

the book reporter

KOSHER CUISINE, by Helen Nash. Random House, N.Y., 1984. \$19.95. 319 pp.

FROM MY GRANDMOTHER'S KITCHEN — A SEPHARDIC COOKBOOK, by Viviane Alchech Miner with Linda Krinn. Triad Publishing Co., Gainesville, Fla., 1984. \$8.95 (paper). 184 pp.

THE CLASSIC CUISINE OF THE ITALIAN JEWS, TRADITIONAL RECIPES AND MENUS AND A MEMOIR OF A VANISHED WAY OF LIFE, by Edda Servi Machlin. Dodd, Mead & Co., N.Y., 1984. \$12.95 (paper). 254 pp.

NOT CHOPPED LIVER, THE KOSHER WAY TO COOK GOURMET, by Dorothy Seaman and Paula Smith. Jetsand Press, West Hartford, Conn., 1984. Paper, unpriced. 338 pp.

IT'S ALL FISH, THE KOSHER WAY TO COOK GOURMET, by Paula Smith and Dorothy Seaman. Jetsand Press, West Hartford, Conn., 1983. Paper, unpriced. 286 pp.

KOSHER CREOLE COOKBOOK, by Mildred L. Covert and Sylvia P. Gerson. Pelican Publishing Co., Gretna, La., 1982. \$8.95 (paper). 214 pp.

QUICK & EASY, edited by Shelley Melvin. Triad Publishing Co., Gainesville, Fla., 1984. \$8.95 (paper). 248 pp.

MOTHER WONDERFUL'S CHICKEN SOUP, by Myra Chasin. 101 Productions, San Francisco, Calif., 1984. \$7.95. 40 pp.

Reviewed by BARBARA TRAININ and FREYDA REISS WEISS

The statement that "man does not live by bread alone" has been variously interpreted. Its original (scriptural) meaning was that human beings require a measure of spiritual-

ity to add spice to life. More recently, it has come to mean that the more variation in cuisine away from the staples, the merrier the palate.

By that token, the Jewish eater's palate has become an immeasurably merrier one. It was only to be expected that Jews would be influenced by the general trend in the society toward greater interest in food and food preparation. The trend has been influenced by many factors: intensified ethnic identity leading to rediscovery and then blending of specialized cuisines; a food industry capable of producing or importing an unprecedented number of different types of food; heightened awareness of nutrition and health among all segments of the population; and, in a related vein, an upsurge of interest in vegetarianism and health foods—which inspires people to come up with creative menus to compensate for the limited quantity of permissible foods.

But Jews have been influenced by factors peculiar to them as well. For example, kosher cooking has been affected by social and demographic changes in the Jewish community. As Traditional Judaism has drawn into its ranks growing numbers of formerly nonobservant people, who for years ate nonkosher food and now want to retain their former eating habits as much as possible without sacrificing newly-acquired religious principles; and as Traditional Jews increasingly number in their ranks American-born, educated professionals, whose lifestyle is every bit as urbane as their non-Traditional or non-Jewish counterparts, there is a growing demand for sophisticated kosher cooking.

Recent Proliferation

The interest in more varied Jewish cooking is reflected in the recent proliferation of cookbooks specifically geared for the Traditional Jew-

ish or kosher cook. Not only are major and minor publishing houses producing kosher cookbooks, but Jewish women's organizations and synagogue sisterhoods have found cookbooks based on recipes culled from the kitchens and memories of their members to be popular and effective fund-raisers. Bored with the chicken-soup-and-knaidlach-type cookbooks of former years, and desiring to go beyond their mothers' recipes, many Jewish cooks today are turning to non-traditional and even nonkosher inspiration to enliven their repertoires.

Several cookbooks have recently been published that allow the kosher or traditional Jewish cook to add a number of ethnically diverse cuisines to his or her culinary repertoire. While none of these cookbooks is entirely devoted to Passover (though there are several of those on the market), each does contain—if not an entire separate section of that holiday's recipes—then at least a few special *pesadick* dishes interspersed among the others, or else dishes that can be used all year long (as long as the ingredients in them are marked "kosher for Passover").

One of the best of the recent offerings is *Kosher Cuisine*, by Helen Nash. Ms. Nash, who has studied with some of the finest cooking teachers in America, has adapted French, Italian, and Chinese dishes to her kosher kitchen.

What makes Ms. Nash's approach unique is that rather than using substitute ingredients to make a dish *pareve* or kosher, she has changed the recipe to create a new dish, based upon the classic. A good example is her recipe for chicken with apples and cider, an adaptation of a classic dish from Normandy usually made with cream, butter, and egg yolks. Ms. Nash's version is simplified and low-calorie, using Calvados, apple cider, and fresh apples.

Of special interest are a large number of exciting *pareve* desserts,

most less fattening than the cream or butter-based originals.

