

make it anywhere, not even in the Homicide Bureau, where he is a "clippings expert" instead of a detective, not even entitled to wear a real badge. Surrounded by a host of weirdos at work, LePeters suffers his wife's official liaison with an ex-detective, his only daughter's social problems at an integrated but mostly colored school, and his mother's stagey laments about the injustices that were once perpetrated against her dead husband. While suffering through all of this, LePeters somehow manages to find compensatory female companionship. And, overcoming enormous odds and making powerful enemies, he qualifies as a full-fledged detective. Then he sees it's time to be himself, like a wised-up Thidwick the Big-Hearted Moose in the Dr. Seuss allegory. No more Homicide Bureau, no more integrated school for Jamie, no more wanton wife. Start over! "Though half of his life had gone by the boards, he saw now that it was an inferior half and that the remaining section might very well turn out to be terrific." Yet Friedman's New York and its distinctive, nourishing presence, are as illusory as the ones in Franz Kafka's dream story *Amerika*: quaint but without substance.

BUT IN Wallace Markfield's novel, *Teitlebaum's Window*, one will find at last what O. Henry called "the composite vocal message of massed humanity. In other words, of the Voice of a Big City." What it amounts to (in O. Henry's story) is the tender, eloquent, heartrending silence of a municipal spectrum of vibrations, heart beats scaling into a vast, sweeping thunder. Markfield stands with the biggest innovators, the most colorful Jewish interpreters of our most important, our Old/New City: Montague Glass, Abraham Cahan, Michael Gold, Henry Roth, Daniel Fuchs, Bel Kaufman, Bernard Malamud. To read Markfield's screamingly funny, outrageous (in places it out-Portnoys *Portnoy*), vibration-filled saga of the city is to feel all over again, with whatever envy, snobbery, or chutzpah an Insider or Out of Towner can muster: "New York, New York, es gibt nur New York."

The hero, the big-boy-growing-up, in Markfield's bildungsroman, is Simon Sloan, eight years old when the story opens in June, 1932 and old enough to go to war when the story ends in April, 1942. Simon lives on

Brighton Five Street, near Coney Island. He has a complaining, eternally outraged mother (Malvena the Orphan) and a sad-sack father (a capmaker-turned usher and later, ticket-tearer at the Lyric Theater). Simon and his jolly chums Boomie and Hymie are members of the Battle Aces S.A.C. Club. And Depression or no, ignorance of their parents or no, Simon's life is extraordinarily rich. It is not ridiculous to liken his New York to Dickens's London or Joyce's Dublin: only a great, teeming city can make such prodigious sounds.

All through the ten-year period of the novel, as Simon makes his way upward to Brooklyn College, Markfield develops a memorable group of thematic melodies. The changing signs in Teitlebaum's grocery window, saying in effect: "The World Looks Like It's Blowing Up—Buy

Now Before It's Too Late." The Knishe Queen's incredible letters to the world's Greats, soliciting their knishe testimonials. The sadistic treatment by the family, of Hymie's *bubbie*, senile and helpless but possessing all kinds of valuables for them to extract. Simon's father's ambivalence: his wife nags him to "go make like a Daddy," and when he does, it's so upsetting to him that he becomes furious with his unoffending son. Beyond all the rich themes and vignettes that enhance this marvelous book are the ever-present mass media, especially the movies, which taught the Jewish immigrants their language, made them High Verbals, and reshaped their thinking. *As it was said on the screen . . .* And at a time when most books have little (at best) to say any more, Markfield has written one that will be speaking to us for a long time.

The 'Hidden' Isaac Bashevis Singer

- *Critical Views of Isaac Bashevis Singer*. Edited by Irving Malin. New York University Press. \$8.00, cloth. \$2.45, paper.
- *The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer*. Edited by Marcia Allentuck. Southern Illinois University Press. \$4.95.

Reviewed by

Isidore Haiblum

SO FAR, THREE VOLUMES OF CRITICAL studies have appeared in English about Isaac Bashevis Singer. They are marvelous affairs full of dazzling imaginative leaps (Singer in company with Poe, Dickens, Kafka, Mann, Dostoevsky, Herman Hesse, Flannery O'Connor, Muriel Spark, Hawthorne, Melville, etc.—not to mention Bosch, Grünwald, Callot and Max Ernst), admirable erudition, and in more than a few instances, unquestionable zest and zeal.

Irving Buchen's *Isaac Bashevis Singer and the Eternal Past* has already been reviewed in these pages (CONGRESS BI-WEEKLY, December 23, 1968). It is a book-length study of much of Singer's work by one man, Prof. Buchen, and among its many virtues is a welcome lack of repetitiveness.

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ness. *Critical Views of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, edited by Irving Malin, consists of 13 essays by various authors (Irving Howe, Baruch Hochman, Michael Fixler, et al), two Singer interviews and a bibliography of Singer's works in English. *The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, edited by Marcia Allentuck, contains 12 essays (William H. Gass, Eli Katz, Mary Ellmann, et al). The works in *Critical Views* were culled from numerous publications, *The Achievement* essays were written especially for Prof. Allentuck's volume, yet the two books are almost identical in tone and approach. Edwin Gittleman and Max F. Schulz appear in both; Cyrena N. Pondrom ("Conjuring Reality in Achievement") takes issue with J. S. Wolkenfeld ("I. B. Singer: The Faith of His Devils and Magicians"), and Prof. Schulz ("I. B. Singer, Radical Sophistication, and the Jewish-American Novel"), in *Critical Views*.

