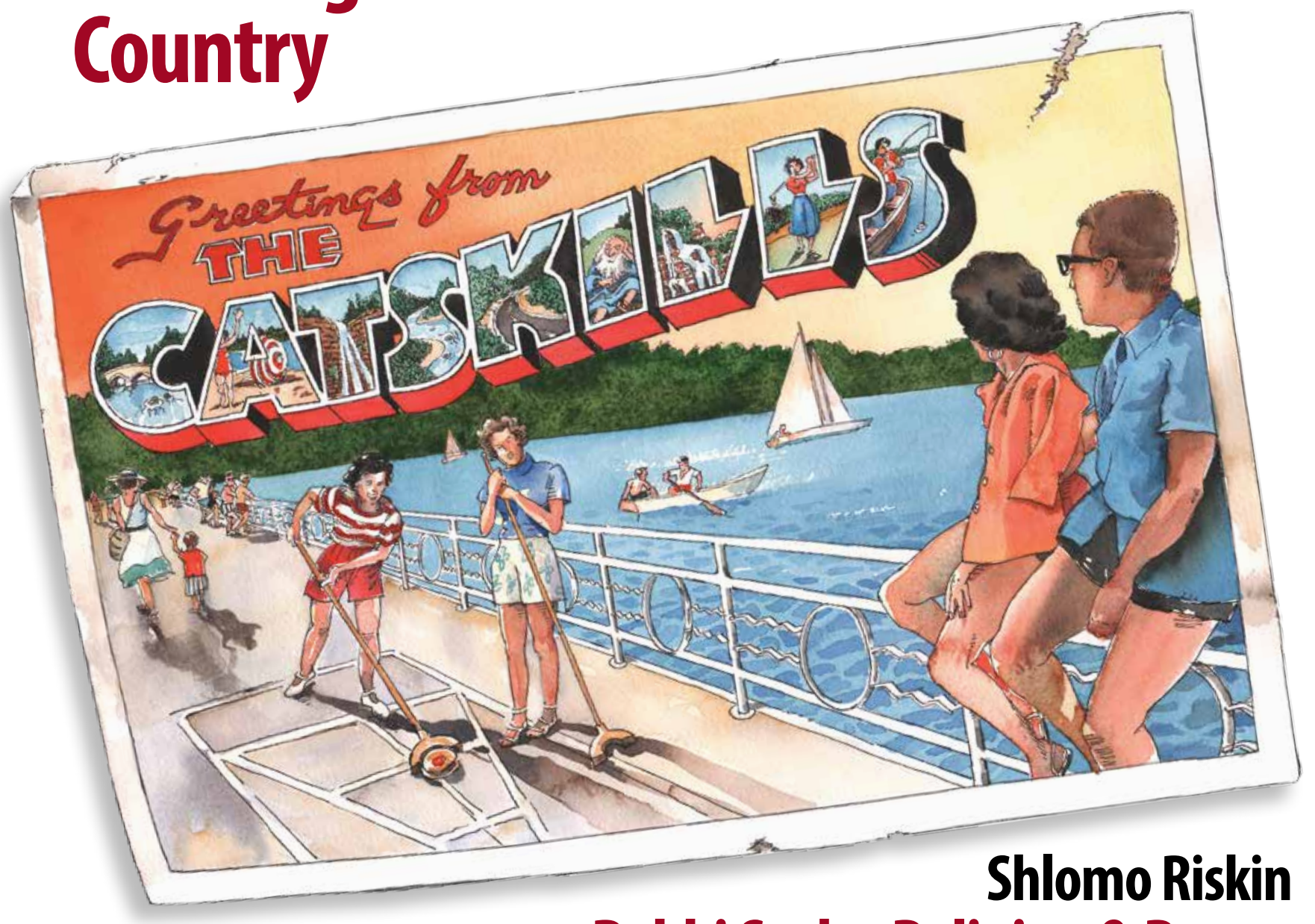
Sarah Abrevaya Stein on Sephardi Passports

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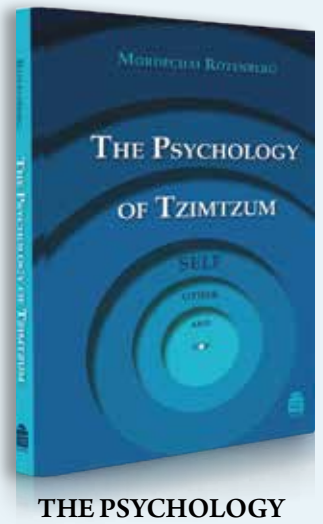
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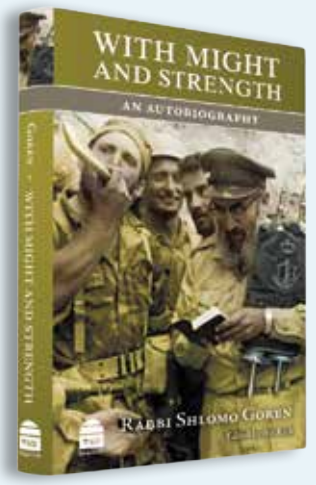
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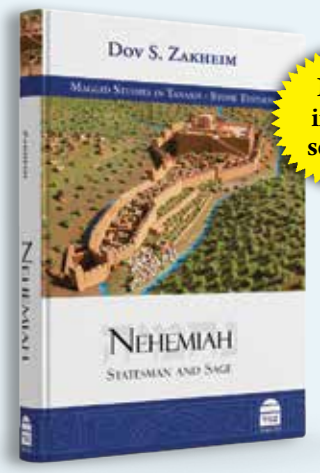
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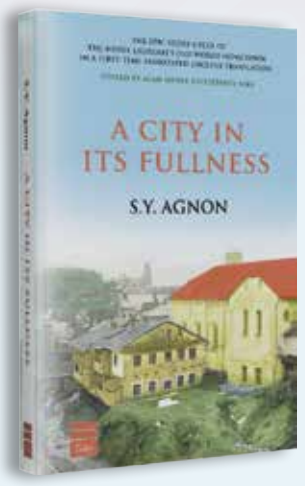


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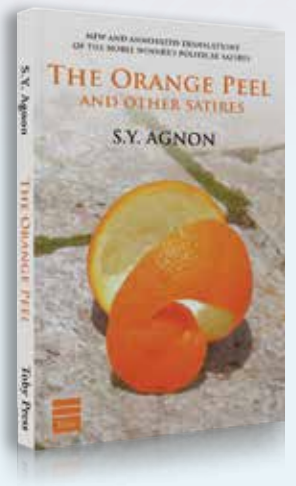
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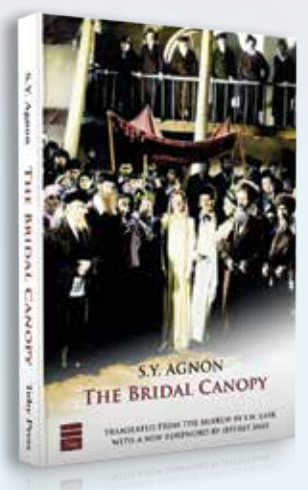




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Existential Presences and Slippery Slopes

Leora Batnitzky's feature essay on Michael Wyschogrod ("Michael Wyschogrod and the Challenge of God's Scandalous Love," Spring 2016) is on the whole as engaging as it is illumining. One might question, however, whether it makes sense to associate Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* with the move of Buber and Wyschogrod to "prioritize existential presence, or being-there (*Dasein*), over ontological essence (*Sein*)." Heidegger is most famous for identifying *human* being as *Dasein*, hardly the meaning Buber and Rosenzweig could have had in mind when they translated as "*Ich werde dasein*" the Hebrew "*eheye*" in Exodus 3:14. Moreover, the passage quoted leaves one with the impression (quite mistaken) that one could associate Heidegger's ontological notion of *Sein* with "essence," *Wesen*, in any traditional sense. Further, human being-there for Heidegger is marked, in the first instance, by an existential "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*), as being "thrown" into its "there." How could one square such an idea with the God who speaks to Moses from the burning bush? One might add that the thrownness that fundamentally distinguishes Heideggerian *Dasein* hardly applies to Moses, who out of intellectual curiosity freely approaches the burning bush and who is first addressed by God on account of that free initiative (Ex. 3:4). We perhaps more aptly cast as "*Hiersein*" the existential presence that characterizes the Moses of the initial speech-act ("*hineini*") in response to the divine call.

Phillip Stambovsky
New Haven, Connecticut

Heartfelt thanks to Leora Batnitzky for her considered, thoughtful, and instructive tribute to Michael Wyschogrod as Jewish theologian. Her essay illuminates the problematic of Wyschogrod as an important starting place for ongoing reflection.

I agree that Wyschogrod's God is more biblical than rabbinic and that his stress of God's favoritism with regard to Jews is a provocative way of presenting divine love as personal. But I don't agree that Wyschogrod struck that posture as a literary "provocation." He genuinely thought and held that being Jewish is what you *are*, not what you believe or do. Circumcision is, for the one undergoing it, not a deed or a belief. It's a mark in the flesh that precedes choice. Wyschogrod thought that, when God set aside a people for His purposes, He didn't want to take the chance of letting God's election depend on their cognitions. It was in that spirit that Wyschogrod wrote to Cardinal Lustiger—not urging him to abandon his Christian *beliefs*—only to remind him that, being Jewish by birth, the obligation of kashrut still obtained for him. In the same stubborn (if you will, eccentric) conviction, he brought it about that the body of a deceased Jew was reinterred in a Jewish cemetery. Whatever that was about, it wasn't about *style*.

Professor Batnitzky construes Wyschogrod's bypass of rabbinic mediation to mean that Wyschogrod opted for the Protestant alternative of *sola scriptura*. That would impute to Wyschogrod the view that God is reached exclusively through mediation by text, just a different text. Not so. When Wyschogrod deplored the "ossification" of spirituality in Jewish orthodoxy, and looked rather for the Jewish spirit to live expressively in novels and the other arts, what he looked for was divine inspiration, coming to the writer or artist direct and unmediated.

The last time I met Michael, I told him that I had some questions to ask him about theology. As we talked, I mentioned that I had come to a point in my life where I felt more able than previously to get guidance in prayer. Rather than look puzzled or incredulous, he merely said, "Then what do you need *me* for?" I asked him what he thought of the rabbinic view that prophecy has died out of Israel. He said they were simply recording an empirical/historical fact, not postulating a principle. Still pressing the



point, I asked him whether he himself thought that God had stopped communicating with us in the present era. He smiled. "Do you mean, has God retired and moved to Florida?" He didn't think I was asking whether *the Bible* had retired and moved to Florida.

Lastly, Professor Batnitzky sees a "danger" in Wyschogrod's claim that God is present in the body of the people of the covenant. Here one must read *The Body of Faith* with the principle of charity. The farthest thing from Wyschogrod's mind would have been to regard real-life Jews idolatrously. He noted the unusual reiteration, in our sacred history, of the fact that we took the Promised Land from its previous inhabitants by force of arms and that the land was bestowed conditionally. He viewed the rebirth of Israel with religious anxiety, because he saw it as conferred on the Jewish people now under the same conditional title that had held in biblical times.

The "logic" of any view can be taken as a prompt for the slide down the slippery slope to absurdity. Wyschogrod was a modest, charitable, and self-disciplined man of sober realism. He was far from taking Jews in their historical reality to be identical with the divine, in whole or in part.

Abigail L. Rosenthal
Professor of Philosophy Emerita
Brooklyn College of The City University of New York

Leora Batnitzky Responds:

It would take several volumes to elucidate the similarities and, as Phillip Stambovsky, points out, the profound differences between Heidegger, Wyschogrod, Buber, and Rosenzweig. My point was not to conflate them. Rather, in gesturing toward an affinity between Heideggerian *Dasein* and Wyschogrod, Buber, and Rosenzweig's respective notions of existential presence I was pointing to some of the ways in which these three Jewish thinkers all challenge rationalist notions of God as well as of human freedom. In doing so, all three make a point of affirming biblical anthropomorphism and thereby risk (but also resist) reducing any notion of divine transcendence to human existence. Noting that Heidegger identifies human being with *Dasein* does not disqualify this basic point.

I agree with Abigail Rosenthal that authors deserve to be read charitably. As I tried to make clear, Wyschogrod remains a powerful and important Jewish thinker. But I also think that it is a sign of intellectual respect to take an author's arguments seriously enough to think them through in ways in which an author may not have. As I wrote, Wyschogrod would and did want to resist some of the conclusions I draw about his thought. But wanting to resist particular conclusions is different from making arguments as to why such conclusions should not be reached. Unfortunately, I don't think Wyschogrod's thought has the resources to make these arguments.

A Pesca con Groucho

For a decidedly less analytical albeit funnier approach than Lee Siegel's *Groucho Marx: A Comedy of Existence* ("Jews on the Loose," Spring 2016)—although, well, who's to say?—a version of Groucho's existence exists that includes his *very being* being thrown out of hotels from West Virginia to Wyoming, check out his friend Irving Brecher's memoir, *The Wicked Wit of the West*. (The title was Groucho's non-chthonical nickname for Brecher.) Irv supplied funny lines for his pal in *Go West* and *At the Circus*. The book's title was changed by the Italian publisher to *A Pesca con Groucho* due to a fishing trip the two men took just before Julius Marx landed the *You Bet Your Life* gig that paid for the rest of his, um, existence.

Name Withheld
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

Groucho v. Schoenberg

Mitchell Cohen asks, "What was new in Schoenberg's music?" ("A Dissonant Moses in Paris and Berlin," Spring 2016) It seems to me that the answer is that by rejecting "traditional grammar" of musical language Schoenberg became musically antinomial at the same time that by converting to Lutheranism he became a Jewish antinomian. It is striking that he returned to the Jewish religion in which laws are meant to be observed and not broken, even though he never abandoned his musical antinomianism.

It is also curious that in this issue of the *Jewish Review of Books* Joseph Epstein in his article on Groucho ("Jews on the Loose") rightly points out that it is wrong to ascribe antinomianism to the Marx Brothers. I think he is correct, but the glove fits with respect to Schoenberg's music.

Gershon Hepner
via email

Correction: On page 6 of "Michael Wyschogrod and the Challenge of God's Scandalous Love," the word "not" was unintentionally omitted from a sentence. The sentence should have read, "In Wyschogrod's words, Judaism 'does not hear this [Christian] story, because the Word of God as it hears it does not tell it and because Jewish faith does not testify to it.'" We regret the error.

Kibitzing in God's Country

BY NEAL GABLER

The Catskills: Its History and How It Changed America
by Stephen M. Silverman and Raphael D. Silver
Alfred A. Knopf, 464 pp., $45

Summer Haven: The Catskills, the Holocaust, and the Literary Imagination
edited by Holli Levitsky and Phil Brown
Academic Studies Press, 416 pp., $69

The Borscht Belt: Revisiting the Remains of America's Jewish Vacationland
by Marisa Scheinfeld, with essays by Stefan Kanfer and Jenna Weissman Joselit
Cornell University Press, 200 pp., $29.95

Mention the Catskills to any Jew of a certain generation and what immediately comes to mind is the "Borscht Belt"—the string of elegant, oversized resorts, basically all-inclusive compounds, in upstate New York where, for decades, Jews from the Eastern Seaboard spent their summers swimming and basting in the sun; playing canasta, shuffleboard, bingo, canasta, mah jongg, and "Simon Sez"; laughing at fresh young comics and some famous older ones (and not laughing too); being tickled by *tummlers* who roamed the premises to provide mischief and fun lest the guests find themselves bored for an instant; occasionally seeking romance; and three times a day, without fail, eating—above all, eating, lots and lots of eating. "Jews ate like Vikings," remembered Billy Crystal.

The famous Catskills fortresses—Kutsher's, The Concord, and Grossinger's heading the list—were, in novelist Mordecai Richler's words "Disneyland with knishes" and in Damon Runyon's "Lindy's with trees," which meant that they weren't just fancy resorts in the mountains. They were quintessentially *Jewish* resorts—of, by, and for Jews. This is the Catskills of *Marjorie Morningstar*, *Dirty Dancing*, and of Stefan Kanfer's boisterous, bawdy, and ultimately wistful history, *A Summer World.* It is the Catskills where so much of Jewish entertainment was born and where so much of the American Jewish experience was defined.

It may come as a surprise, then, that there is an entirely different Catskills, the one described in Stephen Silverman's and Raphael Silver's encyclopedic new book simply titled *The Catskills.* Yes, the Borscht Belt is there, but it is not center stage, just one tableau in a long set of tableaux. The story Silverman and the late Silver (who produced the films *Hester Street* and *Crossing Delancey,* both directed by his wife, Joan Micklin Silver) tell is the story of a pristine wilderness, God's setting, along the river named after its discoverer, Henry Hudson, who aptly enough found it while searching for the Northwest Passage to the Orient, and of man's attempted conquest of that wilderness.

Jews didn't play much of a role in this contest until much, much later in the Catskills' history. In the beginning, a land-speculating Dutchman named Johannes Hardenbergh got a grant from the British in 1708 for two million acres. (The name Catskills means cat creek in Dutch and may have had something to do with the mountain lions that roamed the forests at the time.) Over the following 200 years, the Catskills became America's "first national landscape," even as its natural riches were serially plundered. In telling this story, Silverman and Silver introduce a gallery of eccentrics: Zadock Pratt, who, in the 1820s, discovered that the bark of the Catskills' plentiful hemlock trees was useful for tanning hides and denuded the forests while making the area a capital for tanning; "Bluestone King" John Fletcher Kilgour, who quarried the bluestone for pavement and construction, but wound up penniless; Undersheriff Osman "Bud" Steele, who was murdered trying to put down an anti-rent protest by angry, exploited tenant farmers; multimillionaire Jay Gould, who opened the area to the railroads; and gangsters like "Dutch" Schultz, who, according to a legend sparked by his dying words ("Wonder who owns these woods? . . . he'll never know what's hidden in 'em . . . My gilt-edged stuff . . . What did that guy shoot me for?") allegedly left a fortune buried in the Catskills.

The Catskills became America's "first national landscape," even as its natural riches were serially plundered.

It was Catskills resident Washington Irving who, in stories such as "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," imputed to the mountains a magical romance, and America's first great novelist, James Fenimore Cooper, who, in his *Leatherstocking Tales*, celebrated the untouched wilderness, invoking a time before the Catskills were corrupted by intruders. For them, the Catskills represented what was best about this young country—its beautiful, awe-inspiring, primeval rawness. And if this gently mountainous land was our first national landscape, it was also, because of that, a place where America first became America—a place that defined us as both rustic and reverential.

Perhaps nowhere is this more in evidence than in the magnificent and magnificently large Hudson River School paintings of Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, and Frederic Church, men whose canvases functioned in their day the way blockbuster movies do in ours. People actually paid to see these cinemascopic paintings that gave testimony to the verdant lushness of the Catskills and to its providential glory. In these lush landscapes, man was always subordinate, both literally and figuratively. He was a small dot dwarfed by nature. Cole's great five-painting series from the 1830s, *The Course of Empire*, which depicts one landscape through history, illustrates what happens when man asserts himself against nature. What happens is destruction and desolation.



The Arcadian or Pastoral State, ***the second painting in*** **The Course of Empire** ***by Thomas Cole, 1834. Note the size of the human figures in relation to the landscape. (Courtesy of the New York Historical Society.)***

The Jews who came to the Catskills didn't fit neatly into this schema. They didn't want to ruin nature, but they didn't exactly come to commune with it either. There had been Jewish farmers in the Catskills from the 1770s, though it was an improbably difficult place to raise crops. A Jewish agricultural community in Ulster County in the 1830s lasted only five years. (One feels a Borscht Belt joke coming, but Henny Youngman and his colleagues didn't do history.) By the last quarter of the century, farming had faded, and the Catskills had become a recreation retreat with monumentally large hotels perched on the mountainsides and a railroad disgorging guests directly from New York City.

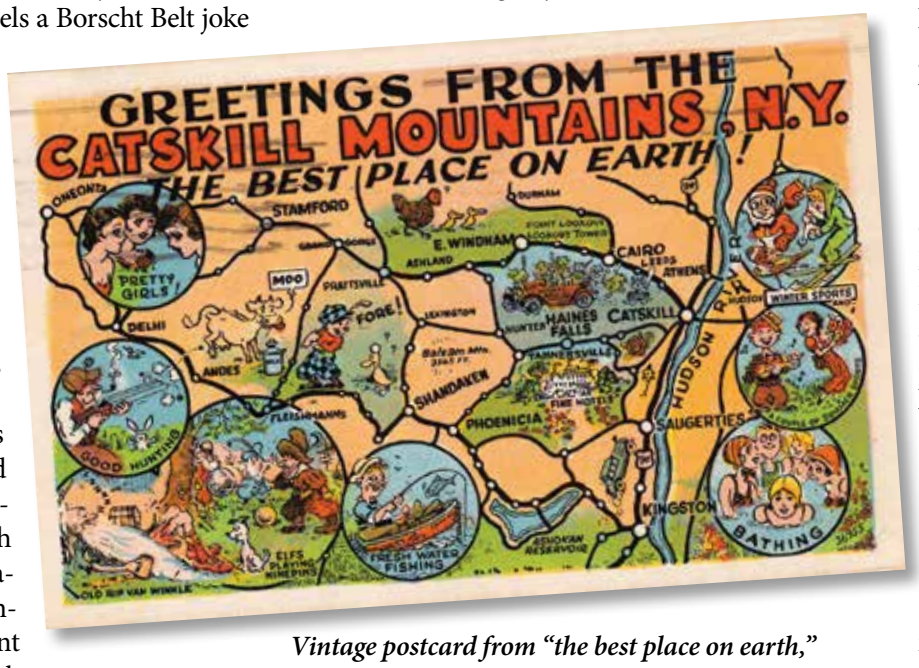
But not Jews. The hotels were restricted—so restricted that in 1877 even the prominent Jewish banker Joseph Seligman, a peer of John Jacob Astor and Andrew Carnegie, and a friend of President Grant, was denied a room at the Grand Union Hotel, on the edge of the Catskills in Saratoga Springs. He wrote an indignant letter to the hotel's owner, and their exchange was picked up by newspapers across the country, triggering a brief national debate on anti-Semitism. It was a debate the Jews lost. If Gentiles were going to God's country to relax, the last thing they seemed to want was to have communicants with the God of the Old Testament there with them.

When Selig Grossinger, a Galician immigrant with a fourth-grade education who had failed at everything at which he had tried his hand, came to the Catskills in the 1910s, he had no intention of opening a hotel for Jews. Not heeding the warnings of history, he bought a farm in Sullivan County. After failing yet again, he converted his farm into a boarding house catering to Eastern European Jewish immigrants from New York City. Usually they stayed either at boarding houses or at what were called *kuchalayn,* where one cooked one's own food in bare rooms with few amenities, aside from the beauty of the outdoors.

Grossinger's evolved into something very different, both from the *kuchalayn* and from the Gentile resorts. Run by Selig's daughter, Jennie, who would become the grande dame of the Borscht Belt by recognizing that Jews enjoyed opulence no less than Gentiles, Grossinger's was somewhat overwrought in the American-Jewish tradition of too-muchness, where more was always more. It had tennis courts, an 18-hole golf course, a 400-seat dining room, and a theater. But, as Silverman and Silver describe it, that didn't seem sufficient, so Grossinger's kept growing and adding: a newspaper, a fire department, a shul, a riding academy, a ski slope, a post office, and, perhaps the pièce de résistance, an airfield.

Belying its Jewish grandiosity, however, was its *gemütlich* atmosphere, which was also prototypically Jewish. By contrast, Silverman and Silver quote historian Samantha Hope Goldstein on 19th-century Gentile activities in the Catskills: "sketching, writing poetry, strolling . . . and other focused activities which emphasized a refined passivity," which she attributed to the old Hudson School idea that a visitor there was a "vessel to receive the greatness of God through His landscapes." The Gentiles came to the Catskills to glory in nature; the Jews came for something else. For them, the Catskills were not nature idealized; it was Jewish family life idealized, which is why it was no coincidence that the two greatest Jewish resorts, Grossinger's and its rival, The Concord, were run by women, basically Jewish mothers fussing and tut-tutting over their guests. More, for Jews, the Catskills resorts weren't only an escape from the crowded city; they were also an escape *into*—into the Jewish community of friends and relatives, many of whom would return year after year after year, underscoring the sense of family on which these resorts were predicated. At Grossinger's, The Concord, and Kutsher's, Jews didn't dissolve their identities into some Whitmanian universal; they asserted it. And for Jews, the last thing they desired was passivity—the Jewish resorts positively buzzed with activity.

As for the God thing, Jews were different from Gentiles there too. For the Gentiles, vacating to the Catskills was all about reverence. Jews were no less religious; the kitchens were, after all, kosher. But they *were* less reverent. And maybe that's where the humor came in. Perhaps, humor was to Jews what gazing upon nature was to Gentiles: a reckoning with God.



Vintage postcard from "the best place on earth," ca. 1950s–1960s.



Jennie Grossinger with Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher at Grossinger's Catskill Resort Hotel, mid-1950s.



Bellboy Wilt Chamberlain, at Kutsher's Hotel and Country Club, ca. 1954. (Courtesy of Mark Kutsher.)

As much as anything, the Borscht Belt would become known for the great comedians and comic writers who interned there—among them, Danny Kaye, Phil Silvers, Jerry Lewis, Don Rickles, Red Buttons, Alan King, Sid Caesar, Mel Brooks, and, in later years, Andy Kaufman and Jerry Seinfeld. In short, where Gentiles communed, Jews laughed. Humor was self-protection, negotiation, and balm. You kibitzed with everybody, including God. You had to.

As one old joke goes, a Jew is walking in the forest and, feeling the spirit of God, begins to speak to Him. "God, are you there?" And God says, "Yes my son, I am here." So the man, in a philosophical mood, says, "God, what is a million years to you?" And God replies, "Well, my son, your million years is like a second to me." The man lets that sink in. Then he looks to the sky and says, "God, what is a million dollars to you?" And God replies, "My son, your million dollars is less than a penny to me. It means nothing to me." So the man thinks a moment, then looks up to the sky and says, "God, can I have a million dollars?" And God replies, "In a second."

Not everyone appreciated this kind of thing. In his novel *Enemies: A Love Story,* set partly in the Catskills, Isaac Bashevis Singer has his protagonist ask, "Why is it all so painful to me? The vulgarity in this casino denied the sense of creation. It shamed the agony of the Holocaust." Singer compared the refugees from Nazism who had flocked to the Catskills shortly after the war to moths "attracted by the bright lights, deceived

by a false day," eventually dying by beating themselves against a wall or singeing themselves on light bulbs.

He wasn't entirely wrong. It is hard to square the noisy, voluptuary, funny Catskills with the Holocaust, and easy to see it as a kind of willful refutation of Jewish suffering. "It's so peaceful here at night," Art Spiegelman says in *Maus* of the Catskills, "It's almost impossible to believe Auschwitz ever happened." To the Singers of the world, it didn't matter that, in some measure, this was one of the points of the Jewish Catskills: There was no time for reflection there and no desire for it.

With the rise of assimilation, the need for a mini-Jerusalem, a Jewish refuge, was obviated.

Phil Brown, in an essay in an anthology he co-edited with Holli Levitsky titled *Summer Haven: The Catskills, the Holocaust, and the Literary Imagination,* calls the dissonance between American Jews' summer pleasure and the recent mass extermination of their European cousins a "horrific contradiction," though it was also, in some ways, cause and effect. Obviously, the great Jewish resorts pre-dated the Holocaust. But the so-called Golden Era of those resorts was the 1950s and 1960s, *after* the Holocaust. And while the Holocaust made no overt mark on the resorts, it did serve as subtext. As the cliché goes, you laughed so you wouldn't cry, you played so you didn't have to contemplate, you gorged to compensate for the European Jews who couldn't, and you occupied yourself so you wouldn't have to remember. Brown calls the Catskills a "mini-Jerusalem" where Jews could be Jews. But clearly it was a Jerusalem without grief.

The Borscht Belt wouldn't last. In part it was a casualty of the very thing that had helped create it. As restricted hotels declined, so did the need for unrestricted ones. At their height, there were some 2,000 hotels in the Catskills. With the rise of assimilation, the need for a mini-Jerusalem, a Jewish refuge, was obviated. Grossinger's closed in 1982 and was demolished in 1986; The Concord lasted until 1998. Kutsher's, where Wilt Chamberlain had once been a bellboy, outlasted them all, but it finally closed in 2013 to be converted into a yoga retreat. There was still a Jewish presence in the Catskills after the resorts' demise. Now, however, it was Hasidim who replaced the secular Jews by buying up some of the old resorts and bungalow colonies, and bringing Yiddish (and a very different kind of *Yiddishkeit*) to the Catskills.





Top: Coffee shop, Grossinger's Catskill Resort Hotel, Liberty, NY. Bottom: Outdoor pool, Vegetarian Hotel, Woodridge, NY. (Courtesy of Marisa Scheinfeld.)

But the ghosts remain. Photographer Marisa Scheinfeld has documented the end of the great resorts in *The Borscht Belt: Revisiting the Remains of America's Jewish Vacationland*, which features page after page of photos of waterless, cracking pools, dirt-caked floors, weathered and withered wooden cottages, gashed ceilings and gushing insulation, graffiti-bedecked walls, rows of bereft beach chairs, and, perhaps above all, emptiness where there had once been fullness. Scheinfeld's photos remind one of the old Catskills' theme of nature despoiled, a contemporary counterpart to the desolate final painting in Cole's *The Course of Empire*.

It is hard to imagine a place once so overstuffed with life now so devoid of it. Scheinfeld's photos are images of desolation, and one feels the urge to mourn the loss of these "mini-Jerusalems," but perhaps that wouldn't quite be in the Grossinger's spirit. As Silver and Silverman inform us, when it finally came time to demolish the great resort's playhouse, Eddie Fisher, who had debuted there, pushed the plunger—an old relic dynamiting an even older relic. It feels like the kind of black irony his Borscht Belt colleagues and audiences would have appreciated.



A Hasidic family out for a walk, Woodbourne, NY. (Courtesy of Eli Wohl.)

