brother darkly recall the aged Isaac's deception by Jacob. Shakespeare gave us all the romance one might want in the good Edgar's slow succoring of Gloucester away from self-destruction, even to a final reconciliation that kills the father with joy.

Audiences had every reason to expect to see that mood continue to the finale, with Lear restored to the throne with Cordelia by his side. In fact, that was, quite literally, the promised end. In Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Shakespeare's primary source for the story, Lear's wicked daughters are vanquished by Cordelia, who restores her father to the throne and succeeds him as queen. Shakespeare's other major source, a play from the 1590s called *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*—first published in 1605, just in time to inspire Shakespeare's own effort—ended on a similarly happy note.

Most of Shakespeare's plays are revisions of older works by other writers (the Gloucester-Edgar subplot came from Sidney's *Arcadia*), but in this case he radically revised the ending, swerving suddenly from romance into the bleakest tragedy. Edgar's triumph butting up so directly against Cordelia's murder only sharpens the narrative cruelty of the latter. All our expectations, like those of the characters left alive onstage, are crushed. One feels that this isn't how it's supposed to end.

Why make this change? It is tempting to conclude that this is of a piece with God's absence from Shakespeare's story, that in a world ruled by the biblical God, the blessing of life does not, finally, require a commensurate sacrifice. In a deep sense, to accept the death of Cordelia is to accept an utterly bleak universe. Perhaps that is why the story was revised yet again. For more than a century and a half the English stage never saw Cordelia's death, since Shakespeare's play was performed only in the 1681 adaptation by Nahum Tate in which Cordelia lives and marries Edgar. If Cordelia is an Isaac figure, of course she must live and testify to the presence of God in the world.

But did Isaac live? If some biblical critics are correct, the *akedah* narrative as we find it may itself be decomposed into two strands, one for Elokim, who demanded the sacrifice of the firstborn male child as of the first fruits, and one for the God of the Tetragrammaton in the "J" strand, who sent the angel and substituted the ram. On this theory, something older, and darker, was revised out of our *akedah* story.

And though the biblical text as it has come down to us clearly states that Abraham's hand was stayed in time, the question nagged at the ancient midrashists. Small gaps in the biblical narrative—why, for instance, doesn't the text say that Isaac went down the mountain together with his father just as they had gone up together?—support a shocking countertradition: Isaac was indeed sacrificed. In his classic book *The Last Trial,* Shalom Spiegel explored these *midrashim*, in which Isaac spilled a quart of blood on the altar, was reduced to ashes, and spent three years in paradise before being restored to life on earth.

Whatever theological significance one imputes to such stories, what they demonstrate first and foremost is a basic narrative dissatisfaction with the *akedah*. Expectations are raised by the terms of the test: Will Abraham truly grasp the nettle of his terrible position and sacrifice the life of the blessing itself to show his gratitude for that life and that blessing? His last-minute reprieve is a let-down. The story as we have it also poses a problem for anyone facing a situation of terrible, unavoidable sacrifice. As Jews have asked in terrible historical moments (the Crusades, the Holocaust), why is God demanding more of me than He demanded of Abraham? Where is my reprieve? The midrashic tradition of an Isaac who was not merely bound upon the altar but sacrificed responds to that gnawing demand for an ending that completes the awesome task and closes the terrible circle.

But set Shakespeare's play beside the *akedah*, with its own history of changes and reverses, and the multiply revised revisions double back upon themselves. There is the potential for tragedy here, and there is the potential for romance here, but we cannot choose; no ending can satisfy. Why should that be?

I read these texts not only as a critic, but as a father. And as a father, I cannot help but be attuned to the central paradox of parenthood. Children are the way in which we continue in the world beyond our lives, and so we want them to carry us with them, as fully and completely as possible. But to continue in the world, they must differentiate themselves, must become less us and more them. And the less us they are, the more we feel a promise unfulfilled: We will not continue beyond our lives.