A family spirit pervades the pieces in both collections. Contributors refer to one another, essentially cover the same critical terrain, if from slightly different viewpoints. Singer's devils, imps, spirits and demons are given a thorough workout.

There are some factual errors: Ruth Whitman, "Translating with I. B. Singer" (C.V.), "Relatively few of his [Singer's] stories have been published in Yiddish." Not true. Almost

all of them have appeared in Yiddish, either in the *Jewish Daily Forward* or in such Yiddish literary journals as *Di Goldene Keyt*.

There are some highly debatable interpretations: Frederick R. Karl, "Jacob Reborn, Zion Regained: I. B. Singer's *The Slave*" (Achievement), "... the unaffiliated reader may still find its [The Slave's] Zionist conclusions contrived and stagy." But surely, as at least this unaffiliated reader sees it, the last thing Singer had in mind in *The Slave* was Zionist propaganda.

There are differences of opinion, as might be expected, and some gaps in knowledge that might not be expected. J. Chametzky ("History in I. B. Singer's Novels," in *C.V.*) tells us, "The last words of *The Family Moskat* draw a line under the final collapse of the messianic hope that threads its way through the Jewish faith in all of Singer's novels: 'Death is the Messiah. That's the real truth,' " But these are only the last words of the English version. A complete chapter—11½ more pages—follows in the original Yiddish, and the conclusion there is one of hope. Prof. Chametzky is apparently unaware of this. Max F. Schulz ("The Family Chronicle as Paradigm of History" in *Achievement*) discusses the missing chapter in *The Family Moskat* and feels that its absence is a virtue, "The English version refuses to follow this Yiddish tradition of the didactic—and rightly so . . ." Irving Buchen, in his book, writes, "On the occasion of the reissue of the 1950 English version [*The Family Moskat*], Milton Hindus lamented the continued abridgment of the original ending. I agree." As do I. And if memory serves, so does Singer: writing many years ago in *The Forward* I seem to recall his complaining that the publishers forced the change on him.

THE TROUBLE is that only a very few of the experts in these two collections can read Yiddish. The rest must persevere rely on English translations. Singer has personally overseen most of these so they are far more reliable than, say, Constance Garnett's version of Dostoevsky. Singer himself has said: "It is not an exaggeration to say that over the years English has become my second language." Yet Singer criticism that is ignorant of Yiddish labors under a terrible handicap. Setting aside the obvious difficulties of absorbing a culture second hand (which can in part, it seems,

be done) there are even more pressing problems. Singer interviews have appeared frequently in English—and critics cherish them for the insights they provide—but they cannot hope to match in number or scope those essays that he has produced in Yiddish about his life and craft.

It is no accident that the articles dealing with *The Family Moskat* fail to present Singer's own view of the matter. The professors, as a rule, are simply not acquainted with Singer's view. Buchen is the exception, having spent long hours with his subject, in preparation of his study. Buchen is one of the most authoritative of Singer's English critics. Milton Hindus, who appears in neither collection and whose opinions are very much his own, is another.

For years Singer has written "journalism" in Yiddish under the name Isaac Warshawsky (the man from Warsaw). These pieces, for the most part, lack the sparkle of his more serious works. They are, admittedly, written in haste. But while the Warshawsky short stories and novelettes lack the linguistic finesse and symbolic overtones of the Bashevis Singer creations, many of them spin a wonderfully fine tale. Singer's major themes are here reduced to their simplest statements. To understand all of Singer a knowledge of these works is necessary. Even more important are the hundreds of remarkably frank and revealing autobiographical essays that Singer has written under the Warshawsky label. These are simply indispensable. But from this source

only *In My Father's Court*, in a reworked version—still somewhat flat in Yiddish but in English stylistically indistinguishable from Singer's other translated works—has appeared in hardcover in either language. This is how Singer wants it. I might predict that ultimately these works will also see book publication, but that is beside the point. For now they are available only in back issues of *The Forward*, and even those professors who know Yiddish well have not found the time to seek them out.

So there are gaps and omissions. Two of the more serious ones are in the realm of language and character. Singer's linguistic feats in Yiddish are peerless, but only Irving Howe in *Critical Views* touches on them. To get the full flavor of this oversight, imagine writing of Nabokov and neglecting to mention the things he does with language. Singer's depiction of character is awesome; each actor in a Singer opus—in Yiddish—speaks with his very own voice, one that is immediately recognizable and idiomatically unique. To know these people is to experience the living Jewish past. *The Family Moskat*, in the original, is an especially fine example of this, but the point—in either volume—is only alluded to in passing.

Both the Malin and Allentuck collections fill a vital need; they shed light on a world that is little understood by many Americans and they do so, in a good number of cases, with wit and wisdom. But much still remains to be done if the total picture is to emerge.

1984 Upon Us?

■ *Pentagon Capitalism: The Political Economy of War*. By Seymour Melman. McGraw-Hill. \$8.50.

Reviewed by

Jack Nusan Porter

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A RADICAL to know that America's military-industrial complex that former President Eisenhower warned against in his farewell address of 1960, has become a mammoth "state within a state." In order to develop this military arsenal with all of its nuclear overkill

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capability, a myth had to be formed and that is, if we did not have a large defense establishment, then the United States might be overrun or destroyed by Communists.

Seymour Melman's book renews these charges and backs them up with an impressive array of figures, tables, government memoranda, and other factual reports. And Melman is neither a flaming radical nor a muckraking pamphleteer, but a respected professor of industrial engineering at Columbia University.

Melman's contribution is most important and it is to be hoped that it will reach the general public. But will it reach the managers of the