Neal Gabler is the author of Barbra Streisand: Redefining Beauty, Femininity, and Power *(Yale University Press) and four previous books on the history of American entertainment and celebrity culture, including* An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood. *He teaches at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and is currently working on a biography of Senator Edward Kennedy.*

Passport Sepharad

BY SARAH ABREVAYA STEIN

Last year, the legislatures of both Spain and Portugal passed laws encouraging Sephardi Jews to become citizens. To qualify they have to show that their ancestors were either among those expelled at the end of the 15th century or those who fled the Inquisition in the centuries after. Both countries are, of course, trying to make amends for old wrongs, and—this being politics—get multicultural credit and perhaps even some economic benefit for doing so. (The two countries are near bankruptcy.) Thousands of Sephardim in the United States, Turkey, Israel, and beyond have responded eagerly to the offers. Many, especially the Americans, have done so out of an abstract sense of historical justice or for the sheer novelty of having a second passport. Others, especially the Israeli and Turkish Jews, see Portuguese or Spanish citizenship as a shortcut to EU citizenship (which, indeed, it can be), a valuable commodity whether they intend to live on Iberian soil or not.

Although this story has received a fair amount of coverage, few have noted the way in which these new offers of citizenship tap into the long, rich, and complicated history of dubious passports, desperate backup plans, and extraterritorial dreams that has been central to Sephardi life for centuries. One thinks, for instance, of André Aciman's Uncle Vili in his brilliant memoir *Out of Egypt*. Uncle Vili became Italian "the way most Jews in Turkey did: by claiming ancestral ties to Leghorn, a port city near Pisa where escaped Jews from Spain had settled in the sixteenth century." As Aciman memorably depicts him, Vili was a serial fabulist who served heroically in both the Prussian and Italian armies in World War I, worked as a spy for Great Britain in World War II, and, as a proud son of Alexandria, served as the auctioneer for deposed King Farouk's property while living in a Georgian estate in Surrey under the name Dr. H.M. Spingarn, which was the name of an Englishman he had met as a child in Constantinople.

Vili's story is fantastic. Still, it resonated with me as I conducted research in the archives of foreign ministries, consulates, private families, and Jewish philanthropies from Algiers to Vienna, Geneva to Tel Aviv, Lisbon to London, and Rio de Janeiro to Rome. Throughout the urban centers of the modern Mediterranean and Middle East, Jews have sought the legal papers, and protection, of foreign countries. In many cases, they never lived in the country whose papers they held, nor did they intend to. For instance, some self-proclaimed Bayonnese Jews were Sephardim whose families had lived in the Ottoman Empire for generations, even centuries, yet managed to come under the protection of the French Republic in the early 20th century based on a tenuous, unverifiable connection to the *conversos* who had settled in Bayonne after fleeing the Iberian Peninsula in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Thus, during World War I, the French foreign ministry suddenly found itself accountable for inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, with which it was at war.

Some extraterritorial Jews were able to pass on their "foreign" status to children and grandchildren who themselves lived outside the Mediterranean region. Thus, one finds a Baghdad-born Jewish man in the 1920s who lived in Shanghai and held British papers inherited from a father who had received them a generation earlier in Calcutta and an Ottoman-born Jewish woman who lived all of her adult life in Brazil under the legal auspices of Portugal, a country on whose soil she had never stepped.

Austro-Hungarian diplomats agitated for the transformation of Salonica into a free and neutral international city headed by a Jewish mayor.

The pursuit of extraterritorial Sephardi subjects by the states of Europe, and Spain and Portugal in particular, is not new either. When the Ottoman Empire lost the port city of Salonica (now Thessaloniki), to Greece in the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), it still had the single largest Jewish mercantile population in southeastern Europe. Some 61,439 of the city's 157,889 inhabitants were Jewish, most of them Ladino-speaking Sephardim whose ancestors had arrived in the Ottoman Empire in the century following the Spanish Expulsion. So many Sephardi exiles settled in Salonica that it was one of the only European cities with a clear Jewish majority. In the course of the fighting, and in the face of anti-Jewish (and Muslim) violence, Jews were led to fear that Greek rule would be accompanied by a rise in anti-Semitism, and they began emigrating in rapidly increasing numbers. In the interim period between the Greek occupation of Ottoman Salonica in October of 1912 and the formal designation of the city as Greek, with the Treaty of Bucharest, in August of 1913, many Jews rushed to acquire the protection of European powers, in the hope that foreign papers would provide a measure of political security. Fortunately for them Spain, Portugal, and Austria-Hungary were eager to sign them up as protégés, or protected subjects.



The Salem family of Salonica in front of their home in the wealthy suburb of La Campagnas, 1899. (Courtesy of the Manchester Jewish Museum Archive.)

From the Spanish and Portuguese perspective, Sephardi Jewish protégés were a vehicle of colonial ambition. On the Spanish side, these ambitions had been voiced some years earlier by Ángel Pulido Fernández, a physician, anthropologist, and Spanish senator. Senator Pulido's campaign centered upon the idea that Spain should reintegrate the Jews it had long ago "hemorrhaged" in order to help restore the commercial and cultural might it had lost more recently, when Spain relinquished the remains of its overseas empire in 1898, after the Spanish-American War. This claim informed not only Spain's policies toward Ottoman- and Moroccan-born Jews, but toward those of other countries in years to come. In Salonica, Pulido's dreams took tangible form. In November of 1912, in a letter to the president of the Paris-based international organization Alliance Israélite Universelle, the Spanish consul in Salonica extended protection to all Jews who "spoke Spanish and were of Spanish origin, whom modern Spain recognized as her sons." By the end of 1913, the Spanish consul in Salonica had registered as Spanish subjects 175 Salonican Jewish men on behalf of their families, representing roughly 850 souls.

For reasons of its own, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy joined the action. In 1883, the Habsburg monarchy had secured the right to connect Vienna to Salonica by railroad, affording the empire a coveted outlet to the Aegean Sea and the promise of

greater economic influence in the Balkans. Since these ambitions would be thwarted if Salonica fell into Greek or Bulgarian hands, Austro-Hungarian diplomats agitated for the transformation of Salonica into a free and neutral international city headed by a Jewish mayor. Simultaneously, the empire's consular representatives encouraged Salonican Jews to apply to become Austro-Hungarian subjects. Beginning in the spring of 1913, the consulate registered approximately two-and-a-half times as many Sephardi men and their families as protected subjects as Spain had.



Caricature of Dr. Ángel Pulido Fernández, from a 19th-century satirical magazine. (Courtesy of the Royal Academy of Medicine, Madrid.)

While all of this was happening in Salonica, the Portuguese parliament in Lisbon was debating an ambitious proposal to allow the massive settlement of Eastern European Jews in Angola. This plan, which was widely covered in the Ladino and French-language press of southeastern Europe, was inspired by the assumption that an influx of Eastern European Jewish immigrants would provide Portugal with a middle-class settler population to further its colonial ambitions. The proposal was ratified by a wide margin in June of 1913.

Portugal's representatives in Istanbul and Salonica seized the opportunity. In Istanbul, Consul Mesquita began registering Ottoman-born Jewish subjects as Portuguese. At roughly the same time, Portugal's honorary consul in Salonica, Jacques Missir, began registering select Salonican Jews as Portuguese subjects. The early months of 1913 found Consul Mesquita strenuously advocating the systematic addition of Salonican Jews to Portugal's registration rolls—not simply as protégés, but as citizens. This tactic was in direct violation of the mandate of the Portuguese foreign minister, who had only granted his consuls in Istanbul and Salonica authority to approve "provisional registrations" for local Jews. Over the ensuing four months, the Portuguese consul in Salonica, Salomão Arditti (himself a Jew), registered 500 Jewish families as Portuguese subjects. So vigorous were Arditti's efforts that he bought new printing presses just to produce passports. Portugal's general director of administrative services described the machines as "magnificent in comparison with those of other consulates." A typical passport embossed on Arditti's press shows a young man nattily dressed, sporting a handlebar moustache, a polka dotted tie, and a carefully waved hairline, his expression cocky beyond what time or circumstance might dictate.

As it turned out, Arditti's professionalism in producing passports provoked decades of confusion for paper holders and Portuguese state representatives alike. A handsome provisional passport, after all, could easily be mistaken for its permanent equivalent. Some Jewish families registered in 1913, unsure of the legal value of the papers they held—or, possibly, intent on maximizing their worth—found themselves commencing a decades-long bureaucratic dance with Portuguese officials. Thus, Mair de Botton (descendant of one of Salonica's most distinguished rabbinic families) and at least 11 of his children registered in Salonica as Portuguese subjects. Over subsequent years and migrations, the family leveraged these registrations into other forms of official recognition. Mair de Botton's children and at least four of their spouses were granted Portuguese passports from the consuls of Istanbul, Milan, Barcelona, and Rio de Janeiro; a brother obtained citizenship from the consul in Rome for his new wife, a French citizen who had become denaturalized upon her marriage to a foreign man. All told, the de Bottons appealed to no fewer than seven Portuguese consuls over a period of two decades.



Signs designating historical landmarks in the province of Toledo, Spain, top, and bottom, the Patio of the Inquisition in Coimbra, Portugal. (Photo, bottom, by S. Lederhendler, courtesy of Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.)

The story of Salonica's Jewish, Ottoman-born, foreign protégés did not end once the city became a part of the Greek state. In fact, it only became more complex with the passage of time and as the protégés themselves became more and more distant from the social context that rendered them "Austro-Hungarian," "Portuguese," or "Spanish." Greece made every effort to impose Greek nationality on its so-called foreign citizens and to conscript their male youth in times of war. But individual women and men, and the Jewish community as a whole, proved immensely inventive in using the papers they had acquired or inherited. As late as the Second World War, possession of foreign papers could mean the difference between life and death, though they did not always help, since being an extraterritorial Jew could also render one extraordinarily vulnerable.

What became of the Salonican Jews who held foreign papers during World War II? When the Nazi occupation forces arrived in April 1941, about 50,000 Jews were still living in Salonica, virtually all of whom were deported to Auschwitz in 1943 and murdered there. When the deportations began, in early February of 1943, there were 860 Jews registered as foreign nationals still living in the city, including 511 Jews with Spanish papers, 281 with Italian citizenship, and six with Portuguese citizenship (most who had any sort of papers at all had already fled to France or Italy). Even as their genocidal plans were unfolding, German authorities were determined to avoid alienating neutral and allied nations, and therefore granted them the opportunity to "repatriate" foreign nationals from areas under German control. German and Spanish authorities began a back-and-forth over the future of the Spanish Jews in Nazi hands, which is agonizing to read even now. As Spain vacillated, Germany prepared to send Salonica's Spanish Jews to Bergen-Belsen. At the last moment, Spain's diplomat in Salonica, Sebastián de Romero Radigales, arranged for 150 Spanish nationals to flee Salonica for Athens (where they would later fall, again, under German rule). The remaining Spanish Jews of the city were forced onto trains. With this deportation, Salonica was rendered all but devoid of Jews. It would take six months for Spain to iron out an agreement accepting these 150 Jews as "repatriates," after which they were "repatriated" with a degree of fanfare that arguably exceeded the circumstances.

Portugal was also slow and selective in opening its doors to its protégés from Salonica. While Prime Minister Salazar's government granted entry to Jews from Hungary, the Netherlands, and Vichy France by labeling them "Portuguese," it rejected the mandate set in 1912–1913 by the young Portuguese Republic, denying petitions from documented "Portuguese" Jews in Greece until nearly the end of the conflict.

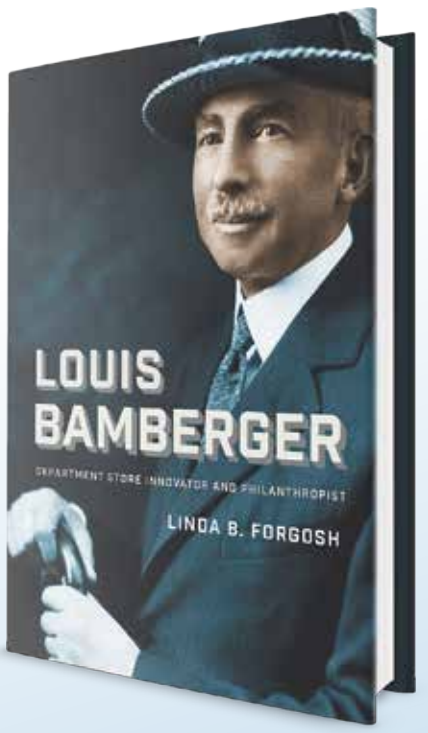
Some perished in the Nazi death camps as a result of Salazar's inflexibility, including the Benveniste family from Kavalla. In March of 1943, Saloman and Flora Benveniste, together with their son Moise and his wife Lucie, were taken from Kavalla to Bulgaria's Gorna-Dzhumaya transit camp and from there (under the oversight of Bulgarian authority) by train to Lom, a port city on the Danube River. Even as this horrific journey was underway, a family member in Lisbon notified the Red Cross in Geneva of the Benvenistes' plight. The Red Cross contacted Portuguese representatives in Switzerland, warning them (incorrectly, as it

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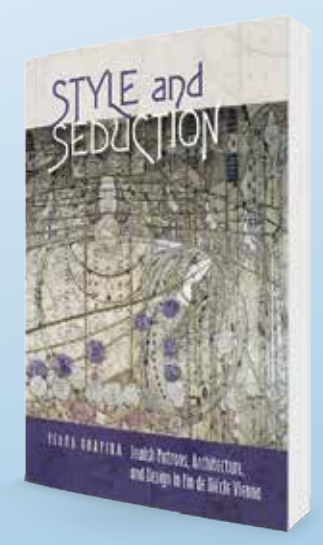




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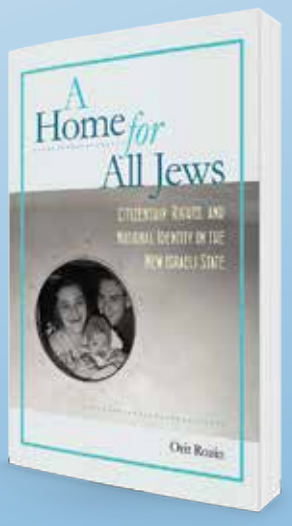
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turns out) that the family was soon to be sent to Upper Silesia, that is Auschwitz. The Portuguese representatives inquired into the Benvenistes' family history, but the information they gathered was not enough for Foreign Minister Eduardo Vieira Leitão. Unmoved by the fact that they were, in the words of the Portuguese mission in Switzerland, "Jews of Portuguese nationality" ("*israelitas, de nacionalidade portuguêsa*") or by the fact that the administration had saved other Jews with more tenuous ties to Portugal, Leitão concluded that the Benvenistes' claims to nationality were groundless. On March 18,1943, they were deported to Treblinka, where they perished.

Among the very first Jews killed on Italian soil in World War II were Jews from Salonica whose parents or grandparents had been Spanish or Portuguese protégés. Some of them had come to Italy before the war; others had fled there in the summer of 1943 with the help of an Italian official in Salonica named Lucillo Merci, who granted them papers to travel on. Five days after the armistice between the Allied forces and Italy in September of 1943, several of these families gathered in and around the town of Meina on Lake Maggiore, northwest of Milan. Alas, the region around the lake was occupied by the SS, which was on an aggressive hunt for Jews. Among those caught in their search were 20 individuals, including members of the prominent "Franko" families Fernandez Diaz, Mosseri, Torres, Nahum, Modiano, and Pompas, who had taken shelter in a hotel owned by Salonican Jewish Frankos named Alberto and Eugenia Behar. The SS confined the guests to the hotel, then, one by one, they were taken to the nearby lake, shot, and thrown into the water with stones tied around their necks.

Scholars of modern Jewish history have tended to view citizenship as a binary matter; something Jews either possessed or lacked. The story of Sephardi protégés and their descendants invites us to think of it, rather, as a spectrum. For the Mediterranean Jews who aspired to protégé status, as for the states that extended it, extraterritoriality was not simply a legal niche but a framework into which one could invest one's fears, ambitions, and dreams. It was not a status that one received passively with birth, but it wasn't one achieved by actual immigration either. It was an active legal, bureaucratic, and political achievement that required persistence, ingenuity, and luck.

Historically, as today, there were faultfinders. Jews and non-Jews criticized Sephardi extraterritoriality from a variety of perspectives—legal, xenophobic, communitarian, nationalist, Zionist, socialist, imperialist. Then, as now, the associated fees were described as overly steep, even vulgar. But despite obstacles and criticisms, over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Sephardi Jews continued to seek foreign protection. They were always in the minority, nonetheless, Sephardi Jews continued to remember and romanticize the protégé status long after the Ottoman Empire had been abolished. Indeed, the historical memory lingers among those who are tempted, for one reason or another, to claim citizenship from the countries that expelled their ancestors five centuries ago.

Sarah Abrevaya Stein holds the Maurice Amado Chair in Sephardic Studies at UCLA. Her latest book is Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century *(University of Chicago Press).*

Religion and Power

BY SHLOMO RISKIN

Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence
by Jonathan Sacks
Schocken, 320 pp., $28.95

At a time of alarming nuclear tests, terrorism, and starving, half-naked refugees seeking safety, Jonathan Sacks, the distinguished theologian and former chief rabbi of Great Britain, has written an ecumenical—yet deeply Jewish—and timely tour de force about religion and violence. *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* draws upon history, theology, psychology, evolutionary theory, and, perhaps above all, close readings of biblical texts to argue that the God of Abraham—that is to say the God not only of Judaism, but of Christianity and Islam—is, properly understood, a God of life, not death; of love, not hate; of peace, not war; and of compassion, not cruelty. Which is not to say that Sacks denies that people have attempted to justify violence in God's name.

In contrast to Hannah Arendt's famous description of the "banality" of Nazi perpetrators of the Holocaust, Sacks calls violence in the name of a sacred cause "altruistic evil." He elaborates:

> By this I do not mean the kind of behaviour that people argue over: abortion, for instance, or assisted suicide. Nor do I mean issues like the highly complex question of civilian casualties in asymmetric warfare. I mean evil of the kind that we all recognize as such. Killing the weak, the innocent, the very young and old is evil. Indiscriminate murder by terrorist attack or suicide bombing is evil. Murdering people because of their religion or race or nationality is evil [. . .] There are acts so alien to our concept of humanity that they cannot be justified on the grounds that they were the means to a great, noble or holy end.

Of course, as Sacks notes, such evil has often been committed in the name of secular causes; indeed one might say that this is the story of the 20th century. But he is no simple apologist for religion either, and his argument has several steps. In the first place, he acknowledges that religions—even his own—can and have been used to dehumanize, demonize, and scapegoat others in justification of such evil. Indeed, as he writes (the italics are his), "*The first religious act, Cain and Abel's offerings to God, leads directly to the first murder.*" And yet, he argues, the true intention of the biblical accounts of apparent divine favoritism and sibling rivalry, from Cain and Abel to Jacob and Esau and beyond, was not to suggest that Divine favor was a zero-sum game, but rather the opposite: a scriptural admonition not to commit violence in the name of God.

Judaism and Christianity have, according to Sacks, historically evolved away from justifying "altruistic evil," as they learned to thrive without the power of the state. In the Jewish case, this happened with the destruction of the Second Temple and the rabbinic accommodation to powerlessness and diaspora (a point to which I shall return); with Christianity he sees this as having happened in the wake of the early modern wars of religion:

It is clear that Sacks does not think that the problem of religious violence has been solved once and for all by Islam's older Abrahamic siblings.



Cain Killing Abel ***by Albrecht Dürer, 1511. (Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art.)***

> More gradually, but also more extensively, Western Christianity had to learn what Jews had been forced to discover in antiquity: how to survive without power [. . .] [This] suggests two hypotheses. First, no religion relinquishes power voluntarily. Second, it does so only when the adherents of a faith find themselves fighting, not the adherents of another religion, but their own fellow believers [. . .] You do not learn to disbelieve in power when you are fighting an enemy, even when you lose. You do when, with a shock of recognition, you find yourself using it against the members of your own people, your own broadly defined creed.

It is this process of internecine violence leading to religious moderation that Sacks, who is in the end an optimistic thinker, sees happening within Islam now. As he notes, "The primary victims of Islamist violence are Muslims themselves, across the dividing lines of Sunni and Shia, modernist and neo-traditionalist, moderate against radical," and so on. One terrible instance Sacks cites is of a Taliban attack on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, in which 141 people were massacred, 132 of them children.

It is clear, however, that Sacks does not think that the problem of religious violence has been solved once and for all by Islam's older Abrahamic siblings. Sacks adduces at least three reasons that religious violence remains a problem for all of us. First, and most generally, Sacks argues (and I agree) that if the 17th century was the dawn of the age of secularization, the 21st century will be one of desecularization. As he writes, the "Abrahamic monotheisms in particular offer ordinary individuals—and we are, most of us, ordinary individuals—a sense of pride and consequence" that modern secular ideologies have failed to provide. However, while Protestants and Catholics realized in the 17th century that they had to deprive religion of power in order to stop murdering each other, this reform took place at the political level, not the deep theological level at which these issues must ultimately be addressed by each religion. Consequently, even in the Abrahamic religions which have turned away from religious violence, dangerous doctrines have lain "dormant like frozen DNA," awaiting the return of religious power. As God warned a jealous Cain, "sin crouches at the door."

The primal sin for Rabbi Sacks is the identification of religion with power. Polytheism, he writes on the first page of *Not in God's Name*, "was the transcendental justification of the state," in which earthly slavery, violence, and injustice were inevitable consequences of a divine hierarchy. The use of religion for such political ends is, he argues, the essence of idolatry. "Religion," he reiterates late in the book, "seeks truth, politics deals in power." Abrahamic monotheism should be understood, then, as a profound social and theological critique of the politicization of religion. It is useful to quote Sacks at some length on this point, both because he is perhaps the great philosophical *darshan* (preacher) of our time and because I think his argument misses (or avoids) a profound point with regard to both the biblical text and the challenges we Jews face in the contemporary world.

> Not all at once but ultimately it [Judaism] made extraordinary claims. It said that every human

being, regardless of colour, culture, class or creed, was in the image and likeness of God. The supreme Power intervened in history to liberate the supremely powerless. A society is judged by the way it treats its weakest and most vulnerable members. Life is sacred. Murder is both a crime and a sin. Between people there should be a covenantal bond of righteousness and justice, mercy and compassion, forgiveness and love. Though in its early books the Hebrew Bible commanded war, within centuries its prophets, Isaiah and Micah, became the first voices to speak of peace as an ideal. A day would come, they said, when the peoples of the earth would turn their swords into ploughshares, their spears into pruning hooks, and wage war no more. According to the Hebrew Bible, Abrahamic monotheism entered the world as a rejection of imperialism and the use of force to make some men masters and others slaves.

Abraham himself, the man revered by 2.4 billion Christians, 1.6 billion Muslims and 13 million Jews, ruled no empire, commanded no army, conquered no territory, performed no miracles and delivered no prophecies.

It is impossible to refrain from applauding Rabbi Sacks's eloquent summation of the deep moral truths which Abraham, our father, and the Hebrew Bible brought into the world. And yet the final quoted sentence points to a significant blind spot in this brilliant book.

For, Rabbi Sacks's eloquence notwithstanding, in biblical fact, Abraham *was* promised an empire, or at least "a great and mighty nation," through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed; he *did* command an army, which bested the four kings and rescued their captives; he *was* the recipient, if not the performer, of miracles; and he *was* vouchsafed the prophecy of the "Covenant between the Pieces," which, in fact, promises specific territory and ultimate national victory. Finally, Abraham merits these promises of power precisely because he has kept the way of the Lord by doing "what is just and right," (Gen. 18:19) that is by acting with compassionate justice and moral righteousness.



The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek ***by Peter Paul Rubens, ca. 1625. (Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art.)***

Why does Sacks feel compelled to describe such an anemic Abraham? Although Moses Maimonides once described the patriarch as a "weak" philosophical preacher, this was precisely to underline the ultimate necessity of political action and power.

In my view, the biblical vision of the relationship between the justice required by religion and the realities of politics is more complex than a simple disjunction, in which truth and power have nothing to do with one another. I agree with Sacks that Abrahamic monotheism gave us the vision of the human being as created in the image of God. This means not only that men and women may not be violated, murdered, or enslaved, but also that they are each unique. According to a famous mishnah in Sanhedrin:

> God created Adam as one individual to teach us that whoever destroys one person, it is as if he destroyed an entire world, and whoever preserves the life of one person, it is as if he preserved the entire world [. . .] A mortal being mints many coins from one prototype and all the coins are exactly alike; the King of all Kings, the Holy one Blessed be He, minted all humans from one prototype, Adam the first, and not one person is exactly like another.

Similarly, there is a talmudic teaching in Berakhot that says, "One who sees a large gathering of Israelites,

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says, 'Praised be the Wise One of secrets', just as the minds (of human beings) are not exactly alike, so their facial features are not exactly alike." It is precisely this uniqueness that testifies to the ultimate uniqueness of the God of Abraham; the unity that is God desires to reign over and coexist with the diversity that is humanity. But none of this requires us to assent to the depoliticized and deterritorialized Abraham described by Sacks.

As careful readers of the Hebrew Bible as different as the early modern Protestant thinkers described by Eric Nelson in *The Hebrew Republic* and the *rosh yeshiva* of Volozhin, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv), have argued, there is a biblical ideal of a constitutional nation-state which is integrally related to the Abrahamic vision. Indeed, only such a political enterprise can fulfill that vision of a monotheistic community devoted to compassionate righteousness and moral justice. It is the kingship of God that underwrites human freedom and justice, but these values must be enforced and defended by human beings. In short, Sacks seems uncomfortable with an Israel that actually succeeds in its Abrahamic mission of convincing the families of the earth to accept the moral and spiritual truths of monotheism.

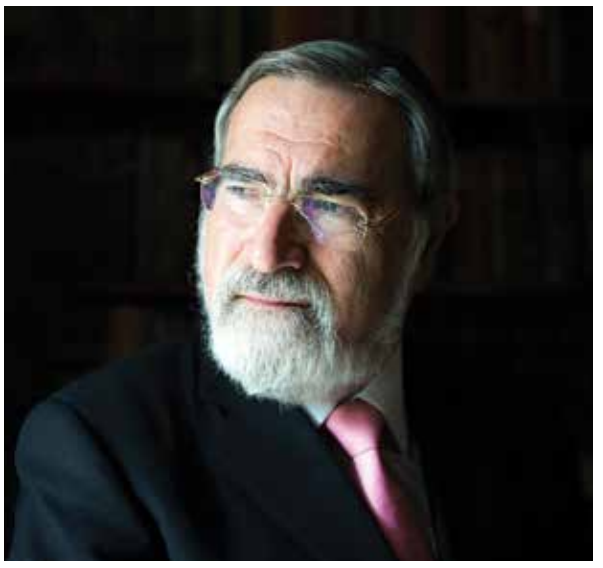
My disagreement with Rabbi Sacks crystallizes in another eloquent passage late in the book. In interpreting Moses' statement to the Israelites that, "It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going to take possession of the land," (Deut. 9:5) Sacks writes:

> A chosen people is the opposite of a master race, first, because it is not a race but a covenant; second, because it exists to serve God, not to master others. A master race worships itself; a chosen people worships something beyond itself. A master race values power; a chosen people cares for the powerless. A master race believes it has rights; a chosen people knows only that it has responsibilities. The key virtues of a master race are pride, honour and fame. The key virtue of a chosen people is responsibility.

Here again, it seems to me that in his eloquence Sacks has run beyond the biblical point, and in a direction that classical Zionist thinkers, among others, saw as dangerously misguided.

It is true that the prophet Amos declared (on behalf of God) that, "You alone [Israel] have I singled out of all the families of the earth; therefore I shall hold you to account for all your iniquities." (Amos 3:2) But a chosen people has rights as well as responsibilities—as human beings and children of God. Similarly, humility is, no doubt, a virtue, but too much of it might prevent one from insisting, as Abraham did, that everyone (even God!) must act with justice. Nor is it possible to care for the powerless while failing to value power—not as an end, but certainly as a means. Without power, how can the chosen people protect the powerless against their exploiters? And, of course, without power, how can the chosen people protect themselves?

In summing up his position, shortly after the passage just quoted, Sacks writes, "A chosen people is not a master race but its opposite: a servant community." But that is *not* how the Bible describes us. Immediately before the Ten Commandments, God addresses Israel: "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:6) The priestly mission is indeed, as the commentator Seforno explains, one of teaching the nations of the world the truths of monotheism, but this is only possible



Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. (Courtesy of Blake Ezra Photography.)

from within a kingdom, a polity. The holiness to which this enjoins us is supposed to guard against the misuse of power, but we are seen here as agents of the One Monarch, not servants but leaders working to bring about a world of compassionate righteousness and moral justice.

In this context it is worthwhile to return to Sacks's description of the sectarian Jewish violence leading to the destruction of the Second Temple. He concludes that "Out of darkness, though, sometimes comes light. What Jews discovered when they had lost almost everything else was that religion can survive without power." This comes close to idealizing the catastrophe which led not only to almost two thousand years of *galut* (exile), but to the depredations of the medieval and modern periods, and, eventually, to the Shoah—all of which demonstrated the tremendous necessity of a Jewish state. Religion may be able to survive without power, but it will be unable to redeem without power. Power may corrupt, and absolute power may corrupt absolutely, but powerlessness corrupts too, for it necessitates accommodation with, and sometimes even surrender to, evil.

We will never be able to fulfill our Abrahamic mandate to redeem the world if we remain powerless. This was the original mission of Israel, and the purpose for which we returned to Zion. Sacks writes that pluralistic liberal democracy is "the best way of instantiating the values of Abrahamic monotheism," with which I have no quarrel, but it is not clear to me that the polity he envisions is, or can be, a distinctively Jewish one. Nor is it likely to help bring a world of peace, compassionate justice, and moral righteousness.

Shlomo Riskin is the chief rabbi of Efrat and the founder and chancellor of Ohr Torah institutions, a network of high schools and colleges including a rabbinical seminary and a center for advanced halakhic studies for women. His most recent book is The Living Tree *(Maggid).*



Our Rabbis J, E, P, and D

BY ETHAN SCHWARTZ

Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition
by Benjamin D. Sommer
Yale University Press, 440 pp., $50

Near the conclusion of the Torah service, the congregation points to the Torah scroll and recites a combination of two biblical verses: "This is the Torah that Moses set before the Israelites, at the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses," neatly expressing what biblical scholar Benjamin D. Sommer calls the "stenographic theory of revelation." In his commentary to the Mishnah, Maimonides made this his eighth principle of faith: "We are to believe that the whole Torah was given to us through Moses our Teacher entirely from God" and "that it came to us through Moses, who acted like a secretary taking dictation." The authority of later Jewish law and exegesis, or "Oral Torah," is, in turn, grounded in the divine origin of this "Written Torah," which was given at Sinai.