Vivid Descriptions

Two cookbooks based on various Sephardic cuisines are of interest, not only for their recipes, but for their vivid descriptions of family life and times unfamiliar to most American readers.

The Classic Cuisine of the Italian Jews, Traditional Recipes and Menus and a Memoir of a Vanished Way of Life by Edda Servi Machlin describes life in Pitigliano, the medieval village in Tuscany where the author was born and raised. Detailed descriptions of how each of the major Jewish holidays was celebrated, including many photographs, give the reader many insights into this rich culture, now nearly extinct.

The recipes, a synthesis of the foods from the varied lands from which Jews emigrated to Italy, provide intriguing taste combinations—some traditionally Italian, others showing the influence of North African and Spanish Jewish immigrants.

The other Sephardic cookbook that also describes the family life of the author is *From My Grandmother's Kitchen*, by Viviane Alchech Miner with Linda Krinn. This personal collection of recipes is Balkan Sephardic—a blend of Turkish, Greek, Romanian and Bulgarian cuisines, with an underlying Spanish influence.

There are recipes in all categories, literally from "Soup to Nuts." Some of the most interesting are desserts made with phyllo (thin, layered) pastry. Our kitchen was most intrigued by the vegetables—basics turned exotic through the use of a variety of unusual spices or through unexpected combinations: leek croquettes, fried cauliflower, baked endives with cheese, to name just a few.

An important note regarding both of these books during this Passover season: Sephardic practice allows the use of beans, peas, rice and even certain pastas. Thus the Ashkenazi

cook looking for unusual Passover dishes should look closely before using many of these recipes. The traditional Sephardic *Haroset*, however, containing raisins, dates, walnuts, almonds, apples orange juice and wine might prove an unusual change from a traditional Ashkenazi *haroset*, which usually contains only wine, nuts, and apples.

Haroset, of course, recalls the mortar used by the Jewish slaves in Egypt to make bricks. In another frequent biblical reference, one word for "multiply" — in the sense of population — the Hebrew "yidgu," comes from the same root as the word "fish" in the Holy Tongue. For those interested in reducing red meat in their diets or the size of their girth, or for those wishing to adopt a modified, and easier, form of vegetarianism, creative fish recipes are indeed a blessing. In *It's All Fish*, such recipes multiply. Billed by authors Paula Smith and Dorothy Seaman as "the first all-fish kosher cookbook published," it is certainly an excellent one, offering fish for all courses—except dessert—and for all seasons. Whether you're looking for something as basic as "baked fillets" or as elegant as "poisson farci à la florentine" (fish stuffed with spinach), the likelihood is you'll find it here. Geared to overcome what the authors call the "timidity on the part of many homemakers to cook fish," the book includes a useful how-to chapter on the eight basic techniques of cooking fish, and the recipes throughout are quite clearly written. Many can be easily adapted for Passover, as long as you take the precaution of substituting matzo meal for year-round flour.

For the Gourmet

Authors Smith and Seaman are also responsible for *Not Chopped* (Continued on page 22, col. 1)

BARBARA TRAININ and FREYDA REISS WEISS are both avid cooks who enjoy experimenting with varieties of kosher cuisine.

An American Woman in Israel

NO CHARGE FOR LOOKING, by Esther Cohen. Schocken Books, N.Y., 1984. \$13.50. 180 pp.

Reviewed by AMY STONE

How rare—perhaps the only one of its kind—a book about Jews and Arabs in Israel that's funny and sexy, and approaches the subtle and complex through outrageously particular detail.

This is the story of Melanie Markowitz, nice Jewish girl from central New Jersey, on assignment from a little known, collectively run newspaper in New York. She's come to Nazareth to uncover what Palestinians are like.

Three months later, she's in love with the Israeli Mordechai, and the Palestinian Agram. Her editor, the voice of perfect reason, is desperately cabling her from New York: "A reporter certainly does not fall in love." "How much can the Pales-

tinians be thinking that it's taking you so long to write?"

Esther Cohen has created a memorable cast of characters populating the various layers of Jewish and Arab Nazareth. There's Cleo Joan Ginzburg, an American who's had four husbands and four children, whom we first see in an Indian sari and last decked out as an English lady botanist. There's Shari, who grew up in Great Neck, is in love with the no-nonsense female kibbutznik Yael, and is married to the Palestinian Fuad, whom she met at Ann Arbor. There's Fuad's mother, padding around the house, serving tea in tiny glasses, and painting pictures by the numbers—meticulously leaving them exposed.

No Charge for Looking is a generous array of details that provide commentary on the baggage we bring to the relations between Arabs and Jews, men and women, America and Israel. There may be "no charge for looking," but the delights of tasting, touching and feeling are clearly worth the investment. □□

AMY STONE, while working as a journalist in Israel, wrote for a collectively run newspaper in N.Y.