God's first command to Abraham was *lech lecha*—take yourself out, exile yourself, differentiate yourself as radically as possible from the place and people that you came from. Then He promised him Isaac for continuity. This boy would be the fulfillment of the covenant, the means by which God's name, and Abraham's, would be known throughout the world. And His last command was to surrender all this, and give it back, with Isaac's life.

Reading Cordelia as a revision of Isaac, the revision says: I must also go out; I must also differentiate myself. I cannot love you all, not even for the best of the kingdom, because the kingdom is worthless if I cannot inherit it, because there is no "I" to do so. And if I do not go out, there will be no "I," for to love you all is as much as to die.

If Cordelia's death is unbearable, it is because we want to believe in reconciliation on those terms. But if Isaac's survival is also unsatisfying, perhaps it is because we cannot believe in reconciliation after his binding, not because he would not love his father after such an experience, but because the binding was itself a kind of death, a complete submission. Lear's test, like Abraham's, cannot be satisfied any other way but by total love, which, it turns out, is death.

And so we turn, and turn again, revise and revise again, finding no ending satisfying. Because the point is, we do not want to end.

Noah Millman is a senior editor at the American Conservative*, a columnist at the* Week*, and a filmmaker. His film* We've Forgotten More Than We Ever Knew *will be released this November, and he is currently working on a book about Shakespeare and the Hebrew Bible.*

Power and the Voice of Conscience: A Lost Radio Talk

BY EMIL FACKENHEIM, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY MICHAEL L. MORGAN

Emil Fackenheim is best known as the Jewish thinker who said that after the Holocaust the Jewish people had received a 614th commandment: not to give Hitler any posthumous victories. But Fackenheim was 50 years old and a widely published philosophy professor before he began to think philosophically and write about the Holocaust in 1966.

In 1938, Fackenheim had been arrested during Kristallnacht and held at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. In 1940, at virtually the last moment in which it was possible to do so, he was able to flee, first to Aberdeen, Scotland, and then on to Canada. In 1943, while he was a doctoral student in medieval Jewish and Arabic philosophy at the University of Toronto, he took a position as the rabbi at Anshe Sholom, a Reform synagogue in Hamilton, Ontario. Fackenheim served the congregation until 1948 when he returned to the University of Toronto to teach philosophy. Until recently, little has been known about his thinking in these early years.

Fackenheim's papers are housed in the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa in 106 file boxes of materials from his youth through his death in 2003. A few years ago, Sol Goldberg, of the University of Toronto, and I spent several days exploring and itemizing what we found. Among the materials that we discovered from this early period were outlines and plans for book projects; a number of graduate student papers and lectures given to philosophical societies on existentialism, German idealism, and Kierkegaard; a large collection of aphorisms; early reviews and talks on medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophy; and more.

These academic materials are important sources for understanding what Fackenheim was reading and thinking in the 1940s, but they are also more or less what we expected to find. Far more surprising were the typescripts of a series of more than 70 weekly radio addresses that Fackenheim gave on Sunday mornings from 1944 to 1948. It seems likely that the radio talks were revised versions of sermons that he had given on Friday evenings at Anshe Sholom. Although they show a profoundly philosophical and religious mind at work, they were often topical. One, for example, is delivered at the end of the war, another after the communist coup in Czechoslovakia, and a third on the occasion of the San Francisco conference to establish the United Nations in 1945.

Take, for example, the 1947 address printed here. Fackenheim delivered this talk as heated debates were taking place in Canada over what to do about the wartime refugees from Europe. He highlights the tendency to make decisions about immigration policy and quotas based on an economic cost-benefit analysis of how these survivors of the war could serve national interests. On the one hand, "this is understandable; for responsible leaders must have in mind the economic future of the people they lead" but what, he asks, of the needs of the homeless themselves? Such self-interested utilitarian reasoning, Fackenheim warns, risks putting Canada on the path of ancient Egypt as described by the prophet Ezekiel: "a mighty one of the nations" brought low by arrogance and ethical failure.

Is our conscience and our sense of moral responsibility growing weaker the greater our wealth, our power, and our influence become?