From Spinoza on, this principle has met with widespread rejection among modern thinkers. Beginning in the 19th century, academic biblical scholars questioned whether the events described in biblical stories had actually happened and whether biblical books had been written by their purported authors. Most importantly, they developed the famous Documentary Hypothesis, proposing that the Torah as we know it was not written by Moses—if he ever existed at all—but redacted from four distinct sources: J, which speaks of God using the Tetragrammaton; E, which prefers the name *Elohim*; the priestly source, P; and the author(s) of Deuteronomy, known as D. Although this literary-historical framework has been challenged by newer and ever-more complicated theories, it remains the cornerstone of academic biblical studies.

Jewish responses to these developments have been mixed. The Orthodox establishment has largely condemned or ignored them. In contrast, non-Orthodox communities have gradually come to accept and even embrace source criticism. However, because these communities tend to place less practical emphasis on halakhic obligation, their acceptance has done little to assuage Orthodox fears that traditional Jewish law will collapse if it does not have a more or less stenographic Written Torah at its base. In *Revelation and Authority*, Sommer argues that source criticism does not diminish, and in fact bolsters, the Torah's claim to convey divine commands. An established biblical scholar, Sommer is also an observant Jew on the faculty of The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), the flagship institution of Conservative Judaism. These identities come together in the book. "I speak not only as a biblical critic or historian of ideas but also as a religious Jew," he says frankly. "My goal is not merely to describe and analyze but to defend and advocate."

Sommer regards Sinai as a real historical event of the highest significance for Jews, including himself and his readers, and he wants to show that such a view is historically and philosophically respectable. In doing so, he articulates a new (and yet, he argues, not so new) theological paradigm for restoring the Bible to a place of both authority within and continuity with Jewish tradition. At the same time, he defends and indeed demands creative interpretation of the Torah as the means of this authority's realization. For this old-new paradigm, source criticism is not part of the problem. It is an integral part of the solution.

Sommer argues that source criticism does not diminish, and in fact bolsters, the Torah's claim to convey divine commands.



Benjamin D. Sommer. (Courtesy of The Jewish Theological Seminary.)

At the heart of Sommer's project is a contrast between the stenographic theory of revelation and what he calls the "participatory" theory, which "puts a premium on human agency and gives witness to the grandeur of a God who accomplishes a providential task through the free will of human subjects under God's authority." If the stenographic theory appears traditional, then the participatory theory sounds liberal and modern. However, Sommer argues that source criticism reveals that *both* have biblical foundations.

Sommer begins by analyzing the different theologies of revelation in each of the Torah's sources. In D, he finds the clearest articulation of the stenographic theory. "It was a sound [*qol*] of words [*devarim*] that you heard" (Deut. 4:12) at Sinai, Moses reminds Israel. In other words, God proclaimed the covenant's content unambiguously to the whole people. In contrast, the E account in Exodus—on which D is based—is intentionally ambiguous. It too uses the word "*qol*," but without the qualifier "of words." Since *qol* can mean both "voice" and "sound," Sommer points out that E does not tell us whether "God answered Moses with thunder, or with a voice that spoke specific words." As premodern Jewish interpreters already realized, E raises the possibility that what happened at Sinai was a revelation not of divine *content* but of divine *presence*, which had to be rendered into words by Moses. This, Sommer argues, is the biblical kernel of the participatory theory, "encourag[ing] the audience to wonder about this issue, to think through various possibilities." The upshot is remarkable: D's stenographic approach became embedded within a canonical Torah that ultimately endorses the participatory approach precisely by offering divergent accounts of revelation. The Torah's willingness to include D's stenographic voice only sharpens its endorsement of the opposite: "a minimum of revelation and a maximum of interpretation," to use Abraham Joshua Heschel's memorable phrase.

Sommer presents Heschel and Franz Rosenzweig as the two modern theologians who did the most to develop E's proto-participatory account. Both differentiate Judaism's legal particulars from the divine command that sanctions them. Rosenzweig says that "the Lord spoke" signifies the end of revelation and the beginning of interpretation. Heschel calls the Bible a midrash on the experience of revelation. They both affirm what E implies: a revelation that was all *qol*—immediate and wordless. In this way, Sommer presents as deeply traditional two thinkers who are normally considered liberal because they prefer the participatory theory to the stenographic. This, he writes, is "the central point of this book."

Moreover, he argues—in parallel to Heschel—that this modern recovery of E's insight has rabbinic and medieval Jewish precedents. Ironically enough, one of them turns out to be Maimonides, whose apparent endorsement of the stenographic theory has become the canonical expression of Orthodox dogma. Making deft use of contemporary Maimonidean scholarship, Sommer shows that *The Guide of the Perplexed* presents Moses as an intermediary who conveyed God's transcendent voice to the rest of the people: "Know that with regard to the voice," writes the great philosopher, "too their [Israel's] rank was not equal to the rank of Moses our Master." Indeed, given Maimonides' insistence on God's utter transcendence, it makes sense that he would have doubted whether God spoke human words at all. This appears to be one of those famous cases in which Maimonides' true philosophical views were more subtle and radical than his popular dogmatic formulas.

Maimonides is hardly the only established Jewish sage to endorse (however implicitly) a participa-

tory theory of revelation. Many rabbinic *midrashim*, for instance, portray Moses interpreting, rather than merely conveying, the divine command for Israel. A poignant Hasidic tradition teaches that Israel heard only the silent *aleph* of the first word of the Ten Commandments. These post-biblical Jewish thinkers are significant for Sommer because they are not innovators but "recoverers" of E's participatory theology.

In most academic settings, one would be hard pressed to find some of these texts and thinkers mentioned in the same *book*, let alone on the same *page*. Yet as Sommer makes clear, it is precisely this kind of specialization that he resists. "[T]he boundaries that divide these fields are inappropriate—not only intellectually inappropriate but also religiously inappropriate," he writes. "Both the P writers in the Pentateuch and Abraham Joshua Heschel produced works of Torah, and it is entirely right that a student of Torah will discuss them in a single sentence." The book thus argues for and models a theological pluralism that brings together diverse Jewish voices around a shared sense of obligation to the imperative of Sinai. Sommer is doing much more than providing biblical prooftexts for both Heschel's and Rosenzweig's accounts of revelation. Rather, he is presenting the Bible as continuous with the creative human interpretation that constitutes the history of Jewish thought. He calls this a reclassification of Written Torah as Oral Torah, denying that Written Torah is a distinct category of Jewish authority.

Sommer acknowledges that this might strike even less traditional readers as radical. However, he is once again quick to mobilize evidence that his approach is not really new: Many medieval and rabbinic voices blur the boundary. In fact, this blurring goes back to the Bible's ancient Near Eastern roots: "writing in ancient Israel does not run parallel to oral tradition; rather, writing was part of a larger oral tradition in which it played subservient and limited roles." Oral Torah quite literally precedes Written Torah because Torah was oral and interpreted long before it became valorized as "the five books of Moses," or Pentateuch.

Such valorization, Sommer contends, is more Protestant than Jewish and more modern than traditional. It finds its clearest and most influential expression in the work of Brevard S. Childs, a 20th-century Protestant biblical scholar. He pioneered the method of canonical criticism, which focuses on the final redacted form of the Bible rather than its putative sources. However, this was also the approach of one of Sommer's own theological heroes, Franz Rosenzweig, who explained in an oft-cited letter:

> We too translate the Torah as one book. For us too it is the work of a single mind. We do not know who this mind was; we cannot believe that it was Moses. We name that mind among ourselves by the abbreviation with which the Higher Criticism of the Bible indicates its presumed final redactor of the text: R. We, however, take this R to stand not for redactor but for *rabbenu* ["our Rabbi"]. For whoever he was, and whatever text lay before him, he is our teacher, and his theology is our teaching.

Although neither Childs nor Rosenzweig rejected source criticism, they both insisted that religious interpreters must ultimately privilege the Pentateuch's final form. In contrast, Sommer insists that one can and should treat J, E, P, and D as teachers of Torah without regard for their canonical arrangement. He speaks of R in the plural: "*rabbotenu*"—"our rabbis."

Sommer argues that this is more consonant with traditional Jewish exegesis than one might suspect. "Midrash," he explains, "typically takes verses out of their immediate contexts and connects them with verses elsewhere to form what is in effect another text altogether." The same, he says, is true of source criticism. Both reflect Jewish prioritization of Oral Torah over the canonical boundaries of Written Torah.

This argument is intriguing but ultimately unconvincing. Midrash's fanciful disregard for context treats each biblical verse as if it were beyond time, potentially connected with every other. Source criticism, however, is strictly beholden to historical context. It cannot connect verses from J and P, or from before and after the Exile, without qualification. Furthermore, source criticism's "another text altogether" is always, and only, a reconstruction of the original source, not an imaginative new creation. The similarities between midrash and source criticism seem less important than their radically different exegetical goals and constraints.



Stained glass window depicting Mt. Sinai by Louis C. Tiffany, sanctuary of Congregation Beth Ahabah, Richmond, Virginia. (Photo by Jennifer Watson, © Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives.)

In Sommer's justifiable eagerness to prove that R is not the *only* biblical voice, he obscures R's rightful status as *one* biblical voice. After all, the redacted Pentateuch is certainly no less a work of Torah than each of its sources. Just as D's stenographic account is embedded within a Pentateuch that ultimately endorses the participatory view, shouldn't one accord the canonical Pentateuch itself, as Written Torah, a place within a tradition that ultimately conceives of all Torah as oral?

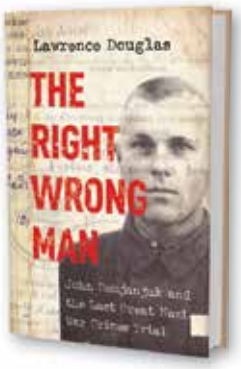
Moreover, the Torah of R is more than just *one* biblical voice alongside its sources. It is, in fact, *the* authoritative voice that has set the terms of Jewish engagement with those sources for two millennia. Although Sommer is correct that many aspects of Brevard Childs' work are irreconcilable with Jewish interpretation, the great Protestant scholar nevertheless could have been speaking of the rabbinic tradition when he wrote, "It is the full, combined text which has rendered a judgment on the shape of the tradition and which continues to exercise an authority on the community of faith." The collapsing of Written Torah into Oral Torah raises serious questions about the coherence of the concept of Oral Torah itself, which assumes a distinct, bounded Written Torah as the ultimate object of interpretation. Sommer's argument is actually much more radical and innovative than he admits—even if it is intimated in earlier sources.

Sommer opens his book with a familiar but important question: How could a divinely authored Torah enjoin so many morally horrifying commandments, such as eradicating the Canaanites? Reconceiving the Written Torah as humanly authored Oral Torah allows him to provide an answer that is in harmony with modern morality and scholarship. Human beings of particular times and places interpreted the wordless experience of revelation, and sometimes, unfortunately, their interpretations reflected the worst of those times and places. "[T]he authority behind the law in general remains fully divine," he explains, "but the specifics of any given law are human."

This brings us to the book's most pressing question. Sommer insists that "no Jewish theology can dispense" with halakhic obligation and addresses his book primarily to the observant community (broadly, rather than denominationally, construed). For Sommer, this is the community that ultimately matters: "committed Jews, in the long run, define what Judaism is. For more than two millennia, they have defined Judaism in terms of law." Jewish communities not defined by law have tended either to fail (like Sabbateanism) or to become something else (like Christianity). But if the Torah is just another flawed, finite response to the ineffable, how is it the basis of binding halakhic obligation?

Sommer argues that the question itself is misconceived. No traditional Jew would deny that rabbinic Judaism rests upon human interpretation as the way the divine command is rendered livable and legible as law. That is what rabbinic legal decision-making, *pesak halakha*, is all about. Why, then, Sommer asks, should it be so scandalous to see this at work in the Torah itself? In the book's most pivotal passage, he explains that his approach

> merely pushes the heavenly origin back by a single step. Instead of an earthly talmudic law based on a heavenly Pentateuch, the participatory theory yields an earthly talmudic law based on an earthly Pentateuch that is in turn based on a heavenly, albeit nonverbal command. In both theories, Jewish law as we practice it ultimately but imperfectly reflects a divine revelation.

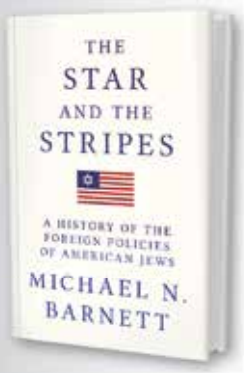


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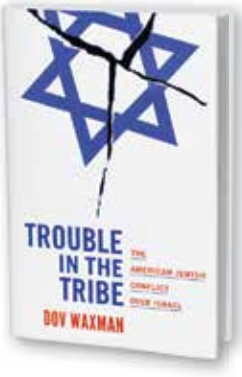
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We might say that according to Sommer, the putative problem raised by source criticism already contains the seeds of its own solution. The humanity of the Torah empowers us to continue the interpretive process that the Torah not only sanctions but, in fact, embodies. This, indeed, is what the participatory theory of revelation is all about.

It goes without saying that the problem discussed above—how the Written Torah can simultaneously be Oral Torah *and* the object of Oral Torah's interpretation—looms particularly large for halakhic reasoning, which clearly presupposes the unity of the Torah. Yet even if we grant Sommer's claim that humanly authored texts can reflect divine commands, we still face another question: *Which* texts? Sommer denies that all Jewish interpretations are legitimate, as do many of the classical sources that endorse the participatory theory. But how is this boundary set? What counts as Torah?

We already know that for Sommer, a sense of legal obligation is essential. Jewish texts that lack this are not Torah. Furthermore, he rejects the widespread notion that radical change is the cornerstone of Jewish interpretation. He insists that the Jewish interpretive tradition is actually fundamentally conservative: "Any revision of a specific law within a legal tradition is an act of continuity rather than of rupture, for such revisions make it possible for the legal tradition to endure." True Jewish legal change is minimal, cautious, and always in fearful service to God's commanding voice. Deuteronomy's notice not to add or subtract from the commandments must be taken seriously, even if it is impossible to take it literally.

Ultimately, however, Sommer's answer to this question is strikingly simple: "Come back in five hundred years and look around. What are religious Jews doing? What are they studying? What shapes who they are? That is Torah." What made Maimonides part of the Torah tradition but not Philo of Alexandria? Historical Jewish consensus. Sommer's participatory theory of revelation turns out to be doubly participatory: Jews not only engage in the interpretations that aim to become Torah, but, over many centuries, decide which interpretations succeed in doing so.

This seems sociologically sound enough, but is it theologically compelling? To be sure, Sommer bolsters his argument with rabbinic support, particularly the adage that the best way to learn the law is to "go out and see what the people are doing." But this optimism about the Jewish people's good judgment is repeatedly upended by the Bible itself. Israel's prophets stood in the breach and decried the people's religious consensus, which all too frequently reflected idolatry rather than Torah. If the arbiter of Torah is Israel's consensus, then what about when Israel gets it wrong?

This is particularly pressing today, when Jewish learning is more widespread and democratized than ever. This has been a tremendous blessing, but it has also led to a wild proliferation of competing interpretations of Torah. If Sommer's book is characterized by a substantive theological pluralism, then contemporary Jewish discourse, by contrast, is dominated by a vapid, relativistic pluralism from which little, if anything, is excluded. Can one have faith that what Jews are learning in five hundred years will be a genuine response to Sinai? Sommer does, acknowledging that the participatory theory of revelation necessitates some uncertainty as to which interpretations are truly Torah. Some readers, however, will not be able to stomach this uncertainty. They might, in fact, begin to understand why the stenographic theory—with its promise of theological certitude—has beckoned to so many.

Readers who finish Sommer's long but engaging book might conclude that what makes it unique is its suggestion that Jews actively participate in the creation and determination of Torah. They might, in turn, be alarmed by the implication that halakha is subject to the whims of human consensus. However, Sommer is correct that human creativity and communal affirmation have been, with various degrees of explicitness, at the heart of the rabbinic project for a long time. Ironically, what is actually newer on the scene of Jewish history is the fundamentalism that presents itself as the direct, immutable manifestation of precise divine command. Sommer's notable claim, therefore, is *not* that Judaism depends upon humanity's participatory interpretation. This is clear. Rather, it is his suggestion that this participatory interpretation is what constitutes the Written Torah itself.

The thrust of Sommer's book is that higher criticism of the Torah reveals the Jewish pedigree of the participatory theory of revelation. However, things seem to move just as much, if not more, in the opposite direction: The participatory theory of revelation offers a way for religious Jews who *already* accept higher criticism to make theological sense of it. I happen to be one of those Jews, and I emphatically share Sommer's belief that critical scholarship can be an enriching form of Torah learning. (Caveat emptor: I took courses with Sommer while a student at JTS several years ago.) However, Sommer doesn't quite acknowledge what a small minority we are. For many—even those outside the bounds of Orthodoxy—the prospect of the Bible's human, fragmentary authorship poses real religious problems.

All of which brings us back to a fact Sommer seems eager to avoid: that historical criticism, like fundamentalism (ironically enough), is something new on the Jewish scene. However, if he is correct—and I think he is—that only the observant Jewish community can confer Jewish legitimacy, then perhaps historical criticism's newness will not be a problem in the long run. Medieval Jewish *peshat* interpretation, which prioritized verses' contextual meaning, may provide a precedent. Religious Jews became masters of *peshat*, but they did not invent it. They learned it, at least in part, through dialogue with non-Jews. "Come back in five hundred years and look around," says Sommer. We are now about a thousand years from the first *peshat* commentators, and what do we see when we look around? The authoritative Jewish Bible, the *Mikra'ot Gedolot*, consists largely of *peshat* commentators such as Rashi, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra. Practiced by generations of observant Jews, *peshat* became Torah.

By insisting on a source-critical Jewish theology, Sommer stakes a claim in the participatory determination of Torah—not entirely unlike that of the medieval trailblazers of *peshat*. To the small group of observant Jews who value higher criticism in their own religious lives, he has issued an urgent challenge: Do not be complacent or discouraged or cynical about the religious importance of historical-critical approaches to the Bible. Teach them as Torah.

Ethan Schwartz is a doctoral student in Hebrew Bible at Harvard University.

The Secrets of the Efod

BY ERIC LAWEE

The Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus: Profayt Duran and Jewish Identity in Late Medieval Iberia
by Maud Kozodoy
University of Pennsylvania Press, 320 pp., $59.95

A century and a year before the expulsion of 1492, the Jews of Christian Spain had to contend with a less famous catastrophe. An unexpected explosion of popular anti-Jewish violence left thousands dead and whole communities destroyed. It also produced a novel subgroup within Spanish society comprising Jews who saved themselves from Christian mobs by accepting baptism. Among these *conversos* was the scholar, physician, and moneylender Isaac ben Moses, also known as Profayt Duran Halevi, who lived in the small Jewish community of Perpignan in northernmost Catalonia. Following his baptism in 1391 or perhaps early 1392, Duran took on the name of Honoratus de Bonafide—in public. But in private he continued to write in Hebrew under the pen name Efod.

As Maud Kozodoy explains in her well-conceived and skillfully wrought new book, the acronym Efod comes from the first letter of *amar* (said) and the initials of the author's pre-conversion name, Profayt—since in Hebrew *peh* and *feh* are vocalizations of the same letter—Duran. This was the way Duran had always signed his marginal glosses, but in Hebrew *efod* is also the name for a garment worn by the high priest that had been associated in some rabbinic sayings with atonement for the sin of idolatry. As Kozodoy shrewdly remarks, the name Efod was itself such a "symbolic garment" for Duran. Under this name, he issued a series of Hebrew writings, including two anti-Christian polemics, in the dozen or so years following his conversion.

Kozodoy aims to solve what she takes to be the main puzzle of Duran's life: "how to understand his literary production in the context of his forced baptism." How did it happen, for instance, that some of the most brilliant anti-Christian polemics of the late Middle Ages were written by an (at least public) Christian? As her book's subtitle indicates, she tackles such questions through recourse to the familiar category of identity, but not in any sort of faddish way. *Secret Faith* is a work of meticulous archive-based biography and cross-disciplinary intellectual history. Duran was a polymath whose interests included mathematics, astronomy, astrology, medicine, philosophy, Hebrew language, biblical exegesis, and, of course, anti-Christian polemics. This imposes considerable demands on a scholar, and Kozodoy does not shrink from them, even when a plunge into technical specifics is required, as in the case of Duran's treatise on the Jewish calendar, replete as it is with "epicycles," "eccentrics," and more.

Kozodoy rightly lays stress on Duran's rationalism as a key not only to his intellectual personality but religious identity. She describes some of his conventional Maimonidean allegiances and devotes a short chapter to Duran's commentary on *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Along with many of his intellectual contemporaries, Duran did not, however, follow Maimonides in his famous denigration of "stupid astrologers." Indeed, not long after his baptism, he became a court astrologer to Joan I of Aragon—the previous holder of this position, a Jew, having died in the riots that brought about Duran's conversion. Kozodoy suggests, on the evidence of his writings, that Duran's rationalism buttressed his Jewish pride and fortified his ongoing allegiance to Judaism after his conversion. Indeed, he seems to have identified rationality with Judaism, and she shows how this conviction informed what are by far Duran's most daring works: two brilliant and innovative polemics in which he subjected Christianity to theological ridicule and an exacting historical critique.

With barbed biblical allusions Duran pointed out the folly of an educated Sephardi Jew abandoning a faith in harmony with reason to embrace one at odds with it.

Duran wrote the first of his anti-Christian books about three years after his conversion. It takes the form of an epistle addressed to one of his contemporaries who was a genuine Jewish convert to Christianity. Here the innovation lies not so much in the work's contents but in its form, especially the "barbed biblical allusion[s]" with which Duran pointed out the folly of an educated Sephardi Jew abandoning a faith in harmony with reason to embrace one at odds with it. Nearly all sections of the "letter" begin with the ironic address that came to serve as its title, *Al Tehi Ke-avotekha* (Be Not Like Your Fathers). In each, Duran continues in this ironic vein, showering praise on his addressee's abandonment of the religion of his ancestors while in fact condemning it. In contextualizing this work, Kozodoy adds yet another layer of irony, cautiously but plausibly suggesting that Duran's literary models for this work were, in fact, Christian.

In his second polemical work, *Kelimmat Ha-goyim* (Shame of the Gentiles), Duran approaches contentious issues in the medieval Jewish-Christian debate in another novel way, this time methodological. To undermine contemporary Catholicism, he distinguishes between the original teachings of the primitive church as reflected in the New Testament and exegetical misrepresentations and theological distortions of them propounded in later patristic and medieval literature. He observes, for instance, that when Jesus spoke poetically, as was his wont, he said that he and his Father were one, by which he meant only that he had a special relationship with God. Misunderstanding their own scriptures, Duran explains, later Christians deified him.

Kozodoy's investigation of this work is illuminating, but not entirely satisfying. As is the case with *Al Tehi Ke-avotekha,* her investigation of *Kelimmat Ha-goyim* unfolds in a part of her book devoted to



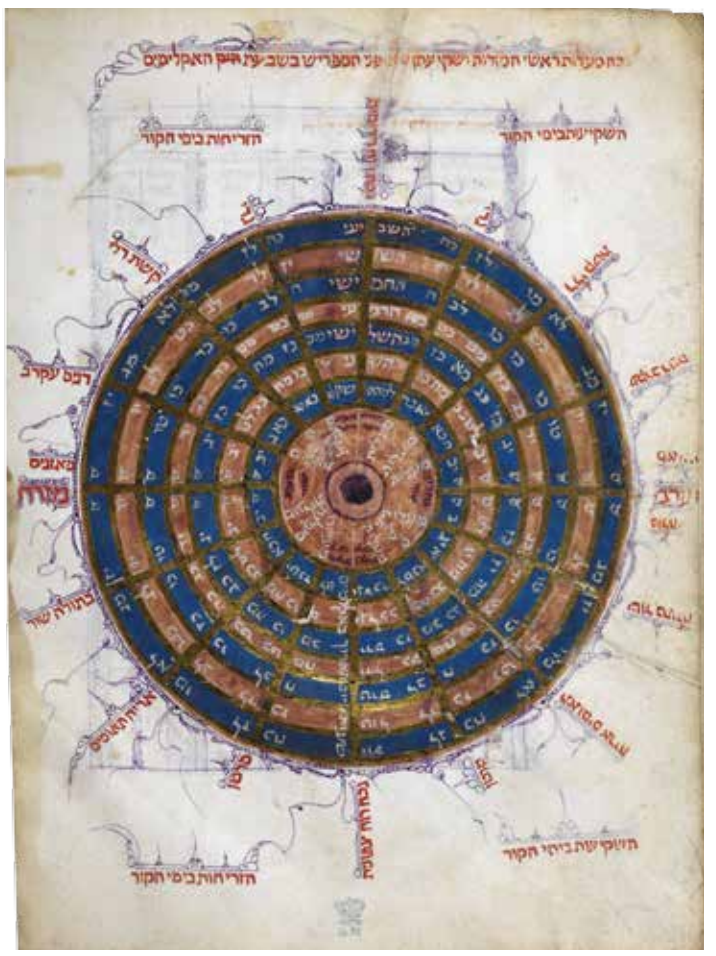
The Marranos ***by Moshe Maimon, 1893, shows a Spanish family's secret Seder.***

"Science and Jewish Identity." Here, however, the fit with the larger rubric is less snug. In fact, the work's center of gravity and main innovations lie, as she indicates, in its historical awareness and astonishingly extensive use of Latin sources. Unfortunately, some of the more arresting historicizing insights, and various subtle touches that inform it, go unregistered. For example, Duran chalks up the abandonment of the Law on the part of early Christians to something like a marketing decision aimed at making the new faith appealing to converts who would find observance of the commandments (and circumcision) too onerous. In casting Jesus and his disciples as unattractive simpletons, Duran calls them, as Kozodoy notes, "pious fools." It is worth adding that he invokes a talmudic category (*hasid shoteh*), in this way adroitly situating Christianity's founders in a (proto-)rabbinic milieu while suggesting the dim view that the ancient sages would have taken of them.

There is a drawback to the focus on rationalism as well, for sometimes Duran's historical approach reaches beyond purely philosophical critique. For instance, with regard to the doctrine of transubstantiation—the idea that the body and blood of Jesus were present in the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist—Duran himself notes that while it defies rational principles, Christians could simply cast it as a mystery beyond reason's grasp. However, he goes on to argue that this central tenet of medieval Catholicism had no basis in the texts of the New Testament.

Finally, though *Kelimmat Ha-goyim* is an undeniably inventive and impressive work, Kozodoy could have been more critical in assessing the quality of some of its arguments. For example, Duran fails to offer a historically convincing explanation of reasons for the later perversions of Christianity's message as preserved in the New Testament by those whom he calls "the deceivers." Later polemicists, like the 17th-century Venetian rabbi Leone da Modena, would improve on Duran in this respect, in part due to their more extensive familiarity with early Church history in its larger Greco-Roman setting.

which he completed in 1403. This study in Hebrew grammar came with a substantial introduction that Isadore Twersky brought to scholarly attention some four decades ago. Though it has been discussed with some frequency since, Kozodoy makes some important contributions to our understanding of Duran's biblical scheme, in part by placing it in a *converso* context and in part by viewing some of its key ideas from a fresh angle. For example, Duran insists that "an occult virtue" (*segulah*) inheres in holy writ, imbuing scripture with salvific powers that allow those who engage with it to attain felicity, even if they do so with little or no understanding. Kozodoy shows that this amounts to a religious appropriation of ideas about magnets and medicines developed by philosophers and physicians working in Duran's larger



Decorated chart displaying calendrical and astronomical tables, France or Spain, ca. 15th century. (Courtesy of the British Library.)

Through his writings as Efod, Kozodoy observes, Duran sought expiation for his defection from Judaism and the sins he was compelled to commit as Honoratus de Bonafide. In the concluding part of her book, entitled "The Efod Atones for Idolatry," Kozodoy explores Duran's "reconception of Judaism under the pressures of his life as a *converso*." She does so by delving deeply into several interlocking topics, including faith and reason, intention and deed, spirituality and eternal felicity, astrology, medicine, and magic. Her overall aim is to unpack Duran's teaching regarding what he called "the true wisdom of the Torah." Two key foci were his Bible-centered vision of Jewish spirituality and his emphasis on the central role of intention in spiritual attainment. It is not hard to see how these mesh with the sort of *converso* religion Duran and his ilk were forced to practice, since *conversos* were debarred from open observance of the commandments or openly studying rabbinic texts.

Duran presented his bibliocentric spiritual vision in the last of his works to survive, *Ma'aseh Efod*, milieu, while also suggesting that his biblicism could have provided "hope and succor" to simple Jews, not to mention *conversos* caught in "a desperate and drastically altered historical circumstance."

As regards Duran's insistence on the centrality of intention to Jewish religious life, it was, of course, in part a response to the classical Christian charge that, in contrast to Christianity, Judaism is legalistic, valorizing outward observance over inner spirit. Late medieval Sephardic thinkers were especially sensitive to this allegation, and even as Duran denied the claim in principle, he not only acknowledged the phenomenon of rote observance of the commandments but regarded it as the reason for the Jewish people's "being crushed by the sword and flame in captivity and shame again and again in the time of this great exile." Tentatively but plausibly, Kozodoy suggests that Duran's preoccupation with this theme intensified after 1391 as he read heavily in Christian literature including the Pauline epistles, with their stress on faith over "works" as the means to salvation.

Duran, Kozodoy tells us, remained a Christian until the end of his life:

> Although it has been often thought that Duran returned openly to Judaism in his later years, we have no evidence that he availed himself of this route; instead, what we have is continuous evidence of a public life as a Christian even as, in his writings . . . he reveals an inner life as a Jew.

