

abandoned wife is Faith with her two sons, Richard and Tonto—Faith who proclaimed “I believe in the Diaspora, not only as a fact but a tenet.” Through such voices—unlike those which are feats of mimicry—the reader cannot help being made aware of the presence of the author rather than of her characters.

What John Stuart Mill said in 1869 about plaintive elegies on the lot of women in women’s writings surprisingly still holds good in many cases. Grace Paley is by no means the only woman writer today to harp on the abandonment of women by men (whether husbands, lovers or sons). Her women love their children and yet at the same time they resent the burden and limitations that children impose. They also resent the freedom of the male to light out for the frontier or foreign parts or other women, and they bemoan his selfishness.

Still, her women take refuge from male

irresponsibility by exalting their own sense of social responsibility, by engaging in social work. This is brought out not only in “A Conversation with My Father” but in the title story “Enormous Changes at the Last Minute,” about the trendy, ill-assorted affair between a not-so-young, once-married social worker and a hippy song writer.

The harsh conclusion to be drawn is that contemporary female freedom is a delusion, that this is still a man’s world where men get the best of it. The willed acceptance of an airy bohemianism vies awkwardly with the pull of a more traditional attitude to life represented by the beloved person of the father.

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FROM THE MOUTHS OF BABES

By ISIDORE HAIBLUM

THE KIDS WHO WENT TO ISRAEL. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF YOUNG IMMIGRANTS, by Harold Flender. Washington Square Press Pocket Books. New York, 1973. \$1.25, 156 pp.

WHAT DO Ilya, Kochavi, Ginger, Naomi, David and the other ten heroes and heroines of this volume have in common? Simply their youth—all are in their teens or twenties—and the fact that they came to Israel. That about sums it up. For they are as unlikely a bunch as ever to be found under one set of covers. These young immigrants hail from every corner of the globe and their experiences in the Jewish homeland have proven as diverse, contradictory and fascinating as their backgrounds. To read their stories is an education.

In *The Kids Who Went to Israel*, Harold Flender has given us a peerless cluster of “Autobiographical Sketches of Young Immigrants,” in their own words, that lay bare these experiences and provide us with a many-faceted and at times startling portrait of Israeli youth. Thus Marc, a seventeen-year-old Frenchman tells us: “Because my father is a foreign correspondent, I have had the opportunity to visit a lot of European countries. Nowhere have I found the vitality and the joy of living that is here in Israel.” But Kochavi, a former Iraqi Jew, displays a far gloomier view of his current surroundings: “I’ve come to the conclusion,” Kochavi tells us, “that nothing’s going to help in this country unless there’s a revolution in which the simple workers and the lower classes take things into their own hands.”

Then there is David. In appearance he is a typical Hasid. Flender describes him: "Long, unkempt, uncut beard; long ringlets; wide black hat over his yarmulke; the long, black caftan over black trousers; a white shirt without tie." But adds: "He has a wonderful smile and blue eyes that sparkle like sunshine on the sea. . . ." David, originally from Capetown, South Africa, is, it develops—for a Hasid—anything but typical. His family can hardly be termed religious: "In Capetown my father is managing director of a ladies fashion agency," David says. "He designs dresses. In South Africa, the Jews are very wealthy people. There are very few religious people there. I never had any teachings in Hebrew or even a Bar Mitzvah. Nothing." David, who completed college, went on to become an ardent football player and surfboard enthusiast. Professionally he toiled first in his father's fashion industry, then in a model agency. He explains: "I would travel all over the country with models putting on fashion shows. Being with so many pretty girls is enough to drive any man crazy." Disgusted with this sort of rampant materialism, David becomes a world traveler. In England, Holland, France, Greece he seeks the "true meaning of life"; the answer to his search, however, proves elusive. In Israel—he has wandered there without definite purpose—he lives on several kibbutzim but finds the experience unsatisfying. In Eilat he enlists in the drug culture, begins a rapid decline. Finally, penniless and near starvation, David contemplates death. But miraculously—at this seemingly bleakest moment—a Hasid befriends him and ultimately the young seeker turns believer; he has found peace—and joy. "The thing I like best about Israel," says David, "is that even the air of Israel purifies a person, even that the air itself gives a person sense as it's written in the Zohar. . . . The work of a man is to spend all his time finding the wisdom and the sense that there is in every single thing in the world."