Emil Fackenheim, Hamilton, Ontario, September 1945. (Courtesy of Michael Morgan.)

In radio addresses like this one Fackenheim shows how urgently and continually he felt the impact of Nazism and the plight of its victims, including members of his own family, and its survivors during these years. While he is not yet thinking about the philosophical or theological implications of these events, he cannot put them out of his mind. Interestingly, in this address, Fackenheim speaks as a Canadian rather than as a refugee and survivor. Midway through the sermon he says:

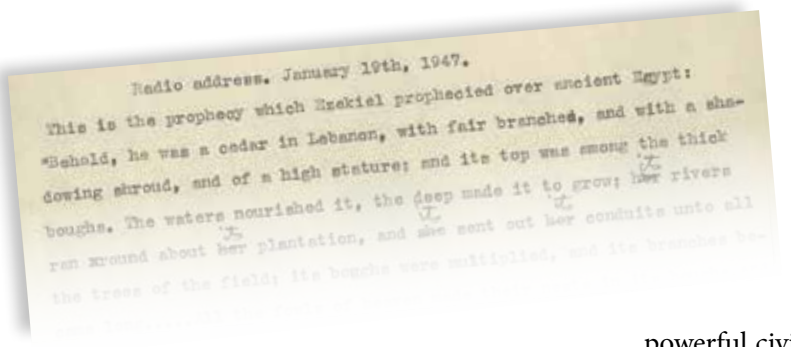
> *For in these long months since the end of the European war . . . we have refused to give those who became martyrs for us a new home. . . . They are crowded in DP camps, but we have refused to invite them into our wide, near-empty land.*

In doing so, he seems to identify not with the victims of Nazism but rather with those in Canada and the United States, who, he says, stood by during the horrors and are still standing by while the survivors suffer, even though he himself was a refugee only seven years earlier.

On the one hand, this may reflect Fackenheim's natural awareness of his role and his responsibility, but on the other, it may also reflect a reluctance on his part to identify with those who sacrificed so much more than he ultimately had to sacrifice. Having fled and left others behind who suffered through the war and so many, including his own brother, who had been murdered, he, like many survivors, may have been reluctant to think of himself, a lucky one, as one of them. Primo Levi talked about this kind of guilt or shame. Later in life Fackenheim admitted to such feelings, but one may glimpse them here in his striking description of Holocaust victims as "those who became martyrs for us."

In 1986, when I was planning the collection of Fackenheim's writings, published as The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, he asked me to include a short piece called "The Psychology of the Drum," which I had never read before. He gave me a few typed pages and told me that it was an early unpublished piece that he had given as a talk and of which he remained proud. It is about how members of a civilized and advanced society, of a modern state, can be lured and seduced into the most horrific conduct. In it he recalls the drums of victory after World War I, a war won for democracy, and he also remembers the drums of Nazism, which "can become an evil frenzy destroying the humanity in man" and can "wield millions into a brutal, inhuman machine shrinking back from no crime."*

Until Sol Goldberg and I spent those days in the archives in Ottawa, I did not know where the piece had come from. Now I do. It was delivered in Hamilton, Ontario, on the radio as one of these weekly talks, on Sunday morning, November 11, 1945, a few short months after the war had ended, in the "winter of our discontent." Fackenheim's call to his congregation and his radio listeners, to overcome the ghastly drum and the nihilism it serves through acts of justice and mercy, was echoed in many later talks, including this one, delivered on January 19, 1947 and published here for the first time. The text is from a transcription of the original typescript by Yossi Fackenheim, Emil's grandson.


Radio address. January 19th, 1947.