As Kozodoy observes, scholars have long wondered how the man who now called himself Honoratus de Bonafide could have written works in Hebrew at all, let alone anti-Christian polemics, without being targeted by the (papal) Inquisition. It may be, Kozodoy suggests, that in Duran's day, long before the establishment of the infamous Spanish Inquisition in 1478, inquisitors did not yet pose a real threat to Judaizers. Nor is it clear, she says, that Duran was known to be writing as a Jew, let alone as Efod. Even accepting such points, one can certainly admire Duran's courage in circulating, however circumspectly, works that risked his ruin, if not his life.

For all its virtues, Kozodoy's book is not the final word on Duran, as I believe its author would be the first to acknowledge. In a study that will soon be published in a Festschrift in honor of Yosef Kaplan, Joseph Hacker presents startling new evidence of Duran's presence in Italy in 1398, around the time to which *Kelimmat Ha-goyim* has been dated, and 1413, a decade after completing *Ma'aseh Efod*. This casts a very different light on Kozodoy's claim that Duran's post-1391 theology did not require *conversos* to engage in flight or in an immediate formal "return to Judaism." Apparently, Honoratus de Bonafide more than once found himself in a situation where he could, like other forced converts, begin life anew as a professing Jew—and chose to return to Spain.

On another plane, for all its many accomplishments, Kozodoy's synthetic approach necessarily precludes the comprehensive treatment that many of Duran's works await. Thus, Kozodoy describes *Ma'aseh Efod* as "by far the most important of Duran's writings," but gives sustained attention only to its introduction. She at times discusses it as if it comprised the whole of the work, leaving the nature and extent of Duran's contributions in the field of Hebrew language study (and some of their motivation) to her own future research, or that of others.

Still, such omissions are decisively outweighed by her book's many virtues. In addition to those mentioned already, it should be added that Kozodoy's study often draws fascinating internal connections between Duran's works. He was, as Kozodoy writes, a "consummate master of multilayered allusion," and even his most intelligent and literate readers have often been left feeling that something crucial has been missed. Kozodoy's careful, subtle, and probing book sheds a great deal of light on one of the most perplexing figures in the history of the Jews of Spain.

Eric Lawee teaches in The Zalman Shamir Bible Department at Bar-Ilan University. His book Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue *(SUNY Press) won a Canadian Jewish Book Award. He is currently working on a book about the reception of Rashi's Torah commentary as seen through the lens of processes of canonicity.*

The Alter Rebbe

BY ARIEL EVAN MAYSE

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady: The Origins of Chabad Hasidism
by Immanuel Etkes, translated by Jeffrey M. Green
Brandeis University Press, 364 pp., $45

The late Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson fondly told and retold many stories about his illustrious ancestor Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of the Chabad Hasidic dynasty. One favorite was set in the period when his married son Rabbi Dov Ber came to live with him. Both devoted themselves to studying Torah, but they often did so separately, with Rabbi Dov Ber on the lower floor, together with his family, and Rabbi Shneur Zalman upstairs. Once, Rabbi Dov Ber's youngest child began crying, but his father was so engrossed in his sacred study that he didn't notice. Although he was also in the midst of deep study, Rabbi Shneur Zalman rushed downstairs and berated his son for having allowed the cloak of piety to render him oblivious to his child's suffering. This story, which Rabbi Schneerson reported hearing from his father-in-law, the previous Rebbe of Chabad, embodies what he saw as the fundamental commitments of the Chabad ethos: absolute, unflinching devotion to study paired with an ever-present attention to the needs of others. This spiritual vision of Chabad, to which Rabbi Menachem Mendel was the most recent heir, was born in the teachings of Rabbi Shneur Zalman.

Immanuel Etkes is a distinguished Israeli historian with a gift for integrating the intellectual and social history of 18th- and 19th-century Eastern European Jewry, and his newly translated biography of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, sometimes referred to as "the Alter Rebbe" (the old Rabbi), is a brilliant accomplishment, both critical and deeply sympathetic. Of his subject, he writes:

> [H]e was a rabbinic scholar; a deep and original thinker; and a talented preacher, educator, and administrator. In addition, he had a deep sense of mission, firm confidence in the rightness of Hasidism, and great sensitivity to the needs of the Jews in the Russian Empire. Moreover, he possessed courage, authority, determination, and self-control.

Drawing on a variety of letters, archive documents, and Hasidic texts to supplement several decades of research, Etkes has painted a broad, contextual portrait of this exceptional spiritual master, addressing issues ranging from the organization and governance of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's Hasidic court to some key aspects of his mystical teachings.

Such a project necessitates sifting through many layers of hagiography, which Etkes has done with great care. We meet the young Shneur Zalman shortly after the death of his master Rabbi Dov Ber Friedman, known as the Maggid (or preacher) of Mezheritch in 1772. At this point, Rabbi Shneur Zalman became a student of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, an older member of the Maggid's circle. In 1777, Rabbi Menachem Mendel and his younger colleague Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk led several hundred Hasidim to the land of Israel, eventually settling in Safed, which was then part of Ottoman Syria. Over the next few years the two of them gently persuaded Rabbi Shneur Zalman, who had remained in White Russia, to act as their proxy.

Painting an accurate portrait necessitates sifting through many layers of hagiography, which Etkes has done with great care.



Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of Chabad, by Boris Schatz, 1878.

In addition to providing spiritual and intellectual guidance to the *Hasidim* his colleagues had left behind, Rabbi Shneur Zalman developed and oversaw the fundraising network which supported Hasidic life in the Holy Land. Gradually, perhaps inevitably, Rabbi Shneur Zalman's independence increased. He matured as a leader and thinker, and, at the same time, it became clear that the *Hasidim* in White Russia could not maintain sole allegiance to two absent leaders. By the time of Rabbi Menachem Mendel's death in 1788, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was poised to become the most important Hasidic leader in White Russia.

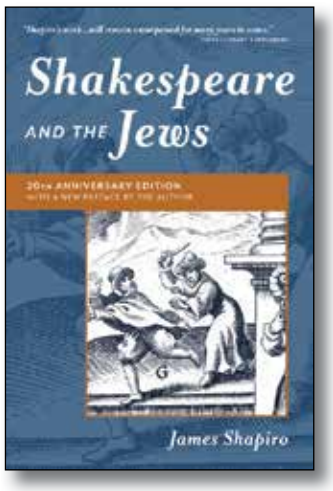
Rabbi Shneur Zalman took an active part in the controversy with the *mitnagdim*, the rabbinic opponents of Hasidism, who banned and persecuted *Hasidim* for perceived social, halakhic, and theological offenses. As a result of charges laid against him by the *mitnagdim*, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was twice imprisoned (in 1798 and 1800) by the Russian authorities on suspicion of sedition, religious factionalism, and misappropriation of funds. While in prison, he was interrogated, and the lengthy Russian transcripts provide a unique window into his understanding and practice of Hasidism. In both cases, he and his followers were vindicated by the Russian authorities.

Over the course of the 1790s Rabbi Shneur Zalman established a sophisticated and highly centralized Hasidic court. His was not the first institution of this kind, but it was the most complex and finely tuned. The numbers that flocked to hear him preach were so great that he was forced to enact a series of policies regulating the flow of visiting *Hasidim* who visited Liady. Etkes argues that Rabbi Shneur Zalman built on the model established by his teacher, the Maggid of Mezheritch, of whom he writes:

> [T]he Maggid did not engage in magic, did not perform wonders, and did not take care of the worldly troubles of the people. His decisive contribution to the development of Hasidism was expressed in the formation of the Hasidic court as the center of spiritual and religious activity. This move was closely connected to changing Hasidism from a limited group of mystics into a growing movement that swept up many of the Jews in Eastern Europe.

In broad strokes, this is true, but such generalizations do not address the complexity of the Maggid's attitude toward miracles and wonder-working or the innovative elements of the Maggid's theology in relation to the ideas of the putative founder (and wonder-worker) of Hasidism, the Ba'al Shem Tov. Perhaps most importantly, they elide the fact that there is no clear notion of the tzaddik as community leader as well as spiritual virtuoso in the teachings of the Maggid. The Maggid was the master of a loose-knit group of intellectual and spiritual disciples, but he was not a communal leader of the sort that emerged in the Hasidism of the 1780s and 90s.

However, Etkes is correct about the innovative



Shakespeare and the Jews

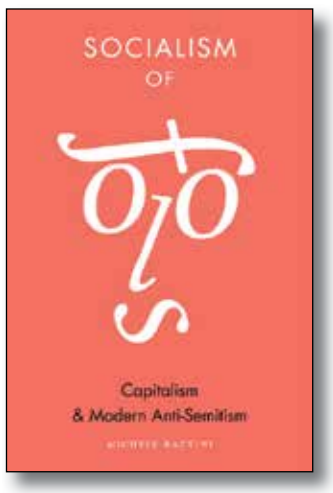
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aspects of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's finely tuned and elaborate system of governance, including disciplined fundraising, strict rules regarding visitation, and a network of spies to ensure that those in the periphery of his orbit remained faithful to his edicts. The community founded by Rabbi Shneur Zalman remained among the most tightly and successfully administrated Hasidic groups throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was, of course, this system that Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson inherited and turned into one of the most extraordinary religious organizations of the 20th century.

The innovative aspects of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's system of governance included disciplined fundraising, strict rules regarding visitation, and a network of spies.

Etkes also identifies Rabbi Shneur Zalman's unique spiritual-religious ethos. In doing so, he devotes most of his attention to the first section of *Likkutei Amarim-Tanya*, published anonymously in 1796. *Tanya* is, by any standard, an exceptional book. Most Hasidic works from this early period are either loose compendia of teachings or anthologies of sermons. The core of *Tanya* is, in contrast, a carefully constructed theological treatise explaining the inner workings of the Godhead, the nature of the human soul, and the complexities of attaining spiritual uplift in Divine service. This mystical system is grounded in the theories and terminology of Safed Kabbalah and emphasizes the power of intellectual contemplation in the study of Torah for cultivating *devekut*, or mystical communion with the Divine.

The Hebrew version of Etkes's book appeared in 2011, and, sentence for sentence, Jeffrey Green's translation is excellent. However, significant elements (including several important chapters and appendices) have been lost in translation, presumably due to the exigencies of space. Unfortunately, one of these is Etkes's discussion of *Sha'ar ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emunah*, the second part of *Tanya* and one of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's richest and boldest theological expressions. The fact that this section was removed, as opposed to synthesizing or omitting one of the three long chapters on his conflict with the *mitnagdim*, tips the balance of the English book too far to the side of social rather than intellectual history.

Also present in the original but not sufficiently treated in the present book are Rabbi Shneur Zalman's other writings. For instance, Etkes does not take up the way the major themes of *Tanya* were expanded upon, sometimes also challenged, and even inverted in the hundreds of sermons attributed to Rabbi Shneur Zalman, nor does Etkes consider his legal writings. The decision not to engage with these primary sources means that Etkes's image of Rabbi Shneur Zalman is only a partial reconstruction, for the social and intellectual aspects of his life were deeply intertwined. Restricting the analysis of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's teachings to the first part of *Tanya* does not allow us to chart how his thinking on key subjects such as the nature of leadership and communal prayer may have evolved over time. It also leaves open the question of whether the homilies delivered on dates when all of his *Hasidim* were present at the court differ in some way from those given to smaller audiences throughout the year.

A developmental study of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's thought, together with Etkes's peerless historical account of his life and times, would prepare us for yet another important scholarly project in uncovering the intellectual origins of Hasidism: understanding the place of Rabbi Shneur Zalman as an interpreter of the Maggid's theology. The reader should note that the relationship between these two great figures is a major subject in the Hebrew edition, making its absence in the English version all the more conspicuous. Etkes himself suggests that:

> [D]espite the splits and variations, Hasidism was regarded by its leaders, and most likely by the community of Hasidim as well, as a single movement that drew on common sources and a shared tradition. Hence, the legitimacy of its leaders depended on their commitment to that tradition.

I'm not sure, however, that things are quite this simple. Rarely in early Hasidic texts does one see an attempt to trace ideas back to the "founding father" in order to ensure their legitimacy. Moreover, while Etkes is certainly right that early *Hasidim* shared an intellectual and spiritual legacy, there were dramatic disagreements between Rabbi Shneur Zalman and many other Hasidic leaders who had studied with the Maggid, which Etkes does not explore.

Thus, in a chapter titled "Zaddikim as Human Beings," Etkes describes the highly public and acrimonious controversy with Rabbi Shneur Zalman's former patron Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk as being largely motivated by a contest as to who was the ultimate spiritual leader of the *Hasidim* of White Russia and, even more, as a struggle for control of the fundraising network that had been established to support the *Hasidim* of the Holy Land. This is, no doubt, true, but human beings fight over ideas and beliefs as well as money and hurt feelings. Etkes does not deny this, but he speaks of their ideological dispute as "secondary."

And yet, Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk was right in claiming that Rabbi Shneur Zalman *was* doing something new and unique. This includes his establishment of a hierarchical Hasidic court and a rigid social architecture; his definition of the tzaddik as innately, qualitatively, and unattainably different from all other *Hasidim*; his rigorously Lurianic presentation of the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Maggid; and his relentless focus on intellectual contemplation. With regard to this last point, Rabbi Shneur Zalman's approach to the inner life might be summed up in his own words: "the mind rules over the heart." But the

notion that the intellectual faculties were the necessary point of departure and the guiding force of all successful spiritual meditation was hardly agreed upon by others in the Maggid's circle. Here are the words of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk's fiercely ecstatic colleague:

> One cannot attain or grasp the true attachment to the infinite One by means of the intellect (*basekhel*), and all the more so [is it impossible] through feelings of pleasure [. . .] But it is true that the only way to arrive at faith and attachment [to God] is [. . .] through love, and fear [. . .] This [work] is preparation, a platform for attaining the Unknowable (*ha-eino musag*), the primary goal that comes only later [. . .] The sages refer to the early pious ones, who meditated for three hours in every prayer service. They arrived at attachment, faith and total self-nullification for nine hours per day. But this is why the Talmud challenges, "When will their study and their work be done?" This question refers to their emotive faculties (*middot*), called "holy work" [. . .] for it is they that lead one to attachment [to God].

Spiritual work, according to Rabbi Menachem Mendel, had to begin with the emotions and not the mind. In the *Tanya*, his erstwhile student taught the opposite.

As I noted, the *Tanya* was the first true book of early Hasidism, as opposed to a compendium of sayings or sermons. What motivated Rabbi Shneur Zalman to write it, given that early Hasidism was primarily an oral movement? Like many thinkers, he was unhappy with imprecise accounts of his teachings in circulation, but, as he writes in his introduction, he was also overwhelmed by the crushing numbers of disciples seeking his counsel. As Etkes puts it, "The book was meant to replace, to a certain degree, the personal audience with the Zaddik." Close disciples were meant to share their understanding of its content with others, establishing a network of reading groups poring over Rabbi Shneur Zalman's words. The intensely intellectual spiritual path described in the *Tanya*, together with the great appreciation for the study of Torah, might also have been an implicit response and appeal to the *mitnagdim*, who tended to regard Hasidism as a movement of enthusiastic ignoramuses.

This is not to say that Rabbi Shneur Zalman thought writing could replace oral instruction. He never relinquished his role as a communal preacher, and his public sermons—unpublished in his lifetime—were a key element of his project. Moreover, his letters, like those of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk and Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk, were accompanied by messengers who would impart another layer of the message orally. At times this was sensitive information that was left unwritten for reasons of confidentiality, but in other cases the accompanying oral message was personal spiritual instruction that could not be captured in writing.

Etkes concludes his biography by noting that "the Hasidic ethos that [Rabbi Shneur Zalman] created and shaped" was preserved and passed down for almost two centuries. This is precisely right, and recognition should be extended to his impact on the development of Hasidic theology as well.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady died in 1812 as he was fleeing into Russia in advance of the invasion of Napoleon, whom he had opposed in favor of the tsar. His son Rabbi Dov Ber took charge of the community after a struggle for succession with a student of his father's named Rabbi Aaron ha-Levi Horowitz of Staroselye and moved the court to the Russian city of Lubavitch. Rabbi Dov Ber's ascent heralded the beginning of a familial dynasty that endured until the death of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh and final Lubavitcher Rebbe, in 1994.

Ariel Evan Mayse recently served as a research fellow of the University of Michigan's Jean & Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies. He is completing a book on the Maggid of Mezheritch's thought and theology of language, and will take up a position as assistant professor and director of Jewish studies at Hebrew College in Boston this fall.



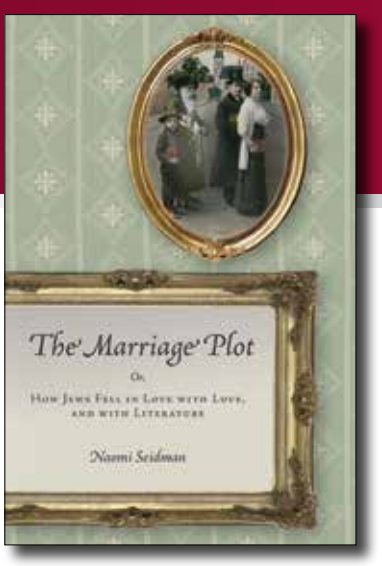
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Summer of '36

BY GEORGE PROCHNIK

Ostend: Stefan Zweig, Joseph Roth, and the Summer Before the Dark
by Volker Weidermann, translated by Carol Brown Janeway
Pantheon, 176 pp., $24.95

The Belgian resort town of Ostend began serving up a beguiling mix of social pageantry and dreamy ocean reveries to cosmopolitan vacationers early in the 19th century. Elegant hotels and cafés sprang up to accommodate the many thousands of visitors who traveled there each year, primarily from Germany and other landlocked nations of Europe's interior. Horse racing, casino gambling, splendid displays of fashion on the promenade, and a busy schedule of colorful festivals heightened the resort's appeal. The sea itself gained renown for its mesmerizing luminosity, which some attributed to the presence of innumerable mollusks.

In 1902, when the Viennese author Stefan Zweig was only 21 years old, he wrote one of his first travel pieces about "the season" at Ostend. This affectionate caricature observes that while people typically visit watering places for "harmonious relaxation in the calm contemplation of nature," Ostend's clientele was different. Rather than an opportunity to switch off, its visitors sought "another shining link in the endless chain of society's distractions." The city had become

> the unofficial rendezvous-location for the real and bogus aristocracy that one sees floating like a spume above the waves of capitals, everywhere encountering and recognizing itself, and for whom a home-town is merely a station in transit.

At season's end, the town was returned to the fishermen and fell into a deep slumber until the "unique, unforgettable game of human fallibility, passions and distractions" began again.

Ostend: Stefan Zweig, Joseph Roth, and the Summer Before the Dark, German literary journalist Volker Weidermann's artful portrait of Stefan Zweig, Joseph Roth, and other Central European writer-intellectuals on the eve of the Second World War centers around a summer in Ostend in 1936, during which a "real and bogus aristocracy" of intellectuals converged on this resort: writers, communists, cranky prophets, most of them Jewish. They act out the same kinds of psychological games that occupied their titled predecessors—love affairs, temper fits, exhibitions of beauty and wit—but with the suspicion that the real game is over and they've already lost.

The German writer Irmgard Keun turns up, after boldly suing the Gestapo for lost earnings caused by their ban on her sexually frank and socioeconomically penetrating novels. She quickly becomes romantically entangled with the much older Galicia-born author Joseph Roth; their tender liaison provides one thread of Weidermann's story. Hermann Kesten, the socially ubiquitous writer and raconteur, arrives and finds ample material among his posturing, disoriented friends. Ernst Toller, an illustrious, politically radical, yet domestically possessive playwright, comes with his wife, the glamorous young actress Christiane Grautoff, and tries to block her path to temptation. Even the irrepressible Arthur Koestler, then gaining a reputation for his stirring, partisan journalism, appears in nearby Bredene, working on a sequel to Jaroslav Hašek's satirical masterwork, *The Good Soldier Švejk*.

Even when these gifted artists didn't much like each other they needed each other's company in order to believe they still mattered.

Many intriguing figures make cameos, but the axis of the book is the relationship between Stefan Zweig and Joseph Roth. The sharp contrasts and strong bond between the two men make them irresistible dramatic foils. Born in the small town of Brody at the eastern edge of Galicia in 1894, 13 years after Zweig entered the world at the epicenter of Vienna's First District, Joseph Roth scrambled and fought to make his name. He observed and dissected individual foibles and the structures of power. Zweig's struggle, more often than not, was against his own privileged comfort and toward a shimmery realm of authenticity in art, love, and international humanism. Zweig was tallish, ultra-refined, and the epitome of genteel self-discipline. Roth was short, schlumpy, and a chronic alcoholic.

When Roth first walked by Zweig's apartment building in 1913 to catch a glimpse of the leading light of Austrian literature, he stood shyly before Zweig's front door for a time, then turned away and hurried home. But when Zweig became aware of Roth's work, he recognized the younger man's genius immediately. As he would do for many other struggling, talented authors, Zweig shared his connections and financial resources to help the outsider find a literary foothold.

By 1936, Roth's alcoholism was increasingly desperate, and their friendship was frayed. (Roth also disapproved of Zweig's having left his first wife, Friderike, for his former secretary, Lotte, who was with him in Ostend.) But still that summer gave them an opportunity to recover something of their old friendship. And Weidermann nicely sketches how, when Zweig became blocked in his work on *The Buried Menorah,* an allegorical tale about Jewish exile and homelessness, Roth was able to supply him with the story's ending.



Poster promoting travel from Harwich and Dover to Zeebrugge and Ostend, Belgium, ca. 1930s. Artwork by Arthur C. Michael. (Science & Society Picture Library/Getty Images.)

Weidermann convincingly shows how all these refugees were at least semi-aware that this time the Ostend season might not return. Most of them were trying to tamp down intimations of impending disaster. Germany's book market was now shut to them. All works by Jews and others labeled "degenerates" had been burned or locked away in the so-called poison cabinet. Even when these gifted artists didn't much like each other—as was not infrequently the case—they needed each other's company in order to believe they still mattered.

It's not really the summer before the dark we get a glimpse of in Weidermann's quick, yet compelling riffle through this stack of oversized personalities. The dark had already come, three years earlier, with Hitler's appointment to Germany's chancellorship. What Weidermann depicts is the summer before people fully opened their eyes to the darkness that was already engulfing them. Everyone is agitated and afraid but unsure about what move to make next. In a review Zweig wrote in 1936 of his friend Roger Martin du Gard's *L'Été*

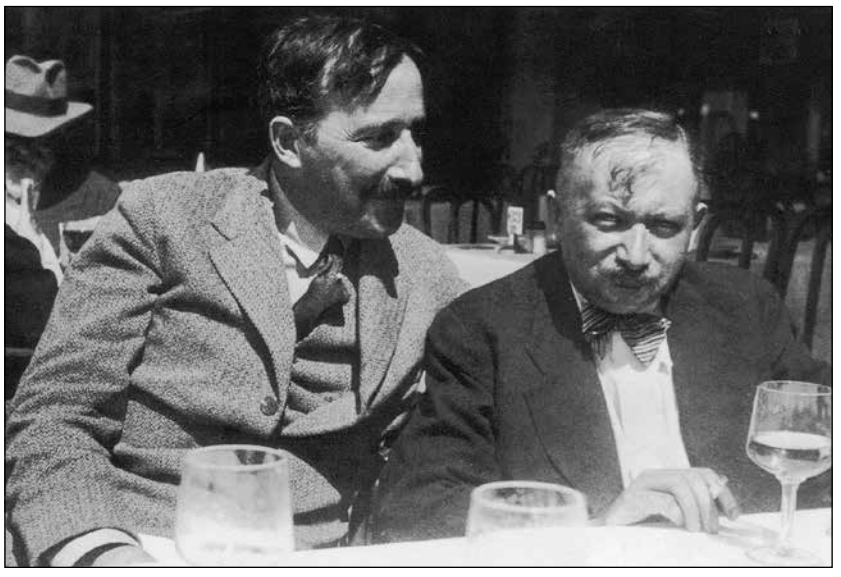
1914 (Summer 1914) he observes that the heroic aspects of Europe in 1914 would not be repeated. Their own times would furnish only "the document of an immeasurable collective fatigue and of an indifference, no longer explicable by logic, to our own destruction."

In a series of well-chosen, interwoven vignettes, Weidermann shows us this cast of extraordinary personalities struggling at once not to succumb to despair at what they already know, nor to deny in cowardly fashion what they sense is coming next. It's an impossible balancing act. Already that spring, Zweig had written Roth, "My instinct for political calamity pains me like an inflamed nerve. I fear for Austria, and the loss of Austria would be the end of us, spiritually." Yet they can't quite let go of the hope that they will wake from the nightmare. Encouraging Roth to join him in Ostend, Zweig wrote beseechingly:

> It would be wonderful to have you there as a sort of literary conscience [. . .] We could test one another in the evenings, and lecture each other, as in the good old days. You don't have to swim, I won't be swimming either—Ostend isn't a spa, but a CITY, prettier, and with more cafés than Brussels.

True to his youthful sketch of the town, the Ostend Zweig longs for is not an escape from civilization into nature, but something closer to the reverse—a glittering distillation of civilization into its most culturally desirable essence.

Inevitably the yearning to make the resort a kind of stage on which they resume their old roles had only limited success. Some, including Zweig and Roth, were more artistically productive in Ostend than they'd been in a long time, but, of course, they couldn't really reconstellate a whole society between them. One of the most affecting scenes in the book unfolds around a discussion that takes place one day when Zweig, Kesten, and others are all sitting at a café doing their best to assume the attitude of nonchalant vacationers. The émigrés begin to muse about the probable fate of Etkar André, a communist arrested on ludicrously flimsy evidence for treason in connection with the Reichstag fire. "What is there to say?" Weidermann writes. "None of them doubts that the sentence [of death] will be carried out [. . .] The only thing is not to show despondency. Defeatism is a crime here at the shore. It's better to bitch around together. The later the evening, the greater the sniping, the laughter, and the mocking." It's a persuasive image of a particular form of distraction at which these hyper-articulate people excelled: gambling, dreaming, and promenading with words.



Stefan Zweig and Joseph Roth in Ostend, Belgium, 1936. (Photo by Imagno/ Getty Images, Hulton Archive.)

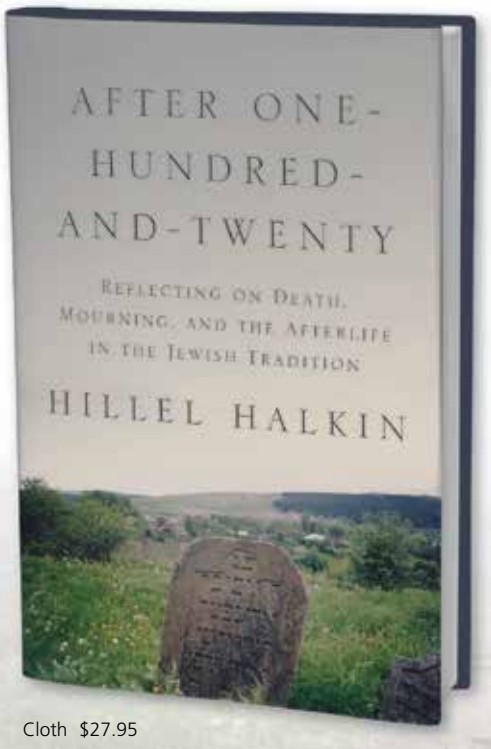
Ostend rises and falls in a fast, far-reaching tumble, like a low wave on a long coastline. The premise of one summer of overlapping fates is a literary device, and there is a lot of movement forward and backward in time in the book. But Weidermann has a light enough touch that we don't feel pulled back and forth; the conceit of this 1936 sojourn gives us something solid to clutch onto. The one jarring note occurs in the book's final section when Weidermann makes the understandable but unsatisfying move to show us the place that was once and is no longer Ostend on a trip he himself made in 2012. A present-day bar on the site of what had been a favorite restaurant of the refugees is stereotypically dreary, complete with a sound system playing American rock and roll. But Weidermann's focus was always on his ensemble of émigrés, not their setting, and it's hard to feel much about what Ostend has become when it was only ever shown as the faintest flicker.

The story's real denouement appears in the passage preceding that contemporary update:

> When Joseph Roth gets the news in Paris in May 1939 that Ernst Toller has committed suicide [. . .] he breaks down. Friderike Zweig, who's with him, has him taken to a hospital where he dies a few days later. Stefan Zweig hears of this in London [. . .] "We will not grow old, we exiles," he writes, shattered. "I loved him like a brother."

Zweig himself committed suicide with his second wife Lotte in Petrópolis, Brazil, less than three years later, in 1942. Having struggled for years to escape his intimation that the world was ending, his sense that he was already living, as he said, "a posthumous existence," he surrendered what remained of his life without remorse. Weidermann gives us postscripts for the other characters too, but they feel a bit perfunctory, like wrap-up lines after a movie telling us what's become of its fictional characters. The roll-call feels out of place here, given the book's real achievement. Weidermann has created a poignant biographical collage, stripped of most historical context, about people in the process of being stripped of all geopolitical context by the new, totalitarian state. Their voices are vivid, but we feel the characters dissolving before our eyes.