"Spellbinding" Autobiography

LOVE AND EXILE, by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Doubleday, N.Y., 1984. 352 pp. \$17.95.

Reviewed by ISIDORE HAIBLUM

For anyone interested in Isaac B. Singer's work, this volume, which combines three earlier memoirs—*A Little Boy in Search of God*, *A Young Man in Search of Love*, and *Lost in America*—and adds a new introduction, "The Beginning," is a necessity. It takes us backstage, as it were, and shows us the raw material out of which Singer fashioned his marvelous fiction. Gifted with what appears to be total recall, the author performs prodigious feats of memory. Leoncin and Radzymin, the Polish village and small town where he spent his childhood years, are brought startlingly to life with a few strokes of the pen. They and the town of Bilgoray—Singer's home from the age of 15 to 19—crop up repeatedly in the early short stories, and Bilgoray is the setting for the author's peerless first novel *Satan in*

Goray. We now see it as it really was.

When Singer was five, he and his family moved to Krochmalna Street in Warsaw. This teeming metropolis—strikingly rendered in *The Family Moskat*—was an endless source of inspiration and delight for the young Isaac. One of his playmates was Shosha (who would appear in a fictionalized version, decades after) in the novel of the same name, as would many of the literary figures he encountered as a young man in the famed Warsaw Yiddish Writers Club that for Singer was a kind of second home, social club and educational institution rolled into one. His beliefs, which matured there, changed little over the years.

(Continued on page 22, col. 3)

ISIDORE HAIBLUM writes essays and reviews and does interviews for a variety of publications. He has just completed his tenth science fiction novel, *The Hand of Ganz* (New American Library).

the book reporter

(Continued from page 21)

Liver! an all-meat cookbook for the red-blooded eater who simply can't squelch his or her carnivorous instincts. The only catch is, these are recipes for the gourmet, according to the subtitle. (A closer look, however, reveals a recipe for an omelette, alongside eggs benedict and hollandaise sauce. The main point is that the beginning cook should probably wait a bit before tackling some of these recipes.) French, Italian, Viennese, Chinese and even Indian meat dishes are incorporated with the same clarity of instructions that characterizes the authors' fish cookbook. Those wishing to liven up the steak-and-potato all-American diet with a cosmopolitan flair can

try florentine steak (with lemon juice) along with *pommes de terre dauphine* (mashed potatoes with eggs and almonds). Again, there are no specific for-Passover recipes, but many are adaptable. And the holiday season, commemorating as it does the freedom and unification of the Jewish people, seems a most appropriate time to sample recipes from a number of different countries in which Jews have sojourned.

Exotic Style

One such country is the United States, and one of this country's most exotic cooking styles is blended with *kashruth* in *Kosher Creole Cookbook*. Since many of the most famous recipes from this cuisine in-

clude seafood and pork as basic ingredients, or the mixing of milk and meat, authors Mildred Covert and Sylvia Gerson sought new combinations and substitutions to capture the original Creole flavor while adhering to the standards of *kashruth*. (For example "oysters mock-a-feller," made with gefilte fish.) Purists may balk, but at least the authors are both residents of New Orleans. The cookbook is enhanced by introductory notes to each chapter, which tell the reader interesting tidbits about the history and culture of New Orleans, a city as unique as its style of cooking. Passover menus of course must eliminate grits, but can remain otherwise colorful with such items as Creole pot roast piquant—using orange juice and wine—and "napoleons a la matzo," filled with lemon custard for the pastry-deprived Passover palate.

Valuable

Though some crave the exotic, others are content with fitting the simplest menus into their busy schedules. With growing numbers of women working outside the home, of single-parent households, of single women and men who get tired of eating out, not to mention the busyness that all—career women and homemakers—experience around holiday time, a book that focuses on *Quick and Easy* menus (also its title) is particularly valuable. Edited by Shelley Melvin, this guide includes a variety of family-oriented recipes that use only fresh

ingredients, can be prepared in a maximum of 20 minutes working time, and, according to the preface, require only a minimum of technique and skill. Many homemakers find that organizational cookbooks, culled from recipes actually used by "average" members, take into account their limited time and facilities more than cookbooks by famous people who appear to have limitless hours and Hollywood kitchens at their disposal. As part of *The Chosen* series, which utilizes tried-and-true recipes from hundreds of Jewish fund-raising organizational cookbooks, *Quick and Easy* fits that bill. Women's American ORT is well-represented throughout, with recipes from chapters in Chicago, Richmond, Hallandale, Southfield, and Cleveland.

Though some cooks may fear that Passover baking may be limited to sponge cake, the book offers a kosher-for-the-holiday pie crust that can be filled with any fruit fillings one's heart desires, as well as banana sherbet to liven up that somewhat redundant Passover dessert—the *affikomen* (what, *more matzo*?)