This is the prophecy which Ezekiel prophecied over ancient Egypt:

"Behold, he was a cedar in Lebanon, with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of a high stature; and its top was among the thick boughs. The waters nourished it, the deep made it to grow; its rivers ran around about her plantation, and she sent out her conduits unto all the trees of the field; its boughs were multiplied, and its branches became long . . . all the fowls of heaven made their nests in its boughs, and all the beasts of the field did bring forth their young under its branches, and under its shadow dwelt all the great nations . . . all the trees of Eden, that were in the Garden of God, envied it. (Ezekiel 31)

But after having described Egypt in so glowing colors, the prophet goes on to say:

Therefore, thus saith the Lord God: "Because he is exalted in stature, he hath set his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height; I do even deliver him into the hand of the mighty one of the nations; he shall surely deal with him; I do drive him out according to his wickedness." (Ezekiel 31)

Radio Address, January 19, 1947

by Rabbi Emil Fackenheim

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There can be but few among us who read without discomfort this description of a country rich in fame and material wealth, a country wielding worldwide influence, yet earning for itself the stern condemnation and evil prophecy of an Ezekiel, because as its power grew, its moral fiber weakened. We read it with discomfort, for often we wonder, whether we, part of the most powerful civilization of the modern world, are not on a road leading us to the exact position of ancient Egypt: the combination of maximum worldly fame, wealth, and power with the minimum of moral fiber and moral responsibility. We wonder whether we not even now, while we are as yet unaware of it, stand guilty in the sight of God and in the sight of History.

There is nothing strange or paradoxical about the combination of wealth and power with moral guilt. For two reasons, it is an almost natural combination. In the first place, the greater the power of a nation, the greater its influence, and the greater its influence, the greater its moral responsibility. A small nation can do little harm and not too much good. But everything done by the powerful is of tremendous influence, for good or for evil. But, alas, the growth of power does not involve of itself a growth in moral responsibility. In the second place, power brings its own temptations. Selfish lusts grow the stronger, the less there is to stop them. The powerful can even buy themselves free from their conscience. They can construct a propaganda machine persuading them that their selfish or immoral actions are in truth for the good of all. And the voices that tell otherwise are too weak to be heard.

Few, if any, of the great powers and empires of history could withstand the temptations of wealth and power. Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Persia, and Rome—they all went down because of moral disintegration, corruption from within, a failure of moral creativity, apathy towards the mission imposed upon them by their influence—these were the reasons why none of them lived up to the historic task they might have fulfilled: to unify the world of their day, to bridge the barriers between civilizations, to elevate those under their influence to a higher level of moral standards and happiness.

Has our civilization reached a similar critical point? Is our conscience and our sense of moral responsibility growing weaker the greater our wealth, our power, and our influence become? Our modern Western civilization is perhaps the first in all of human history that started and developed under happy moral auspices. It is the first, at any rate, which from its very inception was built on the biblical doctrine that all men are created equal and that their relations must be built in justice and compassion. It has inherited, therefore, a stronger moral fiber than any other previous civilization. Yet there are grave indications that, under the temptation presented today by wealth and power, we are discarding our moral heritage, ignoring the moral responsibilities deriving from our world position. There are indications that we are going along the fateful path of ancient Egypt.

Let us, by a few examples, search deeply into our moral integrity. There can be, today, not a single Canadian or American unaware of the fact that there are in Europe hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. No one who can read a newspaper or understand a newsreel can plead ignorance of the fact that these persons are starved, homeless, insecure, through no fault of their own. I say through no fault of their own. I might say partly through our fault. For they have undergone the most horrible persecution and suffering partly because we were too slow to resist the evil tyranny of Nazi persecution, partly because we were too callous to provide a haven for them when there was yet time. Millions were done to death.

Today, many months after victory, the wretched few who survived the gas chambers and concentration camps still are homeless. They are still surrounded by the enmity of those whom Hitlerism has so dehumanized that they would callously send a Jew to death to steal his store or his home. These people are, in as real a sense as can ever be imagined, carrying on their shoulders the sins of other men. There they are, accusing symbols of the injustice, the cruelty, the calumnies of men in the twentieth century, and their very existence cries accusingly to Heaven—accusing those who caused it to happen, who fanned the flames of hate and brutality, and those who did not resist evil as they could and should have done.