George Prochnik is the author, most recently, of The Impossible Exile: Stefan Zweig at the End of the World *(Other Press). He is currently working on a book about Gershom Scholem and Jerusalem.*



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The Inklings

BY MICHAEL WEINGRAD

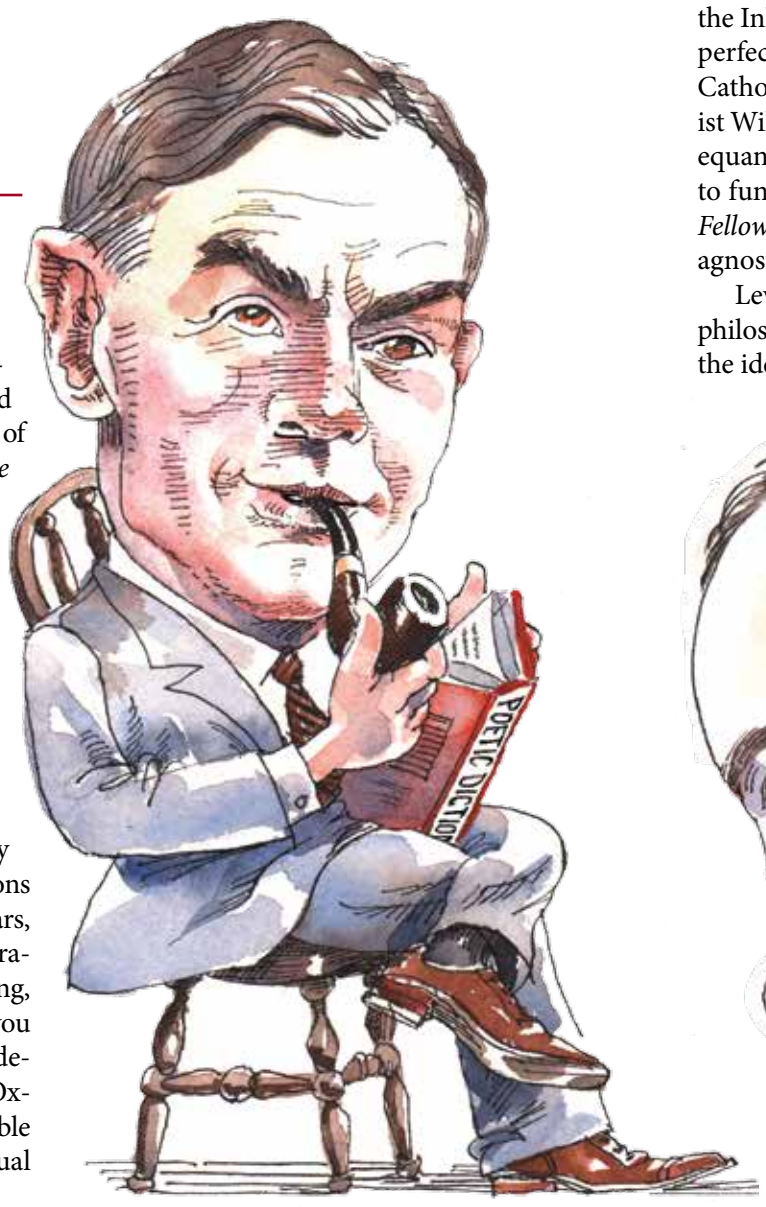
The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings: J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams
by Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 656 pp., $35

Charles Williams: The Third Inkling
by Grevel Lindop
Oxford University Press, 464 pp., $34.95

Had you the good fortune of being present at a gathering of the Inklings, you might have witnessed J. R. R. Tolkien reading from the cycle of private myths that would become *The Lord of the Rings*. (You might then have also heard fellow Inkling H. V. D. Dyson complaining "Oh God, not another [expletive] elf!") Or you might have heard C. S. Lewis read from works-in-progress such as *The Screwtape Letters*, a satire in which a devil explains with withering perspicacity the weak points in the human soul, or *Perelandra*, a fantastical thought experiment that imagines the temptation of Eve on another planet. You might have heard a play by Owen Barfield, poetry by Charles Williams, a study of French history by Lewis's brother Warnie, or other contributions by some of the 20 or so Christian writers, scholars, thinkers, and readers that met in various configurations from the 1930s to the 1950s to share writing, criticism, and conversation. By all accounts, you certainly would have heard laughter, passionate debate, the clink (when they met in their favorite Oxford pub) of beer glasses, and, despite the inevitable ebb and flow of friendships, the buzz of intellectual camaraderie.

As an example of literary and intellectual community, the group merits study on its own terms, yet the Inklings compel special interest because of Lewis and Tolkien, the two members who gave us Narnia and Middle Earth and who command the greatest attention from readers today. In different yet complementary ways the writings of Lewis and Tolkien offer a powerful challenge to the dominant assumptions of liberal modernity—relativism, scientism, materialism, historicism. More strikingly, they are the only such intellectual dissidents to have genuine purchase in popular culture. Leo Strauss may be as devastating as Lewis in his criticism of facile and destructive dogmas, but Hollywood isn't planning a film version of Strauss's *Natural Right and History* any time soon.

The Fellowship, Philip and Carol Zaleski's chronicle of the Inklings, tries to straddle the group portrait and the Lewis-Tolkien focus, not always convincingly. Despite the quartet of names in the book's subtitle, Barfield does not enter the story for a hundred pages, nor Williams for two hundred. And while the Zaleskis write that the

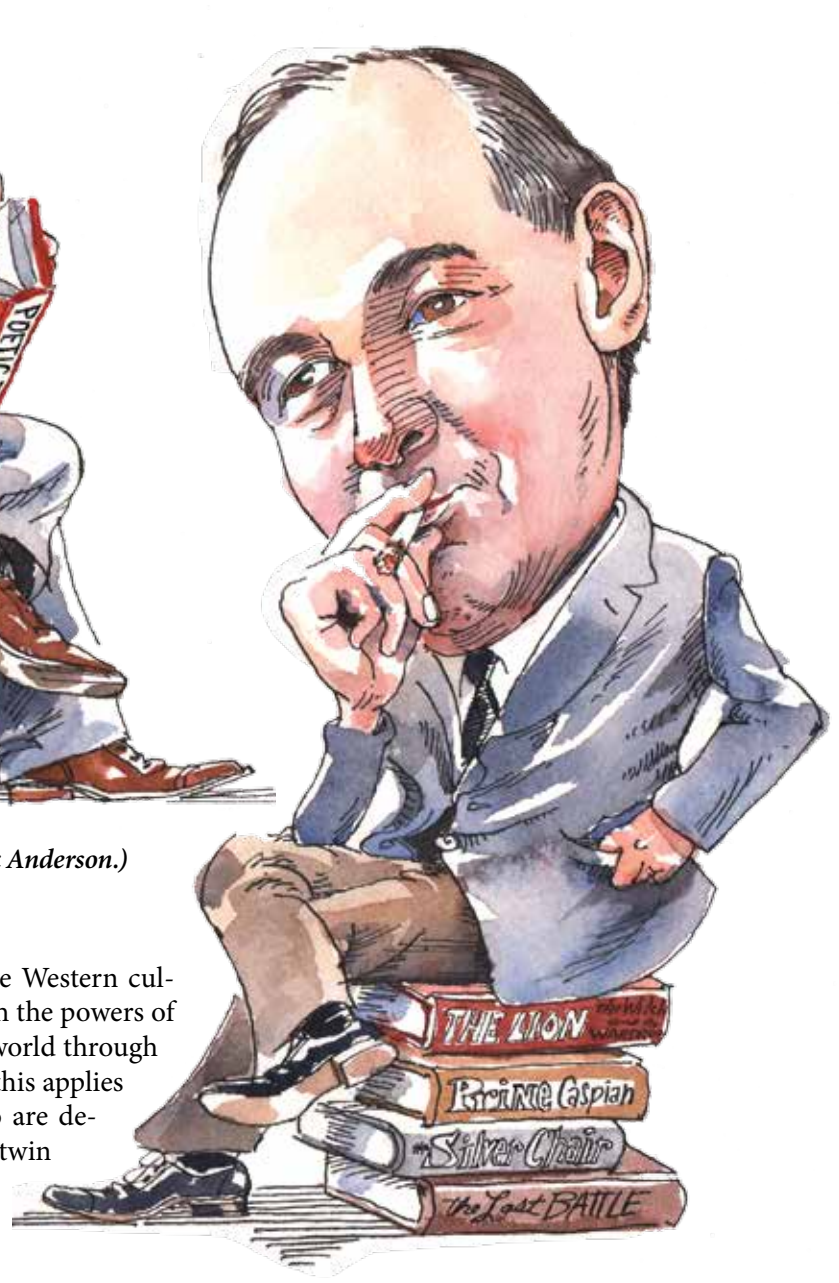


Owen Barfield. (Illustrations by Mark Anderson.)

Inklings' "great hope was to restore Western culture to its religious roots, to unleash the powers of the imagination, to reenchant the world through Christian faith and pagan beauty," this applies mainly to Lewis and Tolkien, who are described halfway into the book as "twin pillars, elevating the Inklings to greatness."

Although everywhere amused by their subjects—their style is aggressively chummy—the Zaleskis are not worshipful devotees of Lewis and Tolkien. It is not merely that they deplore the "neomedieval affectations" of Tolkien's style, find *Screwtape*'s "slaps" at its targets "tiresome," and judge the crucial opening chapter of *The Fellowship of the Ring* to be a "last gasp of *Hobbit* silliness and facetiousness." It is, more significantly, the equanimity signaled in their Foreword when they explain that, while the quartet on whom they focus are obvious choices as the best-known of the Inklings, they also offer a pleasing symmetry, "a perfect compass rose of faith," ranging from the Catholic Tolkien and Anglican Lewis to the occultist Williams and anthroposophist Barfield. It is this equanimity about such irreconcilable approaches to fundamental questions of belief that makes *The Fellowship* generous to the point of being loosely agnostic.

Lewis's early friendship with Barfield, a lawyer, philosopher of language, and lifelong follower of the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, was certainly important

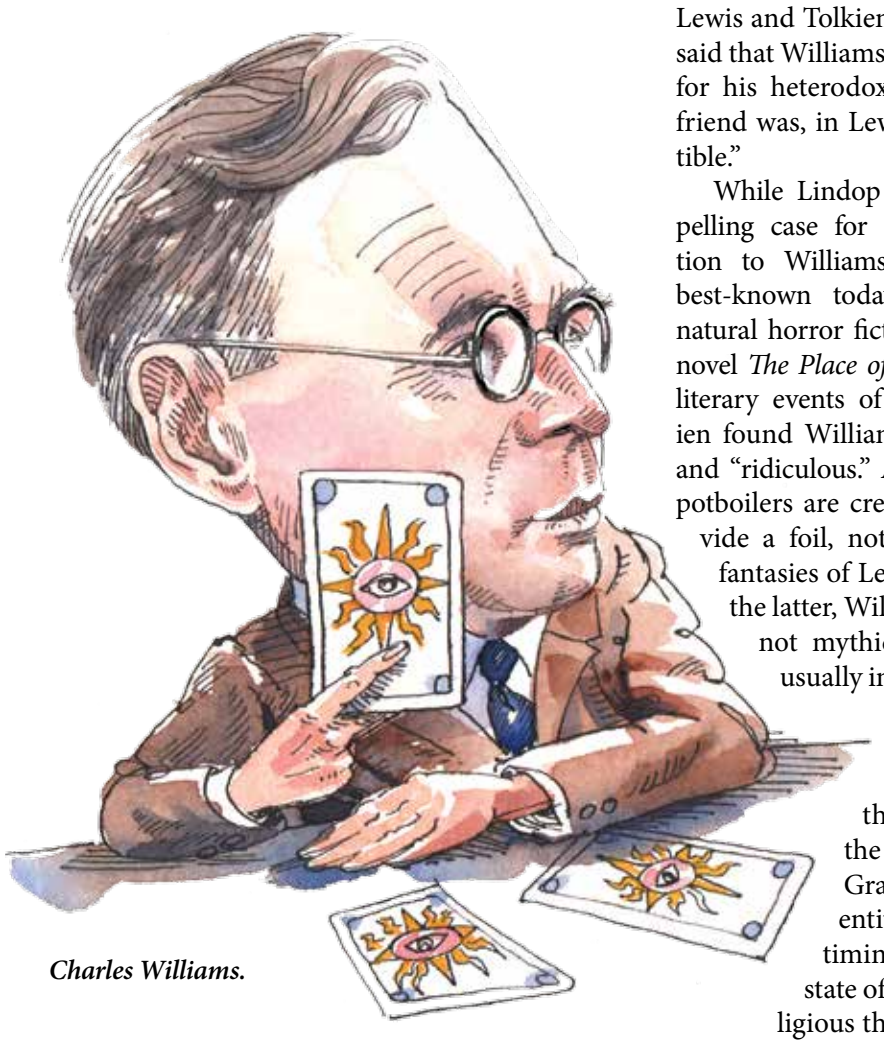


C. S. Lewis.

for Lewis's intellectual development. In his memoir *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis gladly admits that for all the seeming mumbo jumbo of Barfield's anthroposo-

phy, it provided a salutary counter-example to the barren materialism in which the young Lewis was mired before his ultimate turn to Christianity. More profoundly, Barfield's developing philosophy of language suggested to Lewis and the other Inklings that the power of words themselves, the energy crackling in the experience of reading a poem, revealed a more than merely psychological dimension to human existence. Nevertheless, as the Zaleskis relate, these lessons absorbed, Lewis moved on from the early intensity of their friendship. Barfield eventually achieved his own measure of celebrity, mostly in the United States and in the context of the Aquarian 1960s, when his meditations on the evolution of human consciousness won admirers such as Saul Bellow.

Williams's poetic cycle *Taliessin Through Logres* reads at points as if T. S. Eliot had rendered portions of the *Zohar* with Arthurian knights in place of the *sefirot*.

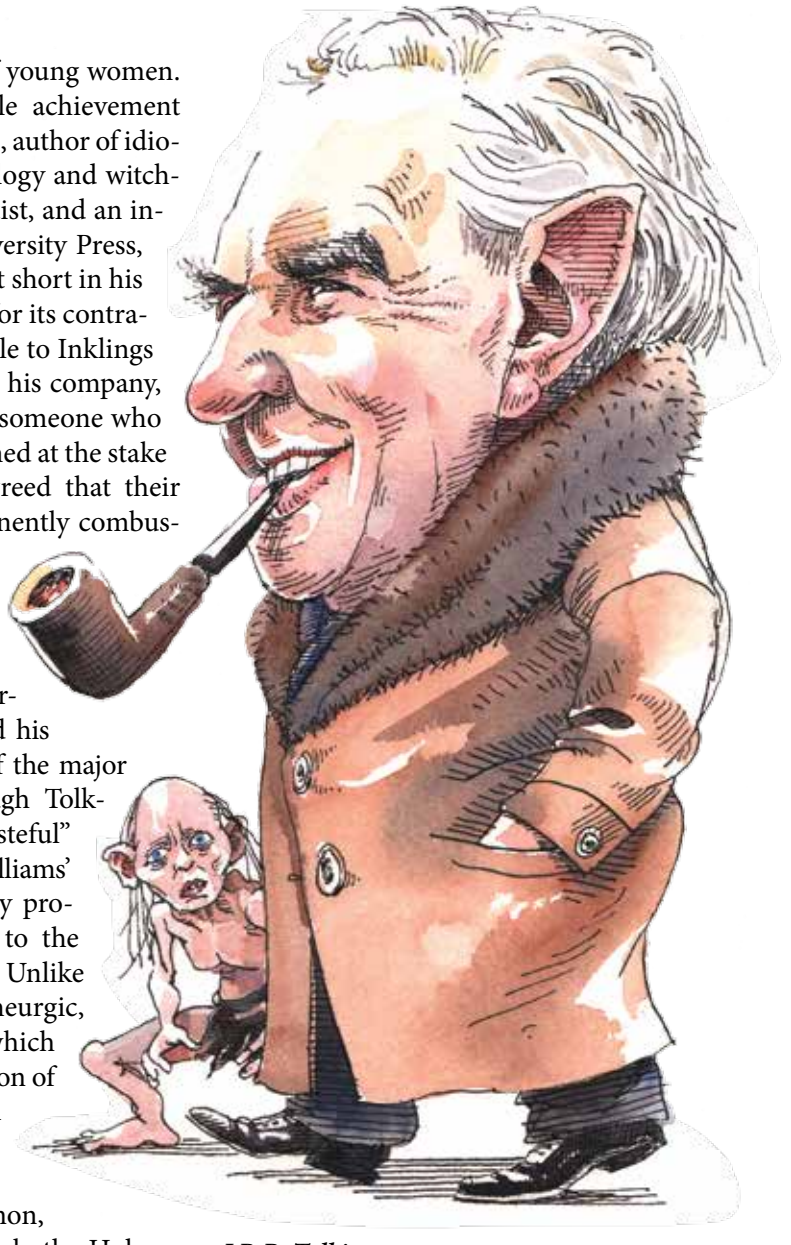


Charles Williams.

Charles Williams, on the other hand, was interested in both faith and re-enchantment, but of a rather different sort than Lewis and Tolkien, as Grevel Lindop's biography of the "third Inkling" shows. Despite its title, Lindop's study allows Williams, untethered from Lewis and Tolkien, to bloom fascinatingly and darkly on his own terms. Captivating to all who knew him, Williams was an electrifying conversationalist and speaker. In the 1940s, without an advanced degree (his working-class family's limited means prevented him from finishing university), he drew large and enthusiastic audiences to hear his discourses on Milton and Wordsworth.

Williams was also a member of secret societies such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and adhered to magical theories about the harnessing of sexual energy, mainly for the purpose of his poetic endeavors, and which were enacted in mildly sadomasochistic yet unconsummated relationships that the married Williams carried on throughout his life with a series of young women. A modernist poet of considerable achievement (and on close terms with T. S. Eliot), author of idiosyncratic works on Christian theology and witchcraft, a celebrated religious dramatist, and an influential editor at the Oxford University Press, Williams's amazingly active life, cut short in his late 50s, repays examination both for its contradictions and for its counter-example to Inklings One and Two. While they enjoyed his company, Lewis and Tolkien, in response to someone who said that Williams ought to be burned at the stake for his heterodox views, both agreed that their friend was, in Lewis's words, "eminently combustible."

While Lindop makes a compelling case for renewed attention to Williams' poetry, he is best-known today for his supernatural horror fiction. Lewis called his novel *The Place of the Lion* "one of the major literary events of my life," although Tolkien found Williams' novels "distasteful" and "ridiculous." At their best, Williams' potboilers are creepy fun, but they provide a foil, not a complement to the fantasies of Lewis and Tolkien. Unlike the latter, Williams' thrust is theurgic, not mythic. His novels, which usually involve the irruption of some magical item into our own world—the Stone of Solomon, the original tarot deck, the Holy Grail, the Platonic forms as actual entities—observe with deft comic timing how his characters react to the state of affairs, but the stakes are less religious than talismanic (or even, at times, geopolitical, as when British acquisition of the Stone of Solomon threatens to trigger an Islamic uprising in the Middle East). With the possible exception of a few elements in Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*, this is not what the twin pillars of the Inklings were up to.



J.R.R. Tolkien.

Williams' career also reminds us to what extent the Western esoteric tradition with which he was so fascinated is a jumbled, Christian imagination of things Jewish. Williams was not really given to anti-Semitism. The Jews in his novels range from the grotesque stereotype in his early *War in Heaven* to the saintly talmudic sages in *Many Dimensions*, but the point is usually that we Jews have magic stuff, Solomonic bric-a-brac. Slightly less instrumental was Williams' fascination with Kabbalah, filtered through occult writer A. E. Waite. In one ritual with the Rosicrucian group of which Williams was a member he was apparently "raised on the cross of Tiphereth"—a typical mashing of Christian and Jewish symbols—while his poetic cycle *Taliessin Through Logres* reads at points as if T. S. Eliot had rendered portions of the *Zohar* with Arthurian knights in place of the *sefirot*.

For serious Jewish readers, though, it is Lewis and Tolkien who offer the most to contemplate, not least their emphasis on the centrality of the imagination in their fictions and their faith, not a topic on which normative Jewish thought has had very much to say. Readers of the *Jewish Review of Books* may remember that I broached this topic some years ago to some controversy ("Why There Is No Jewish Narnia," Spring 2010). In part due to thoughtful criticism from Farah Mendlesohn and other scholars of fantasy literature, I no longer agree with all of my earlier formulations, though I think my question remains a good one. I remain certain, however, that in whatever direction a truly Jewish fantasyland may lie, we will at some point have to take our bearings by the twin pillars of the Inklings.

Michael Weingrad's most recent book is Letters to America: Selected Poems of Reuven Ben-Yosef *(Syracuse University Press).*

Old Isaiah

BY DAVID G. DALIN

Louis D. Brandeis: American Prophet
by Jeffrey Rosen
Yale University Press, 256 pp., $25

There are probably not very many Jews in the United States yearning to see Merrick Garland appointed to the Supreme Court so that their co-religionists might hold four out of its nine seats. Nor, for that matter, is there any reason to believe that a significant number of people now seeking to thwart Garland's nomination are doing so because he is Jewish. For just about the whole country, his religious identity is utterly beside the point.

Things were very different a century ago, when Woodrow Wilson became the first president to nominate a Jew for a seat on the Supreme Court. President Wilson's announcement of his choice of Louis D. Brandeis, "the people's lawyer," on January 28, 1916 precipitated a four-month Senate battle. It was the most contentious fight over the confirmation of a Supreme Court justice in American history prior to the 1987 Senate battle over Robert Bork. In his fine new biography, *Louis D. Brandeis*: *American Prophet*, Jeffrey Rosen, who covered the Supreme Court for the *New Republic* and is now the president of the National Constitution Center and a professor at The George Washington University Law School, shows how some of that battle revolved around the fact that Brandeis was a Jew.

George Wickersham, who had been attorney general during the Taft administration and the president of the New York City Bar Association in 1916, attacked Brandeis's supporters as "a bunch of Hebrew uplifters." Anti-Semitism was also certainly a factor in the opposition of A. Lawrence Lowell, Harvard University's president. When Brandeis's nomination was announced, Lowell, an early supporter of the Immigration Restriction League and one of its national vice presidents, gathered a petition of protest against him that had 55 signatures, including the names of many of the most eminent leaders of Boston's banking and legal establishments. William F. Fitzgerald, a conservative Boston politician and longtime political foe of Brandeis, wrote that "the fact that a slimy fellow of this kind by his smoothness and intrigue, together with his Jewish instinct can be appointed to the Court should teach an object lesson" to true Americans.

Plenty of the opposition to Brandeis, however, had little or nothing to do with his Jewishness. As Rosen recounts, former President William Howard Taft, who was no anti-Semite, was furious when he heard the news of Brandeis's nomination. "He is," Taft fulminated, "a muckraker, an emotionalist for his own purposes, a socialist, prompted by jealously, a hypocrite [. . .] who is utterly unscrupulous [. . .] a man of infinite cunning [. . .] of great tenacity of purpose, and, in my judgment, of much power for evil."

Within days of Wilson's surprise announcement, Taft also began mobilizing opposition to Brandeis amongst the leadership of the American Bar Association. Together with six other former American Bar Association presidents, he sent a scathing letter of protest to the Senate Judiciary Committee stating that "the undersigned feel under the painful duty to say to you that, in their opinion, taking into view the reputation, character, and professional career of Mr. Louis D. Brandeis, he is not a fit person to be a member of the Supreme Court of the United States."

Brandeis's Jewishness played a large part in the struggle over his confirmation to the Supreme Court, but he had little Jewish background.

Brandeis, however, had a great deal of support from liberal politicians across the political spectrum, who regarded him as one of America's preeminent social reformers and an important leader of the progressive movement. Progressive Republican Senator Robert La Follette who, as Rosen notes, Wilson had secretly consulted prior to announcing the nomination, applauded Wilson's appointment, hailing the Brandeis nomination as a historic moment for America. A man who had risen to prominence as a defender of trade unions, women's suffrage, and a shorter workday for women, Brandeis was the inventor of savings bank life insurance and also pioneered the idea of pro bono public interest work by attorneys. Brandeis earned the sobriquet "the people's attorney," achieving fame as one of the champions of the progressive era and as one of the most vocal critics of the excesses of corporate power and the "money trusts."



THAT BRANDEIS APPOINTMENT
CHORUS OF GRIEF-STRICKEN CONSERVATIVES: Oh, what an associate for such a pure and innocent girl! And we have tried to bring her up so carefully, too!

Cartoon by Nelson Greene, which appeared in* Puck*, 1916. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.)

President Wilson remained steadfast in his support for his nominee throughout the bitter Senate confirmation battle and, with 56 Democrats and only 40 Republicans in the Senate, the Senate vote on Brandeis's nomination was never really in doubt. On June 1, 1916, the Senate voted 56 to 28 to confirm his appointment. In the course of the next 23 years, he was to become one of the most important and influential justices ever to sit on the United States Supreme Court.

Brandeis played a singular role in developing the modern jurisprudence of free speech and the doctrine of a constitutionally protected right of privacy, writing some of the most important Supreme Court opinions about free speech, freedom from government surveillance, freedom of thought and opinion, and law and technology. Many of these opinions, originally written in dissent, have become the law of the land and bear upon constitutional questions still confronting us today.

In 1928, in the Supreme Court case of *Olmstead v. United States*, Brandeis sought to apply the principle of a constitutional right of privacy to changes in electronic technology, such as wiretapping. When the federal government began to tap telephones in an effort to enforce Prohibition, it arrested a Seattle bootlegger named Olmstead, on whose phone conversations federal agents had been eavesdropping for five months. Olmstead protested his indictment on the grounds that wiretapping violated the Fourth Amendment, which guarantees people the right against "unreasonable searches and seizures" of "their persons, houses, papers, and effects." In what Rosen calls "his visionary dissenting opinion in *Olmstead*," Brandeis sought to translate "the founders' late eighteenth-century views about privacy into a twentieth-century world." In the age of radio, Brandeis pointed out, telephone conversations were more or less the equivalent of sealed letters, which the Supreme Court had ruled in the 19th century could not be opened without a judge's warrant. To provide the same amount of privacy that the framers of the

Fourth Amendment intended to protect, it had become necessary to prohibit warrantless searches and seizures of conversations over the telephone, even though wiretapping didn't involve the actual entering of a person's home. In a remarkably prescient passage of this opinion, notes Rosen, "Brandeis seemed to look forward to the age of web cam and cyberspace, predicting that technologies of surveillance were likely to progress far beyond wiretapping."

There is some irony in the fact that Brandeis's Jewishness played such a large part in the struggle over his confirmation, for he had the least substantial Jewish background of any of the eight Jewish justices who have so far served on the Supreme Court. His parents, well-educated German-speaking Jews from



Louis D. Brandeis on the* Mauretania *en route to Palestine, 1919. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.)

Prague, did not belong to a synagogue when they settled in Louisville, Kentucky, nor did they celebrate any Jewish holidays or keep kosher. Brandeis himself was never observant; he had a Christmas tree in his home and famously relished the Kentucky hams sent to him from time to time by his brother Alfred in Louisville. He became a committed assimilationist, a man who could affirm on the 250th anniversary of Jewish settlement in North America that "[h]abits of living or of thought which tend to keep alive difference of origin or to classify men according to their religious beliefs are inconsistent with the American ideal of brotherhood, and are disloyal."

Yet by 1914 Brandeis had assumed the leadership of the American Zionist movement. This was the culmination of a process that began in 1910 when he mediated the great strike that had paralyzed the garment workers' industry in New York. It was at this time that he first came into contact with Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe—workers as well as employers—an experience that had a profound impact on him. Brandeis was deeply impressed by their intellectualism and social idealism, and greatly moved by their accounts of the anti-Semitism that had forced them to emigrate from Eastern Europe to America. "What struck me most was that each side had a great capacity for placing themselves in the other fellows' shoes," Brandeis wrote. "They argued, but they were willing to listen to argument. That set these people apart in my experience in labor disputes." At the age of 54, notes Rosen, Brandeis "had gained faith in the Jewish immigrant masses and become conscious of his own Jewishness."

Brandeis evolved into a Zionist largely as a result of his meeting in 1912 with the Boston editor and journalist Jacob de Haas, who had been Theodor Herzl's secretary in America and who educated Brandeis about the great man. That same year Brandeis chanced to meet a man who overawed him, the noted Palestinian agronomist and discoverer of "wild wheat," Aaron Aaronsohn. As a great admirer of Jeffersonian agrarianism and ideals of small government and local democracy, notes Rosen, Brandeis was "thrilled" to learn from Aaronsohn that the Jews were applying principles that he valued highly—"scientific agriculture and self-governing, small-scale democracy"—in Palestine.

Equally important to Brandeis was his encounter with the social philosopher Horace Kallen, who coined the term "cultural pluralism" and who shared Brandeis's commitment to the liberal values and social idealism of the Progressive movement. As Rosen points out, Kallen's essays "helped Brandeis to reconcile two ideals—Zionism and Americanism—that he had previously found to be in conflict." The key to Zionism's legitimacy for American Jews, as Brandeis came to understand it, was its link to Americanism. In speech after speech throughout 1914 and 1915, Brandeis told Jewish audiences across the United States that his approach to Zionism came through Americanism and that the two were based on common principles of democracy and social justice. This approach led Brandeis to make what would be his famous and oft-quoted Zionist formulation, inextricably linking Zionism and Americanism together. "To be good Americans, we must be better Jews," proclaimed Brandeis, "and to be better Jews, we must become Zionists."

On August 20, 1914, Brandeis assumed the top leadership position in the American Zionist movement. Barnstorming the country, he raised unprecedentedly large sums of money for the Zionist cause and massively increased the number of people affiliated with it. With Brandeis at the helm, the American Zionist movement became a major political force in American Jewish life. Behind the scenes, too, Brandeis performed vital services for Zionism. In 1917 he was "instrumental in persuading" President Wilson to endorse the Balfour Declaration, "after wavering about whether the time was ripe." This inspired Jacob de Haas to declare, as Rosen reminds us, that "the most consistent contribution to American Jewish history in the twentieth century has been that of Louis Dembitz Brandeis." Many decades later, after that century has come to a close, this is still a defensible statement.

At the time of his 75th birthday in 1931, Brandeis's friend Louis E. Kirstein, the Boston Jewish philanthropist, publicly praised him as "a modern prophet," adding that "I am not the first, nor shall I be the last to suggest that." Franklin D. Roosevelt famously called him Isaiah, as did members of FDR's inner circle during the New Deal, and Rosen is evidently disposed to regard him in the same light. As he shows, Brandeis's deep ethical commitment, rooted in his determination to protect individual liberty and economic opportunity, led him frequently to denounce injustice in a decidedly "prophetic" mode. But Brandeis could pull surprises. On May 27, 1935—known as Black Monday—he and his colleagues on the Supreme Court handed down three unanimous opinions striking down New Deal programs on the grounds that they created unchecked centralized federal power. Brandeis's support of the unanimous Supreme Court decisions in these three cases stunned FDR—who said in shock, "Well, what about old Isaiah?" Social justice evidently wasn't the only thing on the prophet's mind.

