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developed a theme broached in a
1960 broadcast on Mandelstam, iden-
tifying "actualised language, at once
voiced and voiceless, set free under
the sign of a radical individuation,
which, at the same time, stays mind-
ful of the limits set by language, the
possibilities opened by language."

Demanding as it is, his work is also
unprecedentedly concrete and specifi-
c. The German language, he said,
had "to pass through the thousand
darknesses of deathbringing speech."
Rather than enlarging, it was a ques-
tion of making narrow, "with art to
go into your very selfmost
[*allerreeigenste*] straits."

For this most recondite of modern
poets, the notion of poetry as travel-
ling "perhaps towards an addressable
thou, towards an addressable reali-
ty," was paramount.

Like the poet himself, the critic-
translator operates *inside* language.

is an act of loving companionship,
whereby what was obscure is made
mysteriously explicit.

This "poet, survivor, Jew" not only
reanimated German, but was among
those who may be said to have res-
cued human speech too. Felstiner
brings us close to one who, emerging
from extinction, lived out, to the very
death, his Jewishness, withstanding
the "black hail of oblivion and distor-
tion."

In one of his late Jerusalem
poems, Celan wrote: "*hör dich ein/
mit dem Mund.*" Felstiner renders
this: "hear deep in/ with your
mouth." He *overhears* "the line as
demanding a translator's response,
too, a deep hearing that turns into
speech."

This phrase: "a deep hearing that
turns into speech" is an apt summary
of Professor Felstiner's admirable
book.

peous household enjoying an
extended family holiday in the south
of France, followed by the crisis of
sudden illness — and an NHS emer-
gency service that still worked — and
weeks of hovering between life and
death, months of nail-bitingly slow
recovery and, finally, a return to a
life that had continued slipping by.

The husband-and-wife team are
honest about the burdens each had
to bear, not only the continual medi-
cal problems and setbacks, but the
psychological and domestic changes.

For Roy, a self-employed business-
man and the proud upholder of a
patriarchal Sephardi tradition, his
utter dependency on his wife was a
painful humiliation, which he cov-
ered by demanding constant and
instant attention.

For Caroline, who found unsus-
pected reserves of inner strength, the
strain was back- and nerve-breaking.

ublishing

Once upon a time

BY CHAIM BERMANT

A BRIDGE OF LONGING:
THE LOST ART OF YIDDISH
STORYTELLING
David G. Roskies
Harvard, £23.50

This is a good book, so don't be
put off by the title: it has nothing
remotely to do with either longing or
bridges. Its sub-title is also mislead-
ing, for there are any number of
Yiddish storytellers about, some of
whom are masters of their art but,
unfortunately, they don't tell their
stories in Yiddish.

Hebrew persisted as a literary
medium long after it ceased to func-
tion as a spoken one, and writers
only turned to Yiddish when they
resolved to break through to a wider
market. When Yiddish fell out of
use, they turned to other languages,
usually English.

Most of the Yiddish writers were
active in the *Haskalah*, the move-
ment for Jewish enlightenment,
though, as Roskies points out, they
used the didacticism and style of
Jewish tradition, if only to dismiss it.

"Theirs," he writes "was a trea-
sonous art if ever there was one." He
also believes it was futile, if only
because the dream of enlightenment
gave way to "a new movement for
Jewish self-determination." But there
would have been no such movement
without the *Haskalah*, one's misgiv-
ings about which are not because it
failed, but because it possibly suc-
ceeded too well.

Even if I found myself arguing with
Roskies at every turn, I read his book
with admiration and pleasure. It
reminds me in some ways of F R
Leavis's "The Great Tradition," in
which Jane Austen, George Eliot,



Sholom Aleichem — canon fodder

Joseph Conrad and Henry James
were singled out as the greatest of
novelists, and D. H. Lawrence as
their one true successor.

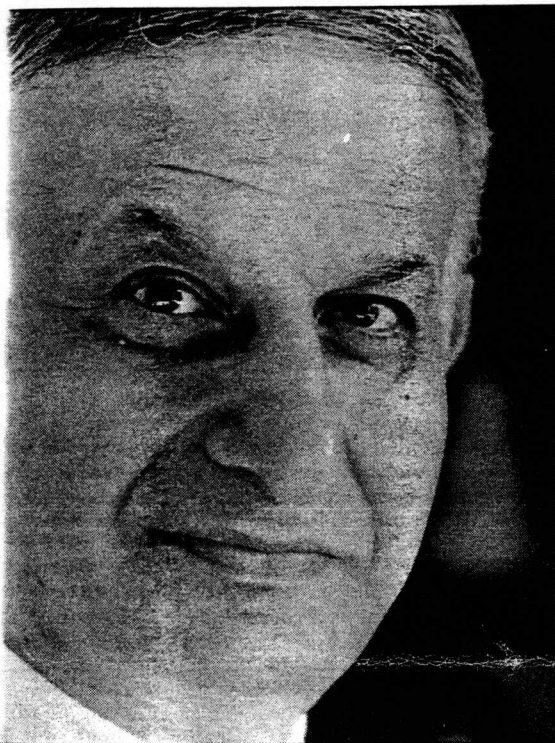
Roskies's canon includes Rav Nah-
man of Bratslav, Isaac Meir Dick (or
Dick, as he calls him), Isaac Peretz,
Sholom Aleichem, *Der Nister*, Itzik
Manger, and Isaac Bashevis Singer as
their true successor.

Not everyone agreed with Leavis's
canon and I have reservations about
Roskies's. He mentions Mendel
Mokher Seforim in passing, but
doesn't accord him sufficient weight.
He accords excessive weight to Dick
(1814-93), whose lapse into obscurity
is probably deserved.

Nahman of Bratslav is enjoying a
revival, but for no good reason I can
see. Unless he was privy to divine
secrets hidden from lesser men,
many of his stories are pointless.

But Roskies has made me see
Pinkhes Kahanovitch (1884-1990),
who wrote under the mysterious
name of *Der Nister* (The Hidden
One), with new eyes. His analysis of
Sholem Aleichem, Peretz and Man-
ger is masterly, his study of Singer,
inspired. His book is about the most
stimulating guide to the Yiddish clas-
sics available in the English language.

Jewish Chronicle (London)
August 18, 1995



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Marais, whose book on the subject I
re-published), turns him on.

An erotic picnic is followed by a
passionate affair. Returning to
London, he resolves to make a con-
fession to his doting wife. Her failure
to take this in is brilliant. He remarks
of her: "All the corners of her life are
filled with busyness and contentment.
This might be a limitation in some
women; in Flora it is a clever accom-
plishment."

Meanwhile, on the fourth floor of
her modern academic building, the
anthropologist, a hitherto childless
married lady, feels "deep inside
her... a flutter of life, like a crocus
pushing through snow."

So, as it says somewhere in the
Talmud, all's well that ends well.