What are we doing today to make up for our sins? It appears that we do nothing, or as good as nothing. We utter a few words of sympathy and perhaps send a few dollars for temporary relief of the impoverished. But in the light of what we could and should do, our words of sympathy sound hypocritical, and the relief we give looks like an attempt to buy ourselves free from the accusations of our consciences. For in these long months since the end of the European war, we have refused to do the only thing that will help, the only thing that perhaps may get us a pardon for our sins in the sight of God and of history. We have refused to give those who became martyrs for us a new home with us, a home where they can live among friendly people, pursue a vocation, create a future for their children. They are crowded in DP camps, but we have refused to invite them into our wide, near-empty land. They continue to be on the brink of starvation, yet we have

The first group of war orphans and refugee youths en route to Canada pose at a London train station, September 1947. (Courtesy of the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives.)

refused to share with them our affluence.

How can this be explained? How is it that the people of this northern continent, not normally callous and indifferent to the voice of conscience, have behaved in this matter so callously and unjustly?

It is because our growth in power, wealth and influence has made us selfish and self-righteous, and because it has, at the same time, enabled us to quieten the voice of our consciences.

How do we quieten its voice? We say that the question of immigration must be viewed from the viewpoint of the benefit or harm it may do to Canada. But what is Canada other than its people? Do we mean, then, that we object to saving lives because to do so might mean a slight and temporary burden for each Canadian? Do we mean that there is a single Canadian so callous and selfish as to refuse to, say, give up two or three cents of his annual earnings for two or three years for the salvation of hundreds of lives? I trust that there is no Canadian so callous, so far degenerated from his religious and moral heritage.

The trouble is that we do not put this question in this way. We pretend that it isn't for our sake, but that of a mysterious entity called Canada, existing apart from its people, that we keep our borders closed. But Canada is not more and not less than its people, and he who loves his country will show this love best by raising her, in his own person, to a higher level of justice, compassion, and decency.

Some of us are in favor of immigration, provided that it is selective. Selective according to what principle? Selective, my friends, according to the needs of Canada, that is to say, our needs. Partly, this is understandable; for responsible leaders must have in mind the economic future of those whom they lead. But surely some consideration should be given in this selection not to our needs, but to the needs of the homeless themselves! Unless we give some consideration to them and much more than we have done, we shall be hypocritical if we open our

They continue to be on the brink of starvation, yet we have refused to share with them our affluence.

doors to larger immigration with the feeling that we do so out of justice and a feeling of compassion. By excluding the needy because they are needy, we shall give proof that we care not for their suffering, but for our self-interest, that we are not concerned with eliminating European suffering, but with using European talent for our own enrichment.

We have dwelt on this one example. We might have selected many examples showing that we are today in the same danger in which ancient Egypt was and which the prophet Ezekiel pointed out; our wealth, power, and influence are growing, but our moral responsibility and moral strength are not keeping pace with them. Many educators and religious leaders are realizing this and grow concerned about it. And the more they love their people, the greater their concern. For anyone knowing what human affairs are like knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that the greatness and happiness we all seek for this country will come to chaos and misery, unless justice, decency, and compassion wax stronger and stronger among our people.

Anyone therefore who wishes true greatness and happiness for Canada must fearlessly expose the moral shortcomings of its people—starting with himself. Let us, today, look at ourselves honestly, asking: Am I good enough? Am I selfless enough? Do I esteem justice higher than my own self-interest? Do I regard my neighbor's starvation as more serious than my own inability to afford certain luxuries? By so searching our consciences, we shall begin to make ourselves better and happier men. By acting according to this search, we shall begin to make ourselves better and happier citizens, and our countrymen truly great, wealthy, and good. For this we shall do the only thing which can prevent our country from walking along the road of ancient Egypt, Babylonia, and Rome: the road of unscrupulous power, irresponsible wealth, and influence exploited merely selfishly, that road which, as all prophets warned, leads to decay, misery, and chaos.