Immediately after the announcement of these decisions, Brandeis met secretly with Roosevelt's adviser Benjamin V. Cohen, one of the most influential architects of the New Deal, and, as Rosen notes, told him to convey a dire "prophecy" to FDR and Felix Frankfurter, Brandeis's longtime friend and associate who was then a Roosevelt adviser. "You must see that Felix understands the situation and explains it to the president," Brandeis said. "They must understand that these three decisions change everything," he warned. Then, in an act of questionable judicial propriety, Brandeis told Cohen to ask Felix Frankfurter to advise FDR that he would have to redesign much of his legislative program. "The president," Brandeis said, "has been living in a fool's paradise."

Brandeis's secret meeting with Cohen was not his only questionable action. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, he used Frankfurter to secretly publicize his political opinions by generating articles and editorials concerning public policy for the *Harvard Law Review*, the *New Republic,* and other publications that would appear under Frankfurter's name. That one of the most renowned and respected justices in Supreme Court history, who has always been portrayed as a paragon of judicial virtue, secretly engaged in extrajudicial political activity that seemed to go beyond the bounds of judicial propriety remains an undeniable part of Brandeis's judicial legacy that cannot be forgotten or ignored.

In his Epilogue, in which Rosen argues that Brandeis's legacy remains relevant, he discusses some of the most important legal issues and cases of our time—including the challenge of new technologies to the right of privacy, and the Supreme Court's controversial 2010 *Citizens United* decision. On the basis of interviews with Supreme Court Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen Breyer, and Elena Kagan, Rosen is able to document Brandeis's direct impact on their jurisprudence. All three have been influenced by Brandeis's judicial opinions and explain why they embrace Brandeis as a judicial model and why Brandeis still matters for them today. Needless to say, you don't have to be a Jewish justice or even a liberal justice to follow in Brandeis's footsteps. As Rosen notes, Brandeis's famous dissent in *Olmstead*, the 1928 wiretapping case, has been invoked by justices of very diverse judicial perspectives "who are united in their devotion to protecting privacy, from Samuel Alito and Anthony Kennedy to Ruth Bader Ginsburg." There is every reason to expect that Brandeis will continue to be as much of a mentor for future Supreme Court justices as he has been for those of the past and present.

David G. Dalin is the author, co-author, or editor of 11 books. His forthcoming book, The Jewish Justices of the Supreme Court, from Brandeis to Kagan*, is forthcoming from Brandeis University Press.*

Pious Censorship

BY ALLAN NADLER

Changing the Immutable: How Orthodox Judaism Rewrites Its History
by Marc B. Shapiro
The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 360 pp., $39.95

Some three decades ago, Marc B. Shapiro met a Satmar Hasidic *Moykher-Sforim*, or book dealer, in the stacks of Harvard's Widener Library, whose sixth floor houses one of the world's greatest collections of rabbinic literature. Shapiro, who was a graduate student in Jewish history at the time, was there to study these tomes, while the book dealer had come to reproduce them illegally for sale to *haredi* customers. They struck up a conversation, and the book dealer showed Shapiro a sample of his work, a republication of an early 20th-century rabbinical halakhic study.

All of the decorative female figures have been altered or removed in later *haredi*-published editions.



Three versions of the frontispiece of Rabbi Menahem Abraham Rapa Porto's **Minchah belulah.** *Left: The original coat of arms, Verona, 1594. Middle: With the mermaids clothed, Bnei Brak, 1989. Right: With the mermaids transformed into men, Bnei Brak, 2010. (Courtesy of The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.)*

When he opened the book, Shapiro immediately noticed an obvious blank space on one of the book's first pages where there should have been a *haskamah*, an approbation from a leading rabbinic authority that is something between a religious Good Housekeeping seal and a literary blurb. Shapiro quickly located the first edition of the book in the Harvard stacks and realized that the approbation the book dealer had expunged was that of the first chief rabbi of the modern-day Land of Israel, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook.

> I approached the man and told him that I understood that he regarded Kook as a heretic. However, the author of the book thought that Kook was a great man, which is why he had solicited his *haskamah*.

Shapiro asked for an explanation: "What then gives you the right to take it out?" The *Moykher-Sforim* replied in all earnestness that the author was now in heaven, and hence undoubtedly knew that the religious Zionist Kook was a heretic, "and he is therefore happy with what I have done." As Shapiro writes in *Changing the Immutable: How Orthodox Judaism Rewrites Its History*, as well as in an earlier account of the encounter, this response left him "speechless." Well, hardly speechless anymore!

In fact, when it comes to unearthing such pious mischief, Shapiro has no peers in either the rabbinic or academic worlds. He has achieved notoriety, in its best sense, as the most persistent and prolific expert on how, as his subtitle has it, Orthodox Judaism rewrites its history. And, precisely because Shapiro is himself a prominent member of the Orthodox community, even his most arcane and scholarly writings generate excitement outside the ivory towers. This is particularly so in the Modern Orthodox community where they are a favored subject among the learned and semi-learned synagogue backbenchers, as well as at rabbinically unsanctioned kiddush clubs worldwide. In such settings, it is not uncommon to find ex-yeshiva students excitedly sharing and debating Shapiro's latest column on the popular website *the Seforim blog*.

Shapiro's remarkably erudite new book delves deeply into the many ways in which Orthodox (mostly *haredi*) rabbis, "historians," editors, and publishers have for centuries—but with rapidly increasing alacrity during recent decades—altered, censored, and covered up a vast array of inconvenient historical, halakhic, theological, biographical, and bibliographical realities. As for the *Moykher-Sforim*'s little act of censorship, Shapiro has now devoted 10 heavily annotated pages to documenting—complete with textual illustrations—the history of the expurgation of dozens of Rav Kook's *haskamot* from the front material of many recently reproduced *seforim*. The authors of these books, among them the greatest Eastern European rabbis of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, may have differed with Rav Kook on the subject of Zionism, but they held him in great esteem and actively sought his approval. For the children, grandchildren, and institutional heirs of these men, this is an embarrassment.

That Shapiro has cast a very large net in fishing for his fishy sources, he makes clear from the outset:

> What I am attempting to do in this book is to show how common "instrumental truth" has been, particularly in the last century. My focus is not primarily on works of history, which is where people usually look for this type of information, but rather on all sorts of texts that are the lifeblood of traditional Jewish communities.

Shapiro instructively compares the attitude toward truth he finds in these sources to that of pre-modern historians who provided exemplary narratives for explicitly didactic purposes. "Yet," he notes, the new "'Orthodox history' [. . .] where 'truth' was entirely instrumental and what was accepted as fact one day could be entirely rewritten the next," also bears striking similarities to Soviet historiography.

Although one might have expected Shapiro to open his learned study with the story with which

we began, he both opens and closes his book with discussions of a famous and powerful Gentile couple: Hillary and Bill Clinton. No, Shapiro does not concern himself with Hillary's questionable behavior in concealing and deleting emails written while she served as secretary of state. Rather, he presents, on the very first page of the book's preface, two photographs of President Barack Obama's inner circle at the time of the killing of Osama bin Laden. The original photograph very clearly shows Hillary Clinton seated directly across from Vice President Joseph Biden. Directly beneath this image, Shapiro reproduces a clumsily doctored version of the same photo from which Clinton and an unnamed female staffer had been erased, because, well, they are women, and the Yiddish *haredi* weekly *Di Tsaytung* doesn't publish pictures of women.

And then, toward the end of the book's last and, as it has turned out, rather controversial and I believe widely misunderstood chapter entitled "Is the Truth Really That Important?" Shapiro refers to the single most notorious line of Bill Clinton's presidency, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman," as an example of mendaciousness that has historically been most commonly associated with Jesuit casuistry, namely "mental reservation" (in this case, it depends on what one counts as sex). But, as Shapiro (who teaches at a Jesuit institution) shows, there are analogous rabbinical discussions. The range of rabbinic sources he invokes in these few pages is stunning, though here, as elsewhere, one wonders at the principle of selection. Then again, who wouldn't want to know that the famous Rogatchover Gaon allowed his son-in-law to tell the British authorities that he had been born in Palestine in order to speed up the receipt of his passport—as long as he kept in mind that "the Talmud explains a verse in Psalms to mean that even one who only looks forward to seeing the land of Israel is regarded as if he had been born there"?

Issues of gender and sex are dealt with in great detail in the book's sixth chapter, entitled "Sexual Matters and More." Shapiro begins the chapter with a very harsh characterization of the Israeli *haredi* society's "extreme fastidiousness when it comes to language that, as far as I know, has no parallels outside this community." He contends that "someone whose only source of news was the Israeli haredi papers would have never learnt exactly what precipitated Bill Clinton's impeachment or the resignation and prison sentence of Israel's President Moshe Katzav."

Shapiro then somewhat clumsily segues into a fascinating and richly illustrated consideration of the history of internal Orthodox censorship of the title pages of beautiful editions of three of the most authoritative codes of Jewish law: Maimonides' *Mishne Torah*, Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe's *Levush Malkhut,* and Rabbi Joseph Karo's *Shulchan Arukh*. What these stunning frontispieces all share are beautiful renderings of women in various states of undress. All of them have also been altered in later *haredi*-published editions that replace or simply remove the female figures, or at least their breasts. In another instance, illustrating that such sexually squeamish censorship is nothing new, Shapiro juxtaposes parallel pages from two versions of the Passover haggadah, those of Prague, 1526, and Venice, 1603. In the Prague edition, the words of the haggadah (citing Ezekiel 23:29) that refer to Israel as naked and bare (*eirom ve-eryah*) are illustrated with a portrait of an almost naked woman and the caption "*eirom ve-eryah; eirom bivgadim; ve-eryah be-mitzvot*" (naked and bare; naked from clothes; and empty of *mitzvot*). The more prudish Venice printer not only changed the woman into a man but added a different caption, "*tzurat ish, eirom ve-eryah*" (the image of a man**,** naked and empty)!

Although the images with which Shapiro opens are the most arresting pages in this chapter, his detailed discussion of contemporary ultra-Orthodox versions and translations of an array of rabbinical and biblical texts with erotic content is more important and no less disconcerting. Shapiro does not limit his criticisms to ultra-Orthodox translators. He shows numerous examples of prudish 20th-century Modern Orthodox mistranslations, and occasional outright deletions, of sexually charged language in the Soncino translation of the Talmud and Philip Birnbaum's classic Modern Orthodox edition of the siddur. Still, Shapiro reserves by far his most extensive and scathing comments for the leading American *haredi* publisher, ArtScroll.

The most extreme example is ArtScroll's decision to "translate" the Song of Songs by providing an English version of the classic allegorical interpretation of the book. Thus, Shapiro notes the biblical phrase "your two breasts" (Song of Songs 4:5, 7:4) is rendered as "either 'Moses and Aaron' or the 'Tablets of the Law.'" The editors justified such translations by arguing that, "The literal meaning of the words is so far from their meaning, that it is false." Shapiro drily notes that this is the first translation of Song of Songs to take such an approach and concludes with the ironic observation that, "As far as I know, no one has ever suggested the publication of an 'updated' Hebrew version of the Song of Songs so that Hebrew speakers are not exposed to the original words."

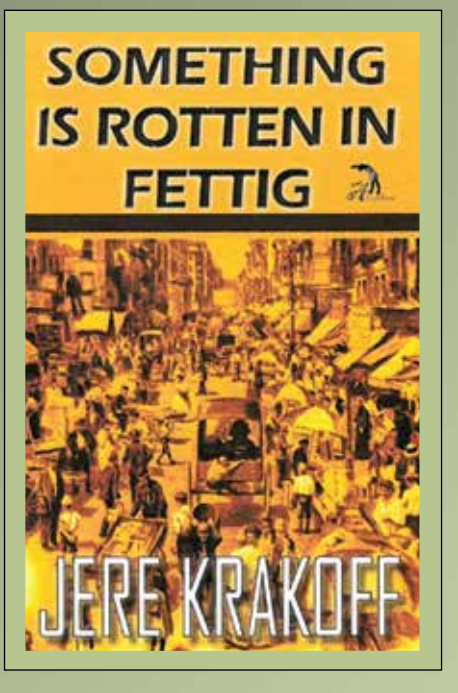
This is hardly the sole example of Shapiro's distaste for this particular *haredi* publisher. In connection with their deletion of the great commentator Rashi's remark that the early rabbinic sages who engaged in what is known as *tikkun sofrim* (corrections of the scribes) did actually aim to "reverse" or "correct" the presumably flawed Masoretic biblical text, Shapiro laments:

> With ArtScroll now the Bible of choice for so many, it is likely that Rashi's comment is now unknown to thousands of otherwise learned Jews, and, as with all acts of censorship, that is exactly the point.

Another of Shapiro's many stinging critiques of the liberties ArtScroll takes with sacred texts is hidden away, in a long and detailed footnote—one of many hundreds of similarly packed annotations—to his brief history of the censorship of the words of *Birkat ha-minim,* the malediction against sectarians that was added to the daily *Amida* prayer in the early rabbinical era. Shapiro offers the following withering critique, which merits extensive citation:

> In explaining the word *velamalshinim* (slanderers), and not realizing that the word is not part of the original prayer, the *Complete ArtScroll Siddur* (ed. Scherman and Zlotowitz), explains that the Sadducees, Boethusians, Essenes, and early Christians "used their

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—Manhattan Book Review

Set in a facsimile of early 20th century Lower East Side, this humorous satire chronicles the arrest, detention, and trial of an angst-ridden kosher butcher.

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> political power to oppress observant Jews and to slander them to the anti-Semitic Roman government." Quite apart from the improper adjective "observant" used to distinguish different kinds of Jews in Second Temple days (as if the Essenes were not observant), or the false claim that the Essenes and early Christians had political power, the prayer was certainly not directed against Sadducees, Boethusians, or Essenes, and no one has ever claimed otherwise.

Since ArtScroll's siddur and Chumash have, over the last generation, become the editions of choice in the pews of most Orthodox synagogues, Shapiro's criticisms are far more than merely academic.

ArtScroll is, however, not alone on Shapiro's hit list of *haredi* publishers and publications guilty of censorship and deliberate distortions. The Israeli publisher Netzah is the object of much withering criticism for its *haredi* reinvention of the 19th-century German Orthodox thinker Samson Raphael Hirsch. Shapiro is especially incensed by Netzah's attempt to cover up Hirsch's ideology of *Torah im derekh eretz*, which required the Orthodox to combine the study and observance of Torah with engagement with the modern world. While Shapiro clearly tries to maintain a detached, scholarly posture throughout, his exasperation, even disgust, occasionally get the better of him, as in this instance:

> in a passage dealing with Jewish education […] Hirsch's mention of *torah im derekh erets* is deleted! Let us not forget that *torah im derekh erets* was the central value of Hirsch's life. One can only wonder at the absurdity of trying to keep Hirsch "kosher" by nullifying his entire educational philosophy.

The chapter devoted to Rav Kook is not only the longest in the book; it will no doubt prove the most upsetting to many readers. If Hirsch has been remade by *haredi* publishers, translators, and historians, Kook has been literally and figuratively erased, and not only by small-time *haredi* book dealers. Shapiro richly documents how thoroughly and unscrupulously *haredi* "historians," memoirists, and editors have attempted to strip Rav Kook of the great stature he enjoyed during his lifetime.

In a similar vein, Shapiro shows that Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the *rosh yeshiva* of Modern Orthodoxy's flagship Yeshiva University and arguably the greatest rabbinic authority in American history, has suffered a similar posthumous fate. He juxtaposes two photographs of Rav Soloveitchik's great *haredi* colleague Rabbi Aaron Kotler. In one, he is sitting at a dinner, flanked by Rav Soloveitchik and Irving Bunim, a leading figure in the American Agudath Israel movement. In the other, taken from a recent *haredi* hagiography of Rabbi Kotler, Soloveitchik has been cropped out of the photo.

The chapters entitled "Jewish Thought" and "Halakhah" are exemplary of Shapiro's book, both its major merits and, alas, its minor flaws. That is to say that both chapters are rich with hitherto unexplored information about censorship and literally bursting with fantastically erudite annotations and asides, but Shapiro sometimes loses his focus. Into the chapter on Jewish thought, for example, he inserts the complex, subtle, and not really relevant issue of Maimonidean esotericism. To the degree that both Maimonides and today's *haredi* censors feel entitled to keep certain potentially dangerous truths from the faithful but untutored masses, one might argue that Shapiro's inclusion of Maimonides' and other medieval philosophers' and kabbalists' theological-political wariness is warranted. But, as Shapiro himself makes clear, there is a significant distinction between those who censor the work of other, mostly deceased, authors and those who choose to exercise care, or restraint, in what they themselves write.

The chapter on halakha also includes a long digression that rather abruptly interrupts the long history of the censorship of lenient rabbinical views regarding drinking Gentile wine, with which the chapter begins and concludes. While speaking of drinking that which is forbidden, Shapiro strays into an entirely tangential and very long discussion of the strange and at times antinomian beliefs and behaviors of a handful of Hasidic rebbes that were eventually censored from their biographies. This train of thought is set in motion by Menachem Mendel of Rymanow who drank—honey syrup, not Gentile wine—on Yom Kippur afternoon because he had a vision in which the heavenly gates had already closed and forgiveness had been granted, so that Yom Kippur was (conveniently) over sometime after *mincha*. Such extreme, even delusional, grandiosity was rather common among early Hasidic leaders, but it was never meant as a judicial precedent in matters of halakha and was never prescribed for others. This material certainly has no place in a chapter devoted to the attempts to cover up thoroughly reasoned, if controversial, halakhic decisions on the part of leading rabbinical authorities. In fact, Shapiro discusses other Hasidic rebbes' bizarre, unhalakhic ideas and dramatically antinomian actions in a kind of miscellany entitled "Other Censored Matters" and might better have included the material there.





Top: Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Aaron Kotler with Irving Bunim at a Chinuch Atzmai dinner, 1956. Bottom: The cropped version, which appeared in Yitzchok Dershowitz's* The Legacy of Maran Rav Aharon Kotler. *(Courtesy of The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.)

Shapiro's discussions of both male and female head coverings are similarly scattered. In a sharp put-down of the extensive effort by contemporary *haredi* authors and editors to cover up (literally!) the fact that until quite recently many Orthodox women, including the wives of leading rabbis, did not cover their hair, Shapiro writes in his Introduction:

> All I would say is that if you are going to start touching up pictures, you have a lot of work ahead of you. For starters, the typical non-hasidic rabbi's wife in the United States did not even wear a *sheitl* (wig) until the 1970s or later.

But it turns out that Shapiro does in fact have much more to say on this very subject, in discussions of *tzni'ut* (female modesty) found in two subsequent chapters. The entire discussion probably belongs in the chapter on halakha, in which Shapiro documents the censorship of a responsum by the great Baghdadi sage Rabbi Joseph Hayim, which concedes that in non-Islamic lands, where women tend to go about with uncovered hair, there is no strict halakhic imperative to cover one's hair.

Shapiro's discussion of men's head coverings, illustrated with a startling gallery of photos of bare-headed prominent rabbis and rebbes, from Rabbi Leon Modena and Rabbi Moses Gentili in the Renaissance era to such modern luminaries as Isaac Breuer and the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, concludes his chapter on Samson Raphael Hirsch, who is not mentioned at all in the final quarter of the chapter. This extensive digression also seems to belong in the chapter on halakha.

Readers of Shapiro's prodigious and provocative earlier chapters on the deliberate deletions and distortions of history, biography, and theology in the work of contemporary *haredi* writers will be surprised by his concluding chapter, "Is the Truth Really That Important?" This chapter, which to my knowledge constitutes the fullest English-language collection of rabbinical sources dealing, in some way or another, with issues of truth and falsehood, elicited immediate criticism by those who misread Shapiro as arguing here that, in the end, the value of truth indeed does not matter after all.

It is not difficult to see how Shapiro's conclusion was misconstrued as justifying, at least from within the framework of classical rabbinic thought, many, although certainly not all, of the egregious examples of censorship that he so meticulously documented in the previous seven chapters. Such a reading, however, distorts his intention. Shapiro is more than sufficiently clear that he is "interested in the strand of Jewish tradition that countenances falsehood," which he deems "an approach [that] deserves to be

understood in a sympathetic manner [. . .] and to be recovered, as it were, from well-intentioned attempts to explain it away."

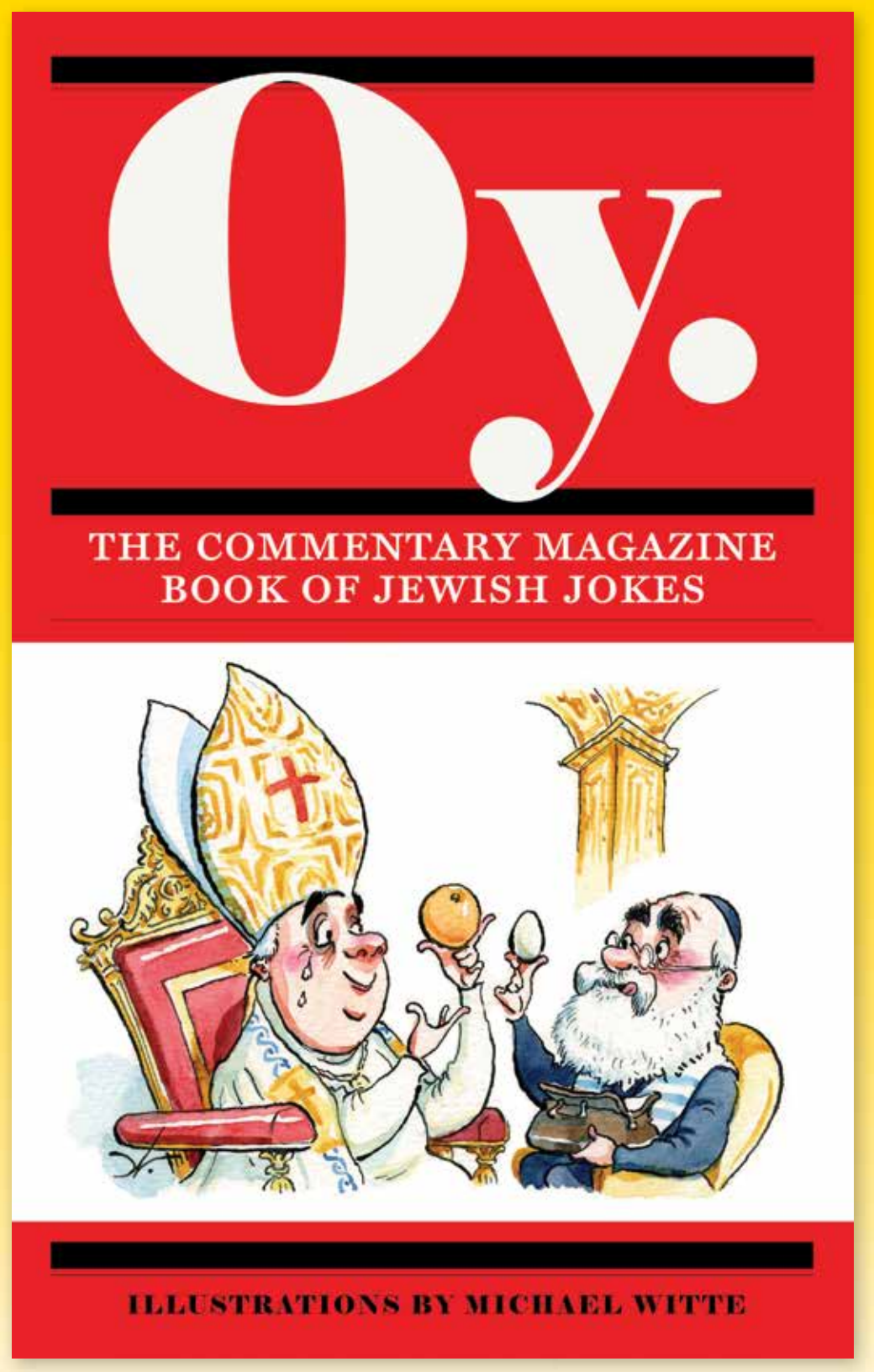
Still, the absence of any apparent organizing principle to his extensive discussion, as well as Shapiro's clumsy phraseology and often simplistic understanding of the many different meanings of "truth" (e.g., ontological, natural, mathematical, logical, emotional, religious, and legal truths), are at least partially to blame for the confused reactions of many readers. What Shapiro is really addressing is not whether the "truth is really important" for the rabbis, which of course it is. It is rather the difficult and ancient question of what truth is; is there always, necessarily, a single truth on any one issue? Can there be conflicting, but parallel and thus equally valid, truths regarding the same subject, especially when it comes to matter of belief or law rather than, say, arithmetic? In its overly wide and unordered array of mostly medieval and early modern rabbinical sources, Shapiro's discussion is overly parochial (and, I dare say, overly erudite) regarding a complex set of issues that has engaged philosophers since the ancient Greeks. Aside from a reference to Maimonides here and Plato there, Shapiro shows little evidence of having thought deeply about the nature of truth before setting out to write of its significance for the rabbis. Thus, Shapiro never alludes to the truly vast and illuminating literature from analytic philosophers of the last one hundred plus years on truth.

Unfortunately, this combination of academic insularity and overwhelmingly vast knowledge of rabbinical sources has led to some even more parochial exchanges between Shapiro and his critics in venues such as *the Seforim blog*, most notably with Aryeh Frimer, who seems to have completely misunderstood Shapiro's intention, which is neither to justify nor to condemn all the mischief that he has documented in this rich study, but rather to make sense of it from the perspective of its perpetrators.

Of course, the fact that in earlier chapters Shapiro often expressed intense frustration and hostility, as well as no small degree of mockery, toward the Orthodox re-writing of history was bound to make his concluding chapter deeply confusing to many readers. Here too, even a brief discussion of standards of truth in different disciplines together with a sketch of the three dominant theories of truth (correspondence, coherence, and pragmatist) could have prevented a good deal of misunderstanding. To be brief, one might argue that the rabbinic tradition has been largely unconcerned with truth as "correspondence" to scientific or historical facts, but rather with promoting those "truths" that cohere with the larger belief system, or serve pragmatically to stabilize the community of believers. Such a discussion would also have shown that differing attitudes to what truth is and what justifies denying or concealing it are hardly unique to the rabbis. Most importantly, it would, no doubt, have left far fewer of Shapiro's readers scratching their heads after concluding this fascinating and remarkably learned book.

Allan Nadler is professor of comparative religion and director of the Program in Jewish Studies at Drew University. He is currently writing a history of the concept of heresy in Jewish thought.

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The Hit Man

BY JONATHAN KARP

Godfather of the Music Business: Morris Levy
by Richard Carlin
University Press of Mississippi, 304 pp., $35

"The ability to wheel and deal are such essential elements of success" in the music industry, wrote the editors of *Billboard* magazine in November 1988, with Morris Levy in mind, that "the thin line between unscrupulous and criminal behavior is often obscure and hard to pinpoint." Wherever that line lay, Levy often crossed it. The owner-operator of the world-famous New York jazz club Birdland during the 1950s, the head of the indie label Roulette Records throughout the sixties and seventies, the creator of the retail record store chain Strawberries during the 1980s, and the object of countless lawsuits for copyright infringement and royalty theft during most of his career, Levy was a lifelong associate (or more accurately, employee) of the Mafia, specifically, the Genovese crime family. Only his death of stomach cancer in 1990 at the age of 63 spared him from a 10-year prison sentence for violent extortion.

Pop music historian Richard Carlin comes not exactly to praise Morris Levy but at least to set the record straight. He aims to rediscover the character in the caricature. Scrupulously even-handed, Carlin eschews the sensational in favor of sober business history, meticulously detailing key aspects of Levy's 40-year career in a business where, curiously in Carlin's telling, Levy occupied a position both at the center and on the margins. Carlin reveals that Levy, who is usually dismissed as just a colorful parasite, was a nightclub owner committed to racial integration (of both customers and staff), an innovator in the early promotion of rock and roll concerts (partnering with legendary Cleveland disc jockey Alan Freed), an ambitious label owner who once aspired to elevate his company Roulette Records to the status of a major label, and a genuine pioneer of discount music marketing, including his virtual invention of the "golden oldie" compilation. While acknowledging that Levy had ties to mobsters from the beginning—his start in the business was as a teenage flunky in the nightclubs' Mob-run coat-check racket—Carlin suggests that Levy remained a semi-legitimate businessman until the middle-late 1960s, when Roulette's fortunes as a hit factory declined. It was at this point that such lifelong cronies as Genovese family boss Thomas "Tommy Ryan" Eboli and New Jersey mobster Gaetano "Tommy" Vastola virtually moved into the company's premises, on occasion even commandeering Levy's office for discreet high-level meetings.

Yet Carlin's stick-to-business read of Levy's life constricts the book's focus almost too tightly. The author tells us that Levy was a notorious womanizer, but we learn next to nothing of his five marriages and three children, although Carlin appears to have interviewed Levy's son Adam, who became his father's confidant and inherited many of his many legal entanglements.

The music business was a Jewish niche industry; almost everyone Levy worked with who wasn't an artist or a Mafioso was a Jew.

Levy's Jewishness is similarly neglected. It is of course never disguised, which would have been absurd. The music business of Levy's day (and to an extent even today) was a Jewish niche industry; almost everyone Levy worked with who wasn't an artist or a Mafioso was a Jew. Co-religionists and Italians alike referred to Morris as Moishe. That the Ashkenazi pronunciation was employed and that Levy himself made frequent use of Yiddish, despite the fact that he was the son of Turkish-born Sephardi immigrants, underscores the peculiar ethnic character of the music business subculture. In his 2010 memoir, *Me, the Mob, and the Music*, the non-Jewish Midwesterner Tommy James, who, with his group the Shondells, would become Roulette's most successful hitmaker of the 1960s era, described his introduction to the business as one meeting after another with Jewish moguls: talent agent Chuck Rubin; head of the Kama Sutra label, Artie Ripp; Ron Alexenburg, boss of Epic Records; George Goldner, the pioneering producer of Latin mambo recordings; and Jerry Wexler, co-head of Atlantic Records. By the time James finally made his way to Morris Levy's cavernous Broadway office, Levy's promotional director, Red Schwartz, had tipped off his boss to the hit record potential of James's song "Hanky Panky." As James later found out, Levy had sent a message to all of these competitors to lay off. "This is my fucking record!" he told them. "Leave it alone."