For Zvi, who emanates from Rumania, all that David holds dear is an anathema. Asserts Zvi: "I'm not religious. I can't believe in God. My friends are not religious.

Most of the young people here are against religion, because the orthodox people here cause a lot of trouble. Like, you know, not traveling on Saturday. There is another thing. The army means a lot to us, and the orthodox Israelis don't go into the army. . . ." Zvi, like the pre-Israeli David, is active in sports, favoring judo and basketball. Girls play a commanding role in his life. Unlike David, the results are not as unsatisfying. "I also go out with girls a lot and have a very intensive sex life. I believe in having many girl friends, not just one. . . ." Zvi's credo? "For two thousand years of exile and suffering the Jew was always the bloody Jew. Always everyone could do to him whatever he wanted to. I'm proud and my generation is to shout: 'Never again!'"

HAROLD FLENDER is an old hand at the documentary approach. His *Rescue In Denmark*, which details the saving of the Danish Jews during World War II, has become a standard in its field. A novelist and film maker of distinction, Flender has applied his considerable knack for storytelling to the shaping of these tales; the human angle is never far beneath the surface.

Naomi was born in England of German-Jewish parents. She came to the United States at the age of three. A victim? Perhaps. But not of anti-Semitism. "My parents were never close or warm to us," Naomi says. "They are both Europeans, both doctors. My father is an anesthesiologist; my mother is a psychiatrist. They were both very busy with their careers and couldn't bother too much with us. . . ." Naomi is now in a Youth Aliyah village. "I got sent here to Kfar Golim. I consider myself very fortunate, because it is very lovely here. Mornings we study. Afternoons we do farming." Novelist Flender, hunting for the telling detail, zeros in on Naomi's aversions. "After our studies," she says, "we have lunch. Ugh! I don't like the food here. It is terrible. All starches. Oh, we get some meat, but very little, and only once a day. I don't even know what kind of meat it is. Kind of a mystery meat. . . . We call the food we get here dog food. . . .

JESUS AS JEW

By JACOB NEUSNER

JESUS THE JEW. A HISTORIAN'S READING OF THE GOSPELS, by Geza Vermes. Collins. London, 1973. 286 pp. £3.15.

THE HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN THE AGE OF JESUS CHRIST (175 B.C.-A.D. 135), by Emil Schürer. A New English Version Revised and Edited by Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar. Literary Editor: Pamela Vermes. Volume I. T. & T. Clark. Edinburgh, 1973. 614 pp. £10.00.

THESE TWO MAGNIFICENT VOLUMES bring into focus the central issues of the historical study of the beginnings of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism in the centuries before and after the beginning of the Common Era. Geza Vermes, Curator of the Oriental Institute and Reader [Professor] of Jewish Studies at the University of Oxford, has devoted himself for more than a quarter-century to the study of Midrashic and Targumic literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the other literary sources for the study of Jewish history and of Judaism in late antiquity. In his *Jesus the Jew* and in the corresponding revision and up-dating of Schürer's standard work, he, along with his associates in the latter project, has taken the position that considerable historical information is to be derived from those sources.

The central issue, clearly, is going to be those two intractable and complex corpora of sources, the Synoptic Gospels, on the one side, and the earlier rabbinic compilations, Mishnah-Tosefta in particular, on the other. In general, much New Testament scholarship takes a severely skeptical position on both bodies of evidence. To his credit, Vermes (*Jesus*, p. 235, n. 1) faces that skepticism head-on: "My guarded optimism concerning a possible recovery of the genuine features of Jesus is in sharp contrast with Rudolf Bultmann's historical agnosticism: 'I do indeed think,' he [Bultmann] writes, 'that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and per-

sonality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary. . . . The real question is this: how much history can be extracted from sources which are not primarily historical?'"