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Like an Echo of Silence

BY SHOSHANA OLIDORT

On the Surface of Silence: The Last Poems of Lea Goldberg
translated by Rachel Tzvia Back
University of Pittsburgh Press, 192 pp., $24.95

In an evocative late poem called "Answer" ("*Teshuvah*"), the Hebrew poet Lea Goldberg wrote:

> To the exam question "For what purpose
> are lyric poems written in our era?"
>
> And what would we do with the horses in the
> twentieth century?
> And with the does?
> And with the large stones
> in the Jerusalem hills?

The poem, which appears in English in the newly released bilingual *On the Surface of Silence*, translated by Rachel Tzvia Back, offers no grand claims. Lyric poems, it says, are part of our world, and while they may not have the power to redeem it, they are as worthwhile as the beings and objects they evoke: horses, deer, the stones of the Jerusalem hills.

In Back's insightful introduction, she points to the ways in which Goldberg's last poems depart from her earlier work. In particular, Back notes Goldberg's move away from traditional poetic forms. Her pared-down verses seem to parallel her physical decline, culminating in her death at 58. As Back acknowledges, Goldberg's poetry never undergoes a similar shift in terms of theme; she was lonely both early and late, though her existential solitude was rendered even starker by the brevity of her final poems. Indeed, the sentiment behind "Answer" was present from the very beginning and is part of what alienated many prominent (mostly male) critics. The celebrated poet Natan Zach criticized Goldberg for her "narrowness," and, in a harsh critique published in *Ha'aretz* in 1960, a young Dan Miron pointed to the "basic limitations," "vapid conceptualizations," and "structural failures" that prevent Goldberg's poems from transcending the "realm of pleasing."

Self-effacing to a fault, Goldberg did not fit the mold of the poet-prophet favored by many of her male contemporaries and their readers. Her poetic voice didn't project outward; it drew the reader in, inviting intimate conversation. In "From My Mother's House" from Goldberg's 1959 collection *Last Words*, the speaker contemplates her reflection in a mirror as she reflects on the memory of a deceased grandmother whose image, "engraved on my grandfather's heart / was erased from the world of images / after his death." Gazing into the mirror, the narrator catches sight "deep down" of a woman, "pink-cheeked and smiling. / A wig on her head," as she threads an earring through "the slender crevice in the tender flesh / of her ear." Is the girl simply seeing herself and imagining the mysterious grandmother, or is this all a dream, or a hallucination? We have no way of knowing, of course, but what we do know is that this poem is profoundly personal, intensely focused, and thus necessarily "narrow."

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Goldberg, who was born in Germany to Lithuanian Jewish parents and settled in Palestine in 1935, at the age of 24, was also a beloved children's author. In her popular children's book *Nissim ve-nifla'ot* (Miracles and Wonders) the narrator, a lonely, childless woman seemingly modeled after the author, is known as "Nobody's Aunt." Like "Nobody's Aunt," Goldberg had no romantic partner, no children of her own. In her stories, as in her poems, one is struck by the understated poignancy of the work.

In his well-known essay "Founding Mothers, Stepsisters," Dan Miron argues that the emergence of poetry by women in Hebrew in the 1920s was made possible by "a revolutionary recognition of the legitimacy of poverty." But Goldberg, at least, was a poet of restraint, not poverty. Such restraint is brought into especially sharp relief in Goldberg's later work, as in this untitled poem:

> The hills today are like shadows of hills
> and the silence like an echo of silence.
> Today I set out on my way
> and the sound of my steps is not heard.
>
> Today I set out on my way
> and the sound of my steps is not heard.

The poem evokes the sense of life slipping away. We can hear the echo of silence in the second stanza's repetition of the preceding lines, but what is more difficult to capture in English are the echoes that permeate this poem in the Hebrew. As Back points out, "The aural image of silence echoing itself, or of silence being an echo of silence, is beautifully accentuated in the Hebrew through the doubled *dalet* in *hed demamah*" and in the "Hebrew word for silence—*demamah* . . . itself composed of the repeated/echoing *mah* syllable." (The poem's biblical resonances—in vocabulary and syntax—also defy easy translation, even by a translator as skilled as Back.)