Left: Logo of Birdland, established 1949, New York City. Right: LP cover of Tommy James and the Shondells' "Hanky Panky," produced by Roulette Records, 1966.

Levy is fascinating in part because he took the Jewish tough guy persona to its greatest extremes in a business in which—to paraphrase Woody Guthrie—robbery was far more frequently undertaken with fountain pen than a six-gun. A long-time contributor and fundraiser for the United Jewish Appeal, Levy was the guest of honor at a notorious 1973 dinner hosted by the organization in which the attendees raised a little short of $500,000, "with additional pledges still uncounted," as the evening's emcee, former Boston disc jockey and Elektra Records president, Joe Smith, reported. Smith went on to extend his own personal best wishes to "Moishe, a man I've known for many years, admired, and enjoyed." To uproarious laughter he then hastily added, "And I just got word from two of his best friends on the West Coast that my wife and two children have been released!" Although Levy could be thin-skinned, he made little effort to downplay his notorious reputation. On the contrary, it usually made actual violence unnecessary. At times the mere mention of Levy's name proved sufficient to persuade attorneys to back down from lawsuits urged on them by disgruntled artists he had cheated.

But Carlin also shows that a number of musical acts sought out his sponsorship precisely because Levy had the power to move mountains. In the Hobbesian universe that was the indie record business, Levy had a rare capacity to get things done. The very definition of an indie label was its institutional separation from an in-house distribution network that could circulate

its product over wide regions of the country where retailers and potential customers might await. On the off chance of a possible national hit, such networks had to be cobbled together piece by piece. This required not only capital and contacts, two assets Levy possessed in abundance, but also persuasion. And no one was more convincing than Morris Levy. Carlin provides an example of this late in Levy's career when the shoestring black-owned operation called Sugar Hill Records—essentially the first rap label—utilized Levy's services to create distribution for a recording haphazardly concocted by a collection of amateurs called The Sugarhill Gang. Levy deserves full credit for making that record, "Rapper's Delight," not just a national hit in 1979, but also a breakthrough in the emergence of a revolutionary new genre.



Sylvia Robinson, in a publicity photo, ca. mid-1970s, was the founder and CEO of Sugar Hill Records and the driving force behind "Rapper's Delight." (Courtesy of BenCar Archive.)

Artists so lucky would have to content themselves with soaking up the glory of momentary fame. Fortune was an altogether different matter. Levy was notorious for refusing to pay artist royalties. "You want royalties? Then go to England!" he loved to say. Most indie label owners were stingy with royalties. They seemed to feel—perhaps not without reason—that a record's success was due at least as much to their own investment and bribery as to the musician's actual talent. In exasperated response to accusations that he had stolen musicians' royalties, record label owner Don Robey once asked, "How can these ignorant sons of bitches think I owe them money because they hear their record on the air? Hell, I paid the deejays to play it!" But Levy, even more than most, seemed to regard such demands as personal affronts. As Tommy James remarked, the only royalties Roulette regularly paid were those "owed to that famous songwriter Morris Levy." Like most of his cohort, Levy was not above claiming songwriting credit on his artists' hits. Called upon in court to explain how he contributed to the epic hit "Why Do Fools Fall in Love" by Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, a group Levy had met only months *after* the song had been recorded, Levy outlined his own creative process: "You get together, you get a beat going, you put music and words together. I think I would be misleading you if I said I wrote songs, per se, like Chopin."

Levy excelled at such Runyonesque bon mots. But what was it that really set him apart from such other larger-than-life Jewish record men as Leonard Chess of the eponymous Chicago label, Syd Nathan of King Records in Cincinnati, Jules Bihari of Modern Records in Los Angeles, and many others of their kind? One answer is that each of those labels had a distinctive identity, a characteristic sound. Levy's Roulette produced hits, but there was no Roulette sound.

In business, Levy was more of an agglomerator than an innovator. As Carlin points out, he preferred to invest in small, financially troubled companies rather than provide loans to their overextended founders. Employing his leverage as part owner, he would then install one of his allies to monitor his investment, from which position the operation would be bled of capital and talent until Levy could gobble it up at an affordable price. In this manner Roulette subsumed some of the more notable New York City labels of the era, particularly those founded by the brilliant but gambling-addicted George Goldner. What Levy craved even more than the label artists themselves were the copyrights and catalogues the labels contained. "Copyrights don't talk back," he liked to say. As he advised the young producer Quincy Jones, "publishing is where it's at." Levy was a genius at recycling the songs he owned through "remainders" and discount compilations whose advantages lay not just in their marketability to thrifty nostalgia buffs but in the legal loopholes surrounding their re-usage that ensured no royalties had to be paid to artists. Less than a decade after his death, Levy's thousands of copyrights were valued at around $200 million.

In the end the "Godfather of the music business" fell victim to his own greedy machinations. Carlin devotes large chunks of the two concluding chapters to detailing Levy's bumbling conspiracy to defraud a small-time operator of the records he thought he'd been wholesaled, as well as the lengthy trial that followed. It is an episode worthy, if not of a Scorsese film then at least of a Jimmy Breslin novel. Levy and his compatriots were truly dangerous men, but the FBI was quickly onto them, taping their conversations and anticipating their plans. Carlin's meticulous telling adds further details to previous accounts, such as William Knoedelseder's *Stiffed: A True Story of MCA, the Music Business, and the Mafia*. Yet in the end one is left with a longing for something more.

Carlin has captured Morris Levy the criminally insatiable businessman, but he doesn't do much to reveal Levy's soul. One anecdote comes close: After songwriters Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards of the 1980s disco band Chic sued Levy for copyright infringement of their song "Good Times" (which had been heavily interpolated in "Rapper's Delight"), Levy agreed to pay them a substantial sum, but on one condition: They had to buy him two round-trip tickets to Paris and a pair of his-and-hers Rolex watches. When their incredulous attorney asked him why, Levy made it clear that it was a fundamental matter of pride. "Come on," he replied, "I gotta fuck ya!"

Jonathan Karp is a professor of history and Jewish studies at Binghamton University, and the author of The Politics of Jewish Commerce: Economic Thought and Emancipation in Europe, 1638-1848 *(Cambridge University Press).*

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Promised Land or Homeland?

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

A Political Theory for the Jewish People
by Chaim Gans
Oxford University Press, 320 pp., $49.95

Zionism and Judaism: A New Theory
by David Novak
Cambridge University Press, 274 pp., $99.99

Rather surprisingly, the university presses of Cambridge and Oxford have provided us with two new works of Jewish political theory that blend theoretical defenses of Zionism with robust critique of what Chaim Gans calls the "Zionist mainstream." In *Zionism and Judaism*, David Novak, a traditionalist rabbi and distinguished professor of Jewish thought at the University of Toronto, argues that the foundation of Zionism must be theological. For Gans, a professor of law at Tel Aviv University and a prolific writer on nationalism, the failing of the Zionist mainstream is not its secularism but rather its inability to shed an ethnocentric myth that has prevented Israel from according the Arabs numbered among its citizens, or who live under its control, full justice. In *A Political Theory for the Jewish People*, he tries to do so without sacrificing Israel's identity as a Jewish state.

Novak has written his book because "the legitimacy of the State of Israel, the object of the Zionist project, is under philosophical-theoretical attack, especially by those who argue that Zionism is antithetical to Judaism." Precisely whom Novak has in mind here is something about which he does not choose to enlighten us. He never cites or even names any of the assailants, nor, for that matter, does he present a philosophical-theoretical response to any of the arguments being made these days by critics of Zionism, post- or just anti-. He does pay some attention to Yoel Teitelbaum, the most articulate and influential exponent of a theology holding Zionism to be a perversion of Judaism. But Novak hasn't done anything as pointless as writing *Zionism and Judaism* to respond to the arguments of the late Satmar Rebbe. It seems, rather, that Novak believes that the only effective way to parry the ongoing but unidentified philosophical-theoretical attack on Zionism is through Jewish theology.

In a manner somewhat reminiscent of the thinker from whom he takes an important cue, Leo Strauss, Novak tries to show the inherent insufficiency of secular Zionism in both its political and its cultural forms. For Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, he writes, anything other than the defiant assertion of Jewish independence was of secondary importance, "if not negligible altogether." This isn't really true, of course, of Herzl, whose social ideals are well known. Novak, however, is confident that his brief sketch of Herzl's views and his even briefer references to some of his successors have shown that political Zionism is "still too negatively motivated to provide enough of a positive purpose for the State of Israel, and for our support of the State of Israel as Zionists."

This was, to some extent, also Ahad Ha-Am's criticism of Herzl and political Zionism. His cultural Zionism was an attempt to link the return to Zion to an effort to preserve Judaism as the product of Jewish "national creativity," rather than a revealed religion. But Novak finds this replacement of divine dispensation by man-made culture to be a "modern version of idolatry." Moreover, insofar as cultural Zionism treats the Jewish "national spirit" as the moral equivalent of other peoples' national spirits, it "seems to suggest *polytheism*: the assertion that there are many gods." Ahad Ha-Am himself would have recoiled from such an indictment (as do I), but the notion of a "national spirit" is, Novak asserts, one that "has to be taken to be *polytheistic*, whether he could admit that or not."

Novak believes that the only effective way to parry the ongoing but unidentified philosophical-theoretical attack on Zionism is through Jewish theology.



David Novak. (Courtesy of Tom Hamilton, Annex Photo, Toronto.)

What follows, Novak says, from the emptiness of political Zionism and the heresy of cultural Zionism is that the only "cogent" Zionism "is 'religious,' stemming from some kind of theological-political Jewish worldview." It is here that he footnotes Strauss's famous preface to the English translation of his book on Spinoza, in which he first builds cultural Zionism up, stating that "the Jewish state will be an empty shell without a Jewish culture which has its roots in the Jewish heritage," and then tears it down by maintaining that "[w]hen cultural Zionism understands itself, it turns into religious Zionism." Unlike Strauss, however, Novak proceeds to outline and defend a religious Zionist world view.

Near the beginning of his chapter on "the primacy of theology," Novak grants "[r]eaders who are anxious to get to the point about Zionism more quickly" permission to skip his extensive "metaphysical discussion." In view of his promise that they can do so "without losing the train of thought of the overall argument of the book," I will take him up on the offer. In order to understand his view of the relationship between Zionism and Judaism we need only to know that his reflections lead to the conclusion that "the people Israel need a place to call home in this world, a place in which to center the God-Israel covenant" regulating Israel's life, and the place that God has given it is the Land of Israel. Novak therefore identifies as "Zionism's true goal" the ultimate establishment in the Holy Land of a Jewish theocracy. But this does not lead him to advocate, as the religious Zionist slogan has it (in his translation), the present governance of "the land of Israel for the people Israel according to Israel's Torah." Why not?

For a definition of theocracy, Novak turns to Spinoza, who identified it (while by no means endorsing it) as a state whose "citizens were bound by no law but the Law revealed by God." In attempting to elucidate the implications of this definition, Novak does not dwell on the Law itself but on the citizenry who must accept it "*because* it comes from God." In the absence of such a citizenry, Novak argues, there can be no true theocracy. Thus, "a dictatorship of rabbinical clerics" or a regime representing "the special interest of a particular party that promotes the political power and welfare of a group of people who happen to be 'religious' or *dati*" is not a genuine theocracy. No one, Novak insists, should attempt to impose divine law upon a populace—like that of Israel today—that consists mostly of Jews who haven't accepted the Law's authority. Religious Jews, then, should not "fight for an *halakhic* state, or even [. . .] religious control of state institutions."

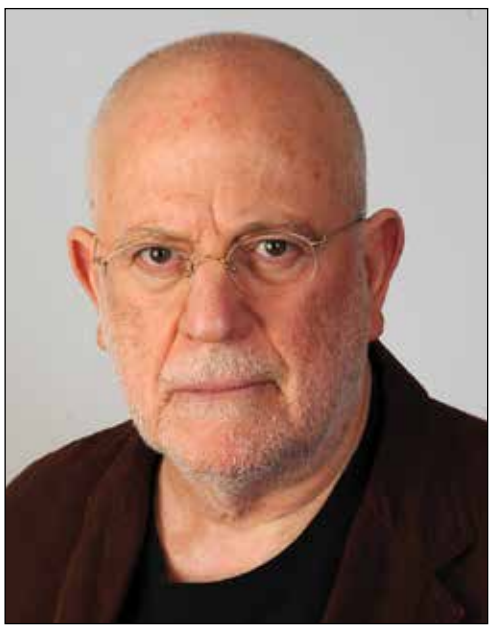
This should not, however, lead faithful Zionists to resign themselves to a Jewish State without theological foundations. Rather than surrender the Israeli public sphere to secularists they must ask the following, all-important questions:

> Does the Jewish tradition have a secular law (or at least an idea of secular law) that is neither atheistic, which would be antithetical to the Torah, nor specifically religious, which would

> require a complete *halakhic* polity to interpret it, administer it, and even enforce it? Can we find in the Jewish tradition an affirmation of a secular realm that is based neither on dogmatic secularism nor on the particular revelation of the Torah (i.e., Jewish religion) to the Jewish people, claiming both the people collectively and each and every Jew individually? In other words, can we find in the Jewish tradition grounds for asserting a theistically based polity, which is presupposed by, yet not identical with, the optimal theocratic polity the Torah seems to be intending for Israel? Furthermore, could this Jewish secularity be the basis for a truly democratic polity in Israel? And, could this democratic secularity guarantee to secular Jews that it has good reason to eschew any coercion of religious belief and religious practice?

The answer to all of these questions is yes! There are the Noahide laws, prescribed by God for all humans prior to the giving of the Torah (according to Jewish tradition). They prohibit idolatry, blasphemy, murder, sexual license, and robbery, and in addition command the establishment of a legal system that enforces these norms. At bad times, like the present, when it is unable to enforce much of Jewish law, the Jewish polity ought to fall back on this earlier, more rudimentary legislation. "These laws," Novak writes, "guarantee basic human rights. As such, their public affirmation by a Jewish polity is the best foundation of a state that is both Jewish and democratic."

The "theistically based polity" founded on such an affirmation might be easier for secularists to accept than a full-fledged theocracy, but it is still antithetical to their basic principles. It would compel them to relinquish the idea of a constitution that sees "the prime authority of the state to be the will of a group of human beings." Novak nevertheless urges them to respond positively to the proposal and "develop a Zionist philosophy that can basically accept divine sovereignty (*malkhut shamayim*) as the state's warrant, yet without requiring secular Jews to personally accept revealed law as normative in their own personal lives or that Jewish religious practices must be enforced in public." He knows that he is asking a lot, but he thinks it is a price in authenticity that secular Zionists ought to be willing to pay in order to "alleviate the deep *Kulturkampf* that divides Israeli Jews, and that has severe repercussions among the Jews in the Diaspora too."



Chaim Gans. (Courtesy of the author.)

Novak's new proposal brings to mind Menachem M. Schneerson's successful (if far from epoch-making) campaign to get President Ronald Reagan to issue a proclamation acknowledging "the historical tradition of ethical values and principles, which have been the bedrock of society from the dawn of civilization when they were known as the Seven Noahide Laws, transmitted through God to Moses on Mount Sinai." But Novak, it seems, wants more than the Rebbe, more than a symbolic political declaration from the highest authorities. He discusses this matter in close proximity to his critical treatment of Israel's Basic Laws and apparently wishes to see the Noahide laws somehow incorporated into them.



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with representatives of the Arab Joint List party discussing growing budgets for Arab councils and municipalities, Jerusalem, August 31, 2015. (Photo by Amos Ben Gershom/GPO/Flash90.)

Is this something that the Jews of Israel would be likely to welcome? Novak clearly wants them to believe that at the very least they would have nothing to lose if they did so, since all of the Noahide laws serve to protect the individual rights that are so precious to them:

> Thus murder is prohibited because every innocent human being created in the image of God has the right not to be killed. Thus sexual license is prohibited because every human being created in the image of God has the right not to be sexually violated. Thus robbery is prohibited because every human being created in the image of God has the right not to have his or her property misappropriated.

But is it an accident, we must ask, that Novak has omitted any mention of idolatry and blasphemy from this Noahide bill of rights? These are, after all, by far the most problematic prohibitions for a modern state. What are Israeli pagans (there are a few) to think of the proposal to outlaw their religion? Much more important, wouldn't the prohibition of idolatry and blasphemy threaten to curtail the free expression of anti-clerical writers and atheists and even—on Novak's analysis—cultural Zionists? And wouldn't Israeli homosexuals (not to speak of consenting adulterers) have good reason to fear that the Noahide law against sexual license would be interpreted in ways that would deprive them of their freedom?

In addition, wouldn't a considerable number of Israeli Jews, if not a majority, have reason to be concerned that the transformation of their country into a "theistically based polity" would put it on a slippery slope toward what Novak calls an "optimal theocratic polity," one that might in fact eventually require "secular Jews to personally accept revealed law as normative in their own personal lives or that Jewish religious practices must be enforced in public"? There is, of course, Novak's assurance that the creation of such a state must await the growth of "an overwhelming majority consensus" in its favor among Israel's Jewish citizens, but he never fully explains why a smaller majority wouldn't be sufficient. Nor does he seem particularly concerned about the rights of the, say, 7 or 17 percent of the dissenting population of such a polity.

While Novak's main goal is to theologize the State of Israel's foundations, he also strives to legitimize Zionism per se. The problem with secular Zionism, according to Novak, is that it rests so heavily on the Jews' historical connection to the Land of Israel. But does "an 'historic connection' to a land," he asks, "give a particular people the right to establish themselves there politically? Does 'history' grant or endow rights?" Even if it does (and Novak doesn't seem to think so),

> the "historic connection" of the Jewish people seems rather tenuous in the face of the Palestinian Arabs who make the same historical claim on the land, and it seems with much more history of living in the land on their side. So, if the Jewish people have a more cogent claim on the land, that

> claim should be the biblical one that pertains to the land of Israel alone, that is, it is because God chose this land for the Jewish people to settle there as permanently as is humanly possible.

This argument, of course, can only impress religious Jews and "those gentiles on their theological wavelength." It will have absolutely no impact on the philosophical-theoretical adversaries of Zionism that the author of *Zionism and Judaism* seems to wish to refute, despite his readiness to consider the possible legitimacy, at some future date, of "a non-Jewish polity within the land of Israel" alongside the State of Israel.

Like David Novak, Chaim Gans challenges the notion that the Jews' historical connection to the Land of Israel alone grants them the right to possess it. For Gans, however, this right does not originate in heaven either. In steering his way between the Zionists to the right of him and the post-Zionists to his left, Gans tries to show how the Jews' historical connection to the Land of Israel gives them certain rights within it, but only when *combined* with other considerations. And these rights, he insists, do not override the legitimate, collective rights of the Palestinian Arabs in the same land.

Arguing against the religious as well as secular proponents of what he calls "proprietary Zionism," in his new book *A Political Theory for the Jewish People* Gans quickly dismisses the idea that the Jews' ancient ownership of the Land of Israel remains forever valid, even though it was occupied by others who had stolen it from them, or rather, stolen it from those who had stolen it from them. But if at the end of the 19th century the Jews could no longer be said to own the land, their ancient, long-standing, and newly intensified attachment to it endowed them with the right to be considered one of what Gans calls its "homeland groups." The primacy of this territory in their history and identity gave them grounds for claiming self-determination within its boundaries, despite what were at the time "its Arab character and inhabitants." But what really sealed the Jews' right to self-determination in their ancestral land was not their attachment to it but their bitter history outside of it, in Europe, above all, in the 19th and 20th centuries:

> The Jews, thus, had a justification that can be called remedial—a justification based on the necessity to rescue themselves, and particularly their dignity—to realize their primary right to self-determination in their historical homeland, even if they were not actually present in it.

However, according to Gans, this right was limited, both with respect to scope of the territory in which it can be legitimately exercised and how it can be exercised within that territory:

> If we agree that the necessity created by the persecution of the Jews is what tipped the case in favor of realizing their right to self-determination in the Land of Israel despite its being Arab demographically and culturally (or in favor of exempting them from responsibility for the wrongness of this act), then the territorial scope of their self-determination there cannot exceed the borders that were set when this necessity actually existed, that is, Israel's borders as determined at the end of the 1940s.

Whether its creation was an act of remedial justice or, as Gans parenthetically suggests, a necessary evil, Israel has a right to exist, but only within specific borders. And even within these borders, the Jewish State has to uphold a limited right to national self-determination of the other homeland community in residence, the Arabs who did not leave when it was established. They, too, must enjoy autonomy in certain areas, such as education, and must be accorded "collective representation in the public sphere of Israel and its symbols."

When Gans insists on the rights of all homeland (as opposed to immigrant) groups to a certain degree of self-determination, he is above all concerned with the individuals who constitute them. What is truly foundational for him, as a liberal, is peoples' interest in living within the framework of their own culture, something which is vital to their well-being. Indeed, "most people desire also to ensure the continued existence of their particular culture," which frames their lives and helps give them meaning.

Writing in *Mosaic* magazine, Peter Berkowitz has called what Gans labels "egalitarian Zionism" a "profound misunderstanding of liberal democracy." Berkowitz argues that it is entirely proper for the majority in a liberal democratic state "to imbue political institutions and popular culture with its national spirit." That majority has an obligation to extend individual rights, but not collective ones, to members of minorities. Therefore the authorization of "language, calendars, and anthems that reflect a majority's culture and traditions is compatible with the equal protection of all citizens' basic individual rights." But Gans is not demanding that Israel relinquish its Jewish character. Nor does he argue that

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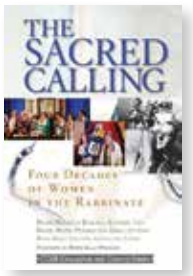
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members of all minorities in Israel are entitled to collective rights that go beyond their basic individual rights. He agrees with those he calls "hierarchical Zionists" that a state can offer special benefits to the people with which it is identified, adding only that "since both Jews and Arabs in Israel are homeland groups, they should both, as a matter of principle, be granted hegemony vis-à-vis communities of immigrants but not vis-à-vis each other." What Gans wants for the Arabs of Israel is, he says, something like what the francophones and First Nations have in Canada, where "[e]ach of them is self-governing

Unlike Novak, Gans lets us know which post-Zionists he is arguing with.

and is able to live within the framework of its culture and preserve it for generations."

Gans doesn't go into great detail about the practical ramifications of his proposal, but he does make it clear that he considers "egalitarian Zionism" not only morally necessary but in the best interest of Israel's Jews. Denying the Israeli Arabs their due only "nurtures the grounds for Arab antagonism and thus for Jewish fears." Berkowitz disagrees, and warns that Gans's proposal "is less likely to stabilize than to excite the very sectarian demands and passions that have impeded the incorporation of Arab Israelis into the common life of the country—and that are roiling Arab states throughout the Middle East." Unfortunately, there is good reason to believe that both men's fears are warranted.

If Gans's egalitarian Zionism promises Israel's Arabs only limited cultural autonomy, it holds out much more for Palestinians on the other side of the 1949 lines. Gans maintains that Israelis have no right to exercise control of these territories, since they arrived there only after they had already successfully established a state that allowed for their self-determination. But this sounds like philosophical fiat in the face of political argument. After all, those who disagree (at least those who do so on non-theological grounds) argue that, in the absence of a peace agreement that has yet to be obtained, Israel cannot simply cede the territories and maintain the safety and welfare of its citizens.

Unlike David Novak, Chaim Gans lets us know which post-Zionists he is arguing with and what they say. He divides them into three camps: "civic," "post-colonial," and "neodiasporic." "Civic" post-Zionists, like Israeli sociologist Uri Ram, believe that Israel "should also stop regarding itself as the realization of the right to self-determination of its own Jewish population." The state's duty to be "neutral among all the ethnonational groups to which its citizens belong" supposedly requires this. But such neutrality, Gans argues, is altogether impossible. "[I]n a multiethnic and multinational state, the state cannot be neutral with regard to its citizens' interests in adhering to their original languages and cultures."

"Post-colonial" post-Zionists like Israeli academics Yehouda Shenhav and Yossi Yonah oppose Jewish self-determination in the Land of Israel "because they consider it a way of constructing an identity that facilitates the hegemony of Western Jews in Israel." But even if their complaints about Israel's treatment of non-Western Jews, Arabs, and other minorities are valid, Gans says, they do not justify their post-Zionist conclusion. For "[c]ompensatory multiculturalism for the communities of Mizrahi Jews, Arabs, ultra-Orthodox and immigrant workers in Israel can coexist with ethnonational self-determination of the Jews in Israel."

Finally, "neodiasporic" post-Zionists like American academics Judith Butler and Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin and Israeli academic Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin are united in their belief that the "inexorable moral failure of Zionism" has made it necessary for the "[n]ationalist Jewish identity à la Zionism [. . .] to be replaced [. . .] with an individual and collective Jewish identity based on a reinterpretation of Judaism and Jewishness as predominantly diasporic." This would entail the renewal of a Jewish ethos of "scholarship, antimachoism, delicateness [. . .] as opposed to the militarized and jingoistic ethos" of Zionism. Gans, for his part, is willing to acknowledge the value of many of these diasporic Jewish attributes, but doesn't see why the Jews should be satisfied "with these alone."

> Zionism highlights the unwelcome aspects of Jewish homelessness and offers a remedy for the Jews' utter dependence on the compassion of others. It points to the need for the reestablishment of a pervasive Jewish territorial culture to correct the diaspora predicament in which Jews had to restrict themselves to a narrow range of activities and occupations.

But this doesn't preclude the Zionist ethos from embracing "the positive aspects of Jewish life in the diaspora."

Gans's comprehensive critique of post-Zionism is unfortunately marred, at one point, as Peter Berkowitz has observed, by his repetition of the discredited claim put forth by "the most extreme and reckless post-Zionists" that Israel was responsible for, as Gans puts it, the "atrocious expulsion of seven hundred thousand Palestinians" during its War of Independence. If Benny Morris's research has by now made anything clear, it is that the number of Palestinians who were actually expelled was far smaller. The overall point Gans wishes to make, however, is that the wartime expulsion "can be acknowledged (and compensated for) without making it impossible to view Zionism as a movement that is on the whole just."

Gans is a consistent thinker whose ultimate grounds for defending the Zionist enterprise require the support of Palestinian national rights, as he defines them. There is, however, good reason to fear the consequences of putting his ideas into practice. Those who do not find Gans's understanding of the rights of "homeland groups" persuasive or are opposed to his proposals should show us where he has gone wrong and how to make a better case for the basic justice of the Zionist project—unless they think, like David Novak, that this cause can best be served not through recourse to philosophical-theoretical reasoning but by relying on God's ancient promise.

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mo•sa•ic
/mō zā' ik/

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

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

3. a web magazine advancing ideas, argument, and reasoned judgment in all areas of Jewish endeavor.



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ADVANCING JEWISH THOUGHT Mosaic

Saladin, a Knight, and a Jew Walk Onto a Stage

BY ADAM KIRSCH

Nathan the Wise
by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
Classic Stage Company, April 13 to May 1, 2016

If Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is the most famous play about a Jew in European literature, then the second most famous—following at a considerable distance—is *Nathan the Wise*, the "dramatic poem" published in 1779 by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. These two classics present almost diametrically opposed pictures of Jews and Judaism, and it is a melancholy fact that the anti-Semitic play by Shakespeare is considerably more interesting than the philo-Semitic one by Lessing. This is the main reason why *Merchant* remains a central part of the theatrical repertoire, while *Nathan,* outside of Germany, is one of those works more often read than performed, and more often read about than actually read.

Indeed, while even most students of Jewish history or the German Enlightenment could not tell you exactly what happens in *Nathan*, they would most likely know two key facts about it. First is that it was written by Lessing as a tribute to his friend the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, whose benevolence and greatness of soul are reflected in the character of Nathan. In this sense, the play is a testimony to the dawning of the possibility that, under the auspices of secular Enlightenment, Christians and Jews—at least some of them—could come together on terms of equality and mutual acceptance. Not everyone in the late 18th century was willing to countenance this possibility: Lessing's play was widely attacked by Christian writers, in part because of its author's prior reputation for free-thinking, and it was banned from performance until after his death.

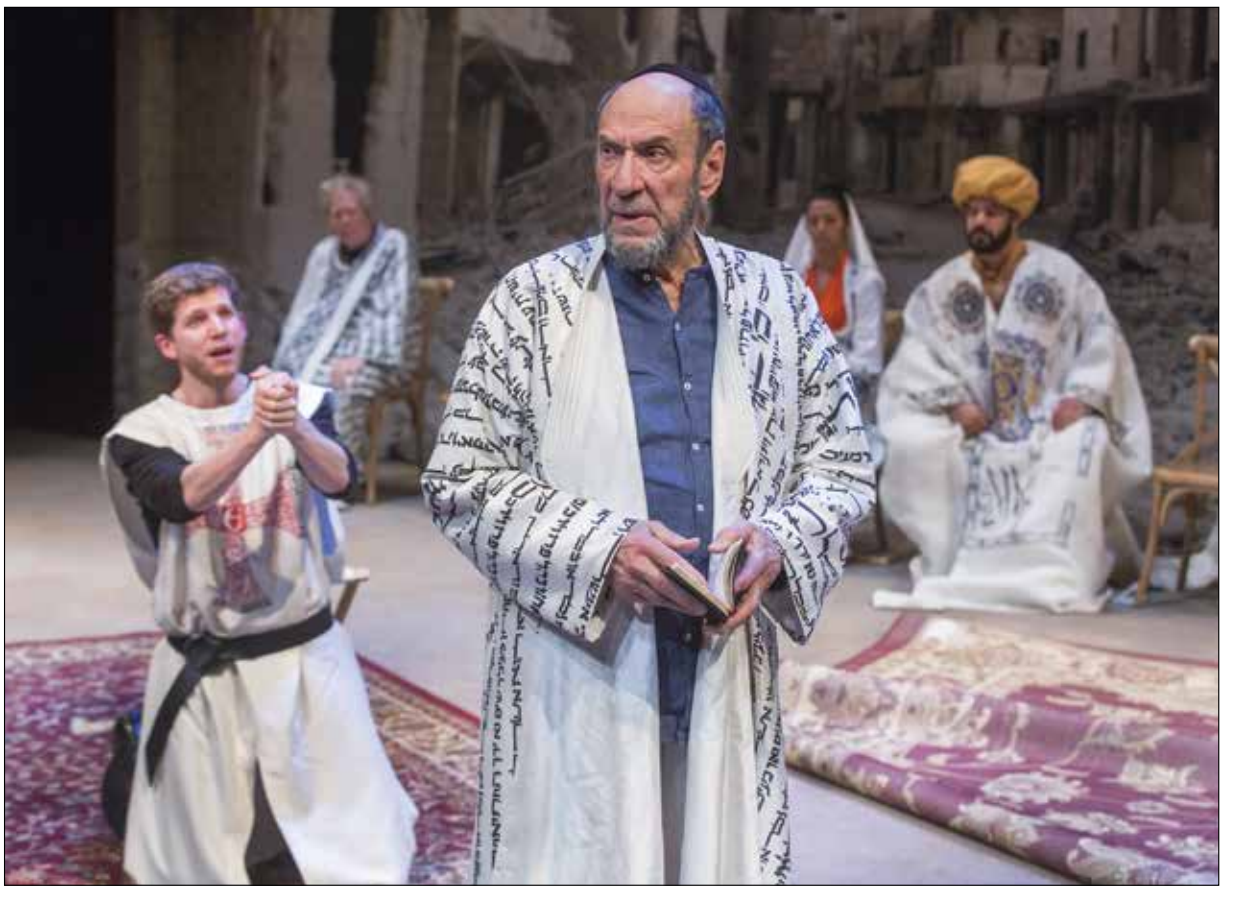
What drew their ire in particular was the second famous thing about *Nathan*, the parable of the ring. Lessing did not invent this fable—he most likely found it in the *Decameron*, and it appears in other medieval sources as well. But in his telling, it became a classic statement of the modern liberal commitment to religious tolerance. There was once, the story goes, a father who possessed a ring of incalculable worth, and he promised it in turn to each of his three sons. Unable to choose who should receive it, he had two indistinguishable copies made, so that each son believed he had been entrusted with the authentic ring. When they discovered their predicament, the sons went before a judge and demanded to know who had the true ring, but he was unable to tell them and advised them instead that each should live as if he possessed the original.