In answer to this question—which is the right one—Vermes maintains we can gain a clear picture of Jesus. He is understood as utterly unrelated to the messianic claims associated with him by his followers. Vermes describes the Messianic claim as "the strange creation of the modern myth-makers." Jesus rather is understood as part of "the venerable company of the Devout, the ancient Hasidim." In particular, he is to be compared to Hanina ben Dosa and Honi HaMe'aggel (the Circler). Vermes admits that not a great deal can be historically authenticated. But "the positive and constant testimony of the earliest Gospel tradition, considered against its natural background of first-century Galilean charismatic religion, leads not to a Jesus as unrecognizable within the framework of Judaism as by the standard of his own verifiable words and intentions, but to another figure: Jesus the just man, the *zaddik*, Jesus the helper and healer, Jesus the teacher and leader. . . ." These results are argued in two pellucid sections, first, the setting, which treats Jesus the Jew, Jesus and Galilee, and Jesus and Charismatic Judaism (certainly the most important chapter), and second, the titles of Jesus: prophet, lord, Messiah, son of man, son of God.

Vermes's claim is carefully phrased. He does not suppose that the stories about and sayings attributed to Jesus are in every detail exact records of what really was done and said on a specific occasion. He stresses that we stand at one remove; we do not know so much as the Gospels claim to tell us. On the other hand, we do have a fairly firm tradition. I may add that that tradition was worked out in an astonishingly brief period. Within less than half a century after the death of Jesus, the Gospels

Dinner time is strictly for eating, not talking or socializing. . . . They also have no table manners. . . . The table manners are typical of the rudeness and crudeness of the Israelis generally. It's the thing I like least about them. Did you ever take a bus here? Then you know what I mean. There's no idiom in Hebrew for standing on line. The bus comes and *pow!* All hell breaks loose. It's every man for himself." Disillusioned? Hardly. Flender has explored Naomi's likes and dislikes to get at a deeper truth. For Naomi concludes: "I never understood that I could mean anything to anyone until I came to Israel. Here I understood what being a human being is—that it means making a difference to other people."

The difference that Israel has made in the lives of these fifteen young people is Flender's predominant theme. Ilya is Russian-born. "For Jewish children, Russia is not bad," he says. "I never had any incidents involving anti-Semitism. Nobody ever treated me any different because I was a Jew." Ilya thought little of his Jewishness while in the Soviet Union. Not so Natasha. "In Russia," she tells us, "I always considered myself a Jew, never a Russian. It wasn't until I came to Israel that I stopped thinking of myself as a Jew. For a while, after I came here, I thought of myself as a Russian. Now I think of myself as an Israeli."

ISRAELI? JEW? Surely there is no contradiction here. Yet Natasha's casual distinction between the two highlights one of Israel's gravest educational dilemmas. Flender's probing questions will return to this time and again.

So *The Kids Who Went to Israel* ex-

plores not only the recent Jewish past and Israeli present, but strongly hints at a number of possibilities for the future. Reading these interviews will not prove a heartening proposition for everyone. Flender has chosen to tell the truth and not all his young people emerge as virtuous or especially attractive. They were not meant to. But there is a definite overall sense of optimism here, a bright and cheerful confidence that is something of a rarity. Other nations—less beleaguered—must envy it. When London-born Sue says, "I feel that I've been reborn thanks to Israel," we believe her. Aaron, who came to Israel via Japan, tells us: "Being in the Israeli Army was one of the most beautiful experiences I've had in my life. The officers were so understanding, so fantastic. That's where you make most of your friends, in the army. And remember, it's in your own backyard; it's not somewhere across the sea," and we nod in recognition. This is the way it must be.

A truly unique society. You don't have to be Jewish to love it. As Ginger, the daughter of a Baptist minister from Mississippi, puts it: "I'm finishing up my M.A. right now, and the funny thing is that I have no desire to go back home. I want to stay on here in Israel. I like the freedom here. I like the cosmopolitan atmosphere. . . . Even though I am a religious Protestant, a Baptist, I feel at home in Israel, I feel it's my home. . . ."

Those who read Harold Flender's *The Kids Who Went to Israel* may very well come away with similar feelings.

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