Back's own literary skill is evident in her meticulous rendering of these poems and the careful consideration she gives to her translation decisions is articulated in her introduction and notes. On her decision to insert the word "are" in the first line of the poem cited here, for instance, Back explains that "the oddity of the line without it far exceeded the effect of absence rendered in the Hebrew original."

One of this collection's most memorable poems is the one with which it opens:

> A young poet suddenly falls silent
> in fear of telling the truth.
> An old poet falls silent fearing
> the best in a poem
> is its lie.

In her introduction, Back notes the limitations of English in rendering the self-reflexive *mishtatek* (falls silent). Less clear is Back's decision to render differently the two iterations of the Hebrew *mipachad*, first as "in fear of" and the second time as "fearing." The difference is minor and yet not insignificant in a poem marked by brevity and repetition. As Back points out, there is a fascinating allusion to the great medieval Andalusian Hebrew poet Moses ibn Ezra in the concluding lines of this poem. Significantly, Ibn Ezra's conception of the poetic lie was very different from Goldberg's. For Ibn Ezra, the lie is the triumphant artifice of the poem and thus its very essence. For Goldberg, by contrast, what is being expressed is a fear of deceitfulness that, as Back puts it, "results in self-silencing."

Lea Goldberg's student identification card from 1929 was found among documents in Kaunas, Lithuania. (Yad Vashem Archives.)

Silence and loneliness are leitmotifs in this collection. An early poem titled "There Are Many Like Me" Goldberg began, "There are many like me: lonely and sad, / one writes poems, another sells her body, / a third convalesces in Davos, / and all of us drink thirstily from the bitter cup." The poem ends: "There is no escape." These sentiments are sharpened in the later poems, and though their expression is more sophisticated, they remain fundamentally unchanged:

> Already the silences are easy.
> The light is bright.
> When there are no roads
> there's no fear of borders.
> And there's nothing to reveal
> when there's nothing to hide.

For Back, this poem suggests surrender and release, the poet's acceptance of her impending death. But recognition that the struggle is over offers scant consolation, and the sense of relief is at best bittersweet.

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Distant Cousins

BY MATTI FRIEDMAN

Reading novels published in the last year by some of America's best Jewish writers, I found myself struck by a recurring character—Israel. That Jonathan Safran Foer's *Here I Am* and Joshua Cohen's *Moving Kings* both feature Israel and Israelis as important plot devices might have been a coincidence. But then this fall came Nathan Englander's *Dinner at the Center of the Earth* and Nicole Krauss's *Forest Dark*, both of which are set mostly in Israel. Something's going on.

I came at these novels as someone the same age as the authors (40-ish) who left North America at 17 and has been living and writing in Israel since then. That might explain my sensitivity to this shift in American Jewish fiction. (I should also mention that I know Foer and Krauss, and that *Forest Dark* has a passing reference to an Israeli journalist named "Matti Friedman.") But I don't think anyone reading these books could miss their distance from the brash and rooted tone of "I am an American, Chicago-born." The center seems to have moved.

The Israel of each of these novelists is different, of course, but there are similarities. Two recount watching an Israeli war on TV from America and the strong emotions this elicits; two make reference to King David; two have *hamsa* keychains; two have the Mossad; all have soldiers; and all use a little Hebrew. Perhaps most tellingly, two feature American characters with Israeli *second* cousins—at first Jews in America and Israel were siblings divided by European wars, then first cousins, but now they're only second cousins, a generational fact that might explain the fraying connection as much as anything else. None of these novels is fully at home in Israel—they're more like Mars orbiters than rovers. They're not permanently on the ground. But they have entered the gravitational pull of this place, which makes it worth trying to figure out what, exactly, that pull is.