The parable is easily legible: The three rings are the three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—each of which claims to possess the authentic word of God. Since there is no objective way to prove which is the "correct" faith, the honest believer should follow his or her own traditions while honoring the commitment of those who worship differently. The only competition between religions should be a competition in virtue, since it stands to reason that the best faith should inspire its followers to the best actions. It is only a short distance from Lessing's message to the less eloquent, but equally well-meaning and sensible, saying of Dwight Eisenhower: "Our government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is."

Lessing's parable implies that a person's religion is not essential, like a suit of clothing that can be taken off as easily as it is put on.

Of course, this way of thinking about religion only makes sense to those who can abstract themselves from their own beliefs, imagining that they might have been born or raised to believe differently. Like John Rawls' original position, Lessing's parable of the ring implies that a person's religion is not an essential part of their being, but an extraneous addition, like a suit of clothing that can be taken off as easily as it is put on. Between this kind of believer and the kind who thinks that God is pleased by the stoning or burning of infidels—whether we're talking about Spanish Christians in the 15th century or ISIS killers today—there is no real common ground. Like liberalism itself, Lessing's tolerance may only make sense to those whose religious passions have already cooled; it is a feeble weapon against superstition and extremism.

The virtues and defects of this vision of religious toleration are, in fact, on display throughout *Nathan the Wise*, not just in the famous ring speech. A recent production of the play, by the Classic Stage Company in New York, offered a rare opportunity to see how much work it takes for Lessing—as translated and adapted by Edward Kemp—to maneuver his characters into a closing tableau of comity. The play is set in Jerusalem in the late 12th century, just after the Muslim armies of Saladin reconquered the city from the Crusaders. Saladin himself, revered by Christians since the Middle Ages as a chivalrous foe, appears in the play as a wise and indulgent ruler. Just before the action starts, he has spared the life of a Knight Templar, one of the Christian soldiers who fought against him. This Templar, in turn, has rescued Rachel, the daughter of Nathan, from a deadly fire.



Stark Sands, left, and F. Murray Abraham in* Nathan the Wise. *(Photo by Richard Termine, courtesy of Classic Stage Company.)

The play begins, then, with Muslim, Christian, and Jew linked in a chain of gratitude, and while this chain is tested, it is never allowed to actually break. When Nathan returns to Jerusalem from a trading journey and learns of the Tem-

plar's good deed, he is determined to reward him—possibly, he implies, with Rachel's hand in marriage, since the girl is romantically obsessed with her savior. At first the Templar, who is part of a monastic order, resists these advances, but soon he is brought face to face with Rachel and falls in love. Meanwhile, Nathan has been summoned to the court of the kind but impecunious Saladin, who needs to borrow money from the famously wealthy Jew. In an attempt to intimidate Nathan, he poses the question of which religion is the best. But when he is answered with the story of the three rings, Saladin realizes that Nathan's wisdom is superior even to his wealth, and the two men become friends.

Significantly, it is the Christians in the play, not the Muslims or the Jews, whose fanaticism and intolerance threaten to ruin this brotherhood. Rachel's beloved old Christian nurse, Daya, reveals a secret to the Templar: Rachel is not actually Nathan's biological daughter, but a foundling he has raised since infancy. What this means, however, is that a Jew has kept a Christian girl away from her ancestral faith, and the Templar reports this fact to the local Christian patriarch. This threatens Nathan with disaster, until it is revealed, in the hectic denouement, that Rachel was originally the daughter of a Muslim—none other than Saladin's lost brother Assad. To boot, the Templar himself is Rachel's long-lost brother and Saladin's nephew.

Rachel, then, is the pivot on which the play's ecumenical message turns. At the beginning of *Nathan the Wise*, Rachel is a Jew, as her name suggests; then she believes she was born a Christian; finally she is revealed to have been a Muslim. But the girl herself has not changed—she remains just as lovely and virtuous no matter her religious background. The effect is to underscore Lessing's liberal conception of religion as a garment that can be taken on or off, not an integral part of the person or the personality. Yet it takes only a little imagination to wonder whether Rachel, who was presumably raised in a Jewish household with Jewish customs and beliefs, would be so pliable in the face of her sudden reclamation by Saladin. Lessing is writing about religion as a group affinity, rather than faith as an individual conviction; the former may be exchangeable, but surely the latter is not, at least not without paying a price.

The Classic Stage production, directed by Brian Kulick and starring an imposing F. Murray Abraham as Nathan, turned Lessing's concept of religion as a garment into a visible metaphor. Saladin, played by Austin Durant, was dressed in a flowing white robe covered in Arabic script, while Nathan wore a similar robe bearing Hebrew letters. This was religion as placard or logo—an effect reinforced by the staging of the opening scene, in which the actors shouted at one another in Arabic and Hebrew, until Nathan emerged to unite everyone in English. Here, too, was an interesting metaphor—English standing in for Lessing's German as the language of modernity and harmony, replacing the ancient quarreling tongues. A similar effect was achieved by the use, as a backdrop, of a contemporary photograph of a war-torn Middle Eastern city, which was not identifiable. This choice was justifiable on dramatic grounds—Lessing's Jerusalem was, indeed, a postwar city—but it also reinforced the sense of the whole region as a timeless scene of eternally recurring grievances. Religious strife and bigotry, it seems, are things that happen *over there*, not here among us.

If this production did have any form of religious hatred in mind, it was, ironically, not anti-Semitism but Islamophobia. For Lessing, Jews were the strangers within, the source of immediate controversies about assimilation and tolerance. The future of the Enlightenment hung on whether Jews could be accepted as equal citizens. Islam, by contrast, was utterly foreign, something out of a storybook. (The play's Saladin resembles no Muslim monarch so much as he does an Enlightened autocrat like Frederick the Great, who ruled over Prussia during Lessing and Mendelssohn's lifetimes.)

Today, in America, the conventional wisdom is that things are reversed: Now it is Jews who are accepted, even powerful, while it is Muslims who are the targets of hatred and discrimination. With this in mind, the Classic Stage production made the demonstrative choice to have two of the actors greet the audience, after intermission, with an actual recitation of Islamic prayers. This ecumenical gesture was all the more significant since the actor playing Saladin was one of those at prayer, and so he borrowed his role's dignity: This was not just a foreign religious rite, but an imposing one, worthy of respect. If it had been Nathan up there saying *ma'ariv*, the effect would have been quite different—and possibly more in line with Lessing's original intention.

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Nuclear Family

BY SHAI SECUNDA

Shtisel
created and written by Ori Elon and Yehonatan Indursky, directed by Alon Zingman

In the extraordinary Israeli TV series *Shtisel*, a twenty-something *haredi luftmensch* named Akiva (Michael Aloni) lives alone with his widowed father, Reb Shulem Shtisel (Doval'e Glickman). Bereft of the comforting presence of the woman of the house (played in dream sequences and flashbacks by Irit Alter Avni), father and son share meals and cryptic conversation at the compact kitchen table like a pair of wounded cats waiting to pounce, but mostly just hurting. There are, as one would expect in the *haredi* neighborhood of Mea Shearim, many more family members that come and go with regularity. A partial count includes two of Akiva's siblings Zvi Arye and Giti; their spouses and children, including Giti's difficult husband, Lipa; Lipa and Giti's eldest daughter, Ruchama; Nukhem, a not very avuncular uncle; a cousin, Libbi; and the sweet, peppery Bubbe Malka (played by the skilled octogenarian Hanna Rieber in the first season and, after her passing, by Israel Prize recipient Lea Koenig in the second). If there is anything nuclear about this large Jewish family, it is its explosive intensity.

Akiva is a good, if troubled, young man with kind brown eyes. His beard is short but long enough to be respectable, and his gentle face is framed by long *pe'ot* (sidelocks). He has a teaching position at the local *cheder*, where his gruff father is the principal. When not teaching his students, sitting with *shidduch* dates in the lobby of the Kings Hotel, or hanging out with friends at the local kugel joint, he puffs away dreamily on the apartment porch. Something stirs and disturbs his soul.

Akiva is a doodler and from the moment we see his sketches of the animals at Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo (he is on a *cheder* field trip, ignoring his students), we know he has talent. Gradually, he too begins to suspect that he might, though where this could lead is a mystery to him. One morning he excuses himself from *cheder* to see if any of the upscale touristy galleries lining King David Street might be interested in his drawings. Alas, Akiva—who has probably never heard of Marc Chagall—has no idea that there is a glut on the market of pictures of smiling *Hasidim*. Worse, he is fired for playing hooky and will only be let back if he submits a formal apology addressed "to the principal of the Shaarei Torah Cheder, Reb Shulem Shtisel." Coming home late, Akiva places the letter next to his father, who has fallen asleep over a volume of Talmud. Bent and snoring, his gray beard pressed on the dining room table, spectacles off and black yarmulke overturned, Reb Shulem seems to embody the heights and depths of *haredi* devotion, its beauty and crudity, dedication and sloth—and Akiva sees it, as if for the first time. He crumples his apology note, takes out his easel, and paints his first real work of art.

Israeli television has come a long way. David Ben-Gurion was a vociferous critic of the medium, and successive governments managed to insulate Israeli society from American-style TV shows for the first two decades of the state's existence. It took another two decades until a second, commercial, channel was finally allowed to broadcast in 1986, and then almost two more until anything of value reached the airwaves. Today, Israel has everything from heart-pounding thrillers like *Hatufim* (Prisoners of War), which inspired the American hit *Homeland*, to *Avoda Aravit* (Arab Labor), novelist Sayed Kashua's wicked satire of Israeli-Arab life. With *Shtisel*, Israeli TV has entered the artistic world of shows like *The Sopranos* and *Mad Men*—works of real aesthetic ambitions and accomplishment with the production values to match that have more in common with the serialized realistic novels of the 19th century than the sitcoms and cop shows that used to typify American TV.

The overwhelmingly secular cast has invested tremendous energy not only in learning how to talk like *haredim*, but also in adopting the minute, everyday habits that express a way of life.

In its first season, *Shtisel* picked up 11 awards from the Israeli Academy of Film and Television. The second season, which just concluded in January, enjoyed unprecedented critical success and has become a popular obsession across the country's Jewish secular-religious divide. A third season is promised, and rumor has it that an American adaptation is in the works (one presumes that the Shtisels will be moved to Brooklyn). It may have taken over half a century to get here, but in its depiction of ordinary human love and drama in the cramped flats and overcrowded schools of *haredi* Jerusalem, *Shtisel* has turned the rare aesthetic trick of finding the sublime within a particular form of life; it has showed us the way we live now.

One of the most compelling secondary story arcs of the show focuses on Akiva's sister Giti, whose considerable forbearance and powers of denial carry her family through the pitch-black months of their deadbeat father's absence, domestic crises, and crushing post-partum depression. In Neta Riskin's subtle portrayal, Giti is neither a demure *haredi* wife nor a brave proto-feminist, she is simply a woman doing her best under difficult circumstances.



The fictional* haredi *family living in Jerusalem's Mea Shearim neighborhood. From left, Elisheva (Ayelet Zurer), Reb Shulem Shtisel (Doval'e Glickman), Akiva (Michael Aloni), and Giti (Neta Riskin). (Courtesy of* Shtisel *and Go2Films.)



Kikar Shabbos (Shabbat Square), the intersection between Geula and Mea Shearim, Jerusalem.

Although it always has interesting stories to tell and is almost never preachy, *Shtisel* does have an implicit message: Contrary to chauvinistic Israeli stereotypes, the ultra-Orthodox population is not a swarming mass of parasites, they are as deeply human—flawed, interesting, impossible—as the rest of us. It is no accident that the show's co-creator, Yehonatan Indursky, is himself a product of the *haredi* community; his first film was a generous ethnography of the Ponevezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. It also makes good sense in this context that the lead editor of the series of season two was the acclaimed Israeli-Arab satirist Sayed Kashua.

Part of the artistry of *Shtisel* derives from an almost ritualistic obsession with the details that ultra-Orthodox Jews themselves obsess over. In interviews, Indursky has said that there was a full-time *haredi mashgiach* (ritual/spiritual inspector) on staff to catch any inaccuracies. In fact, the show is so faithful to its specific setting in ultra-Orthodox Jerusalem that it is even hard to imagine its stories transpiring in the *haredi* city of Bnei Brak. Clearly, the overwhelmingly secular cast has invested tremendous energy not only in learning how to talk like *haredim*—a fair amount of the dialogue is in a distinctly Jerusalemite dialect of Yiddish—but also in adopting the minute, everyday habits that express a way of life. One shudders to think of what actor Doval'e Glickman's lungs went through while learning to smoke like a pensive *lamdan*. To its credit, *Shtisel* does not exoticize the profound differences between secularism and the rigidity of the ultra-Orthodox world. Instead, it exploits the intense semiotics of *haredi* life to create a rich modern portrait of a community at turns at war with or oblivious to what most of its audience consider essential aspects of modern living.

Depicting love in a community that does not tolerate public displays of affection or even permit touching non-related members of the opposite sex is obviously a challenge. Rather than seeing it as a dramatic impediment, however, Indursky and his colleagues mine their subjects' strict sexual code for gentle comedy and productive tension. When Zvi Arye Shtisel's wife becomes enamored with the possibility of her husband achieving fame as a Hasidic singer, she subtly suggests that, given the late hour, it's time to go to bed. The accomplished talmudist claps his hands together with satisfaction in a gesture he might employ if he had just solved a textual crux—and follows his wife into the bedroom. An early scene in which Akiva lends a space heater to a young widow named Elisheva (delicately played by the Israeli star Ayelet Zurer) pulses with erotic energy although there is not a trace of physical contact.

Like a great novel, *Shtisel* manages to imbue small moments with human substance and dramatic heft. On the day marking the conclusion of the year-long mourning period for the family matriarch, the extended Shtisel clan recites the traditional Psalms at her grave and then returns home to a meal of *heimische* food and a first taste of the music that had been forbidden to them as mourners. As the chatter dies down, Shulem announces that "the moment has arrived" and ceremoniously presses play on an old cassette player. The saccharine strains of the Pirchei Jerusalem Boys Choir fill the room. The scene could easily have been played for comedy (the incongruity of the technology, the kitschiness of the music), and it is funny, but what we feel most acutely is the poignancy of this particular moment for this particular family.

Shai Secunda is the author of The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context *(University of Pennsylvania Press), founder and co-editor of* The Talmud Blog*, and a Martin Buber Society Fellow at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he teaches comparative religion and rabbinic literature.*

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Eight Poetic Fragments by Avraham ben Yizhak

BY LEON WIESELTIER

Avraham ben Yizhak was the pen name of Abraham Sonne, who published only 12 poems in his lifetime. His silence was deeply charismatic, not least to the people who knew him. "Through Sonne I learned for the first time what a man's integrity means," wrote Elias Canetti, who befriended him in Vienna in the crackling years after the First World War, when Sonne lived in the eye of the modernist maelstrom and became acquainted with many of its luminaries. In his autobiography Canetti devoted many pages to the taciturn Jewish poet from the provinces, but the fullest and most affecting account of Sonne is *Pegisha im Meshorer* (Encounter with a Poet), the tender memoir of their friendship and their love that Lea Goldberg wrote shortly after he died. ("On my birthday, on May 29, Sonne died," she noted in her diary. "Since then, really, nothing has any significance save for this fact.")

With those 12 poems, Sonne transformed Hebrew verse. He introduced European modernism into it. "Avraham ben Yizhak was the first," Bialik declared in 1927. And Goldberg: "He was the first Hebrew poet whose watchface showed not only the hour in Jewish time but also the hour in world literature." There is a genuinely new music in these Hebrew poems, an unprecedented exquisiteness of diction and mood. Sonne was born in Przemyśl, in Galicia, in 1883 and died in Tel Aviv in 1950. He was a nationalist and an aesthete, a Zionist activist who preferred cafés to meetings and language to action. Not long before he died, he said of his work, "I always tried to capture a particular instant that contained the feeling of the things I had seen. I never spilled my soul." His reader may be forgiven for finding feelings not only in the things but also in the poems. Sonne's startling images leave a powerful emotional wake, the way classical Chinese poems do. Some of his lines are so gorgeous that one commits them to memory almost unthinkingly.

Sonne was averse to collecting his lyrics into a book; not even Bialik could persuade him to do so. In 1930, however, not long after Sonne's immigration to the land of Israel, they were collected by Israel Zemorah into a booklet made of mimeographed paper, the sturdy consonants typed and the sprightly vowels added by hand in the old way, tied together with a thick black string. This humble edition was produced in 30 copies by the weekly *Turim* as a gift to its contributors. Some years ago I was lucky enough to acquire one of these treasures—the copy once owned by Reuven Barkat, who served as speaker of the Knesset in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Since the booklet was fragile, I took it to an extraordinary local bookbinder—a shrine to the art of the book not far from the White House—and asked that he design a protective case for it. When he presented me with his creation a few months later, I gasped. The lyrics of Avraham ben Yizhak were resting in a carefully constructed red envelope housed in a large clamshell box opulently manufactured of red calfskin with its corners hand-tooled in gold: the work of a master craftsman for the work of a master craftsman. I not only gasped, I also feared for my wallet. "Not to worry," my friend assured me. "You said that this was an important document, and we had some materials left over from the box we built for the iPod that Obama presented to the Queen." I laughed, I thanked him, I explained that for my people such things are indeed the crown jewels, and I carried *Shirim me'et Avraham ben Yizhak* out to Pennsylvania Avenue in perfectly condign splendor.

Some of Sonne's lines are so gorgeous that one commits them to memory almost unthinkingly.



Shirim me'et Avraham ben Yizhak ***in the red calfskin box. (Photo courtesy of Matthew Wieseltier.)***

My translations of these fragments are based on Hannan Hever's superb edition of the complete poems. He dates them to 1913, 1919, and 1924. I dedicate them to Harold Schimmel.

Leon Wieseltier is the Isaiah Berlin Senior Fellow in Culture and Policy at The Brookings Institution.

Do you know what I prayed for in these days
as I passed between the houses into which the
    afternoon silence was gathered
the tough cypress standing tall before them
like a candle-soul reveling in its holiness?
I prayed that it would be given to me at the
    fading of the day
to place my hand upon the bolt to your room
and find you draped in darkness
with just your head subsisting
in a golden sphere of restful light
and your fingers dispersed to the edges of the
    piano
until the sounds rise and you are forgotten
and only your soul will make a stir
which will reach me.

---

rise
rise from the depths rise
from the dark places and the rubble rise
with your bleeding hands
and if your days were heavy there
and if the sun set in sunsets without end
rise.

Our first longings were like this:
like a blossoming branch facing the dawn
like flowers
like the disgrace of an arid land.

The lightning ate
my heart.

O lily of the valley whiteness of shame

I received a letter (from Sarah)
the stars reddened in their orbits, the heart
shed a tear. Like a bloom in a wasteland like
a bloom in a wasteland like a bloom in a
    wasteland.

Let us raise the candles of the wind
in our darkness.

Lines all the way to the limits of joy
a face sweetened by pain
expiring in nets of gold, flowing
sapphires roaming above them
like a dream that stands still and will not pass

—Avraham ben Yizhak

Max, Moritz, and Marx

BY SHLOMO AVINERI

In the 1970s, the two main associations of Hegel studies, both based in West Germany, were split along the "right-left" lines that had existed in one form or another since the 19th century. The conservative Hegelians were more interested in Hegelian metaphysics, while the "left-Hegelians" focused on the master's political and social philosophy, and included members from communist countries. In 1974, the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Academy of Science invited the "left-Hegelians" to hold their congress in Moscow for the first time, and I was, rather daringly, invited to give a talk on Marx's criticism of Hegel's political philosophy.

Since there were no diplomatic relations between Israel and the Soviet Union, the organizers in Moscow told me to send my Israeli passport to the Soviet embassy in Bonn, which would be authorized to issue me a visa. It took a while but eventually it worked, though I had to pay an exorbitant sum to Intourist for the hotel reservation. Since we were guests of the Soviet Academy all participants from the West had to fly via East Berlin on the East German airline Interflug.

I brought two books with me to Moscow. The first was my Hebrew translation of the *Early Writings* of Karl Marx (published by the Hashomer Hatzair publishing house Sifriat Poalim), which I planned to present to my hosts at the Soviet Institute of Philosophy; the second was a siddur, which, like other Jewish visitors to the Soviet Union at the time, I would try to leave at the Moscow synagogue when I visited it on Shabbat.

Before leaving Jerusalem, my Hebrew University colleague the great Yiddishist professor Khone Shmeruk asked if I would do him a bibliographical favor. He was working on a study of various Yiddish translations of the classic illustrated German children's book *Max und Moritz* by Wilhelm Busch. He had discovered that there had been a Yiddish translation published in Kiev in the early 1920s, when the Soviet regime was encouraging Yiddish literature. Could I try to get a photocopy of this edition from the Lenin Library in Moscow? I was not at all sure that I could, but I promised to try.

We arrived at Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport after 3 a.m.: The grayness and dilapidation of the arrivals hall spoke volumes. A special representative of the Soviet Academy was waiting to whisk us through passport and customs control. It all seemed relatively efficient—until the uniformed customs official saw my Israeli passport. Everyone else was passed through customs, while I was asked to wait.

Eventually someone who looked like a more senior official appeared. He was wearing civilian clothes, and his English was quite good. He looked carefully at my passport, official invitation letter, currency declaration, hotel reservation slip, and visa; then he very courteously welcomed me to Moscow. For the next half hour we went through every item in my suitcase. Again, very courteously, he asked me about the two Hebrew books. I started with the siddur, explained that it was a standard Jewish prayer book, and after making sure there were no secret messages hidden among its pages, he said to me, "That's OK," which was a great relief. When he asked me about the second book I said rather nonchalantly that this was my Hebrew translation of Karl Marx's *Early Writings*, which I was going to give to my hosts at the Institute of Philosophy. When he looked puzzled, I turned to the English title on the verso of the title page, which said "Karl Marx: *Early Writings*, translated with an Introduction by Shlomo Avineri." To my great surprise the official asked me to wait, took the book with him, and disappeared into a back office. After what appeared to me an eternity—I saw all other members of the delegation waiting for me behind the glass barrier—the official returned, telling me that to his regret I could not bring the book into the Soviet Union.

Mildly, I suggested that there must be some misunderstanding. The book was, after all, a translation of Karl Marx. If they allowed me a Jewish prayer book—for which I was grateful—how could a book by Marx be banned? "Let me level with you," the official said



The Yiddish translation of* Max und Moritz*, published in Kiev, 1921. (Courtesy of the National Library of Israel.)

in quite idiomatic English. "Hebrew books published in Israel are banned, *except* prayer books." Given the official's cordiality I allowed myself a somewhat mischievous suggestion: Perhaps the Marx volume could also be classified as a religious text? The official smiled pleasantly, said he didn't think so, but went again to the back office. When he returned he said that since this was a very unusual case, they would not simply confiscate the book. Instead, I could leave the book at the airport and claim it when I departed. On a bad carbon duplicate form he filled out a receipt for the book. I made sure to have him write in the full title, including the name of the author.

After almost an hour I was allowed through customs, to the great relief not only of myself but of all other members of our delegation and the official welcoming colleague from the Institute of Philosophy. When they anxiously asked me what the problem had been, I said that I had no problem; it was just that Karl Marx had been barred from entering the Soviet Union.

During the conference each of the foreign speakers was allotted a research student who would serve as a guide, but also, naturally, a spy of sorts, who could report anything unusual to what in the Soviet Union they used to call "the competent authorities." I was assigned a pleasant young female student. When I complimented her on her excellent, unaccented English, she told me that her father was a high-ranking diplomat who had served in the West, where she attended international schools. In fact, he turned out to be the Soviet deputy foreign minister. She was quite curious about Israel and its people, and we had several interesting conversations, though we avoided discussing Soviet policies in the Middle East.

Since the conference was going smoothly and my young guide was friendly and intelligent, after some hesitation, I decided to ask her for help with Khone's request. I told her about the famous adventures and boyish hijinks of *Max und Moritz*, and gave her the details Khone had given me about the 1920s Yiddish Kiev edition. Graciously, she said she would try. I was skeptical, but the next day she took the morning off from monitoring me and returned in the afternoon, beaming. She had photocopied the entire book, with the iconic drawings from the original German edition, and the title page stamped with the logo of the Lenin Library. In thanking her, I asked how difficult it had been to get the copies. She said that it had been easy to locate the book (she knew a librarian who was Jewish and could read Yiddish), but then she ran up against the usual bureaucratic hurdles. Photocopying the book would require a special permit; she would have to file an application and the process would take a few days, if not more. Her argument that I had to leave the next day didn't change anything. It was at this point that she decided to call her father at the foreign ministry. The deputy foreign minister agreed to talk to the chief librarian and told him that this was a "matter of state"—permission granted.

I did not reclaim my Marx translation when I left Moscow. Perhaps it is still there, somewhere in an airport customs storage room. The photocopy of the Soviet Yiddish translation of *Max und Moritz* is now at the National and University Library in Jerusalem. As the old Latin phrase goes, *habent sua fata libelli*, books have their fates.

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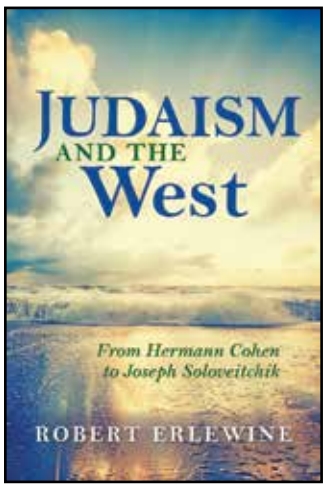
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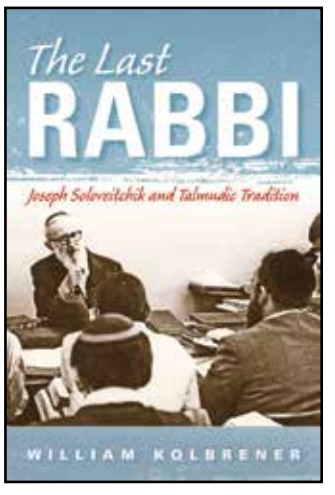
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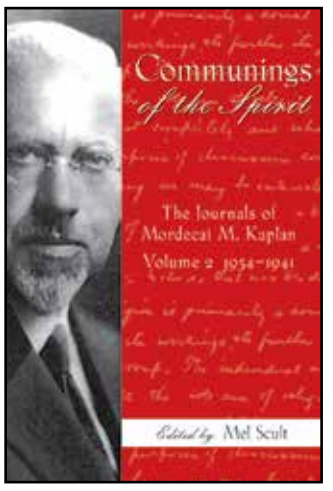
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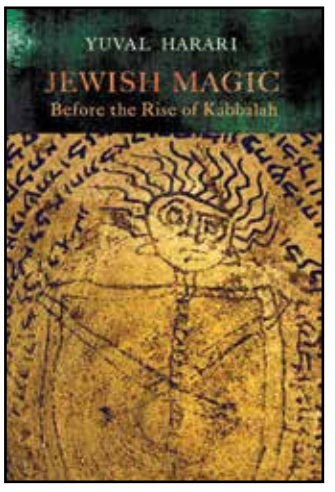
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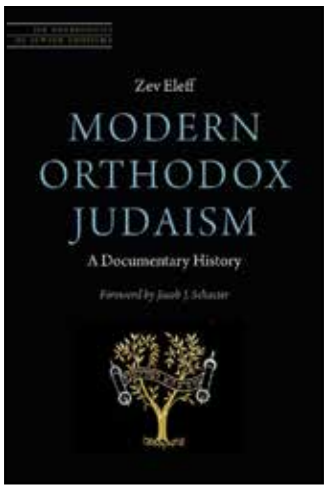
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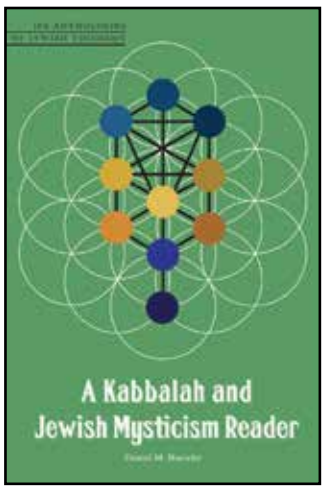
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