Saul Bellow once said that for moral critics the Jewish state was becoming what the Alps are for skiers. To see how prophetic this remark turns out to have been, the reader need go no further than the recent collection of essays by writers who condemned the occupation of the West Bank after going on a little moral ski trip led by two prominent American Jewish novelists, Michael Chabon and Ayelet Waldman. None of the four authors here are up to anything as simplistic as that project (which I reviewed in the *Washington Post*), but moral dilemmas are certainly part of the draw. Englander's *Dinner at the Center of the Earth*, for example, which is about an American Jew who becomes a Mossad spy before going off the rails, has two characters set out the positions for and against house demolitions. "Giving five-minute warnings to old women who never race out the door with anything but their olive oil and a picture of Arafat? It's pitiful." "How else do you punish someone who's already gone? It's a deterrent." Elsewhere, there is a similar back-and-forth about bombing terrorists amid a civilian population, something the main character enables and regrets: "What we just did—it's not what I signed up for."

In all four novels Israel is the scene of strange and exciting events, if not outright enchantment,

The immigrant fires of writers who once hit America like shtetl-launched ICBMs are now too cold to even toast a marshmallow.

but the idea that magic is possible here is most present in Krauss's *Forest Dark*. (Home, on the other hand, is where the novels set jobs, divorces, affairs, and bar mitzvahs.) Krauss's narrator is a writer who has come unmoored in the United States and finds herself in Israel, which is evoked in descriptions of the Mediterranean, the warm and prickly people, the charmless concrete block of the Tel Aviv Hilton, and the smell of hot cat piss on the street—but also an Israel with the supernatural qualities suggested in some of the great stories set here, like the one in Kings where the prophet Elijah dramatically departs this earth without dying, or the one where Jesus dies, then comes back, and then leaves again, but is still not dead. In *Forest Dark* a departed European writer might live resurrected as a humble Israeli gardener, or an aging New Yorker might take a taxi to the Negev and vanish.

Woodcut map with Jerusalem as the center of the world, by Heinrich Bünting, 1581.

Many of the characters in these novels turn to Israel to shore up American lives that feel short on meaning, even if we're not meant to take that turn entirely seriously. At the end of Foer's *Here I Am,* in which an American family falls apart as Israel is struck by catastrophe and invaded, his main character gathers his courage and heads off to join the war. Entering a Long Island airport to be vetted along with other American Jewish volunteers singing "Jerusalem of Gold," he reflects, "I had written books and screenplays my entire life, but it was the first time I'd felt like a character inside one—that the scale of my tchotchke existence, the *drama* of living, finally befitted the privilege of being alive."

In Cohen's *Moving Kings*, David King brings over an Israeli relative, a young military veteran, to work in his New York moving and storage company and muses that there's something about Israel that is linked to immortality. "If he'd stay in touch with Israel," King says of himself after a heart attack focusses his thinking, "if he'd maintain with Israel, certain responsibilities would devolve on the living after his demise. He was almost sure of it, he almost said it aloud: who among the living was going to shovel dirt in his grave or say a kaddish? His daughter?"

Jewish American writers of a few decades ago might have poked around the strange Jewish country in the Middle East, but they knew that the real literary action for them was back home. The novelists of 2017 don't seem so sure. The immigrant fires of writers who once hit America like shtetl-launched ICBMs are now too cold to even toast a marshmallow. If you're not a recent arrival from the Soviet Union, you're not likely to have funny mannerisms, an ethnic chip on your shoulder, or much interesting history of your own. Yiddish nostalgia is stale, and with everyone in the suburbs, there is no American Jewish street. The broader American culture seems to offer little cohesion for a writer to either embrace or rebel against. So where do you go? As Shaul Tchernichovsky wrote in Berlin in the twilight of Jewish Europe a century ago, "They say there's a country, a sun-drunk country…"

And so there is—a country that seems to have hit its cultural stride, having recently struck some reservoir of distinctly Jewish fuel, turning into a blend of Beirut, St. Petersburg, and Palo Alto, but mainly turning into itself. It's a place that's messed up and revved up and moving, one that feels so different from the American Jewish world not just because it's Middle Eastern, and not just because it's endangered, but because it's alive.

Matti Friedman is the author, most recently, of Pumpkinflowers: A Soldier's Story of a Forgotten War, *which appeared on the* New York Times *"100 Notable Books of 2016" list and was one of Amazon's 10 best books of the year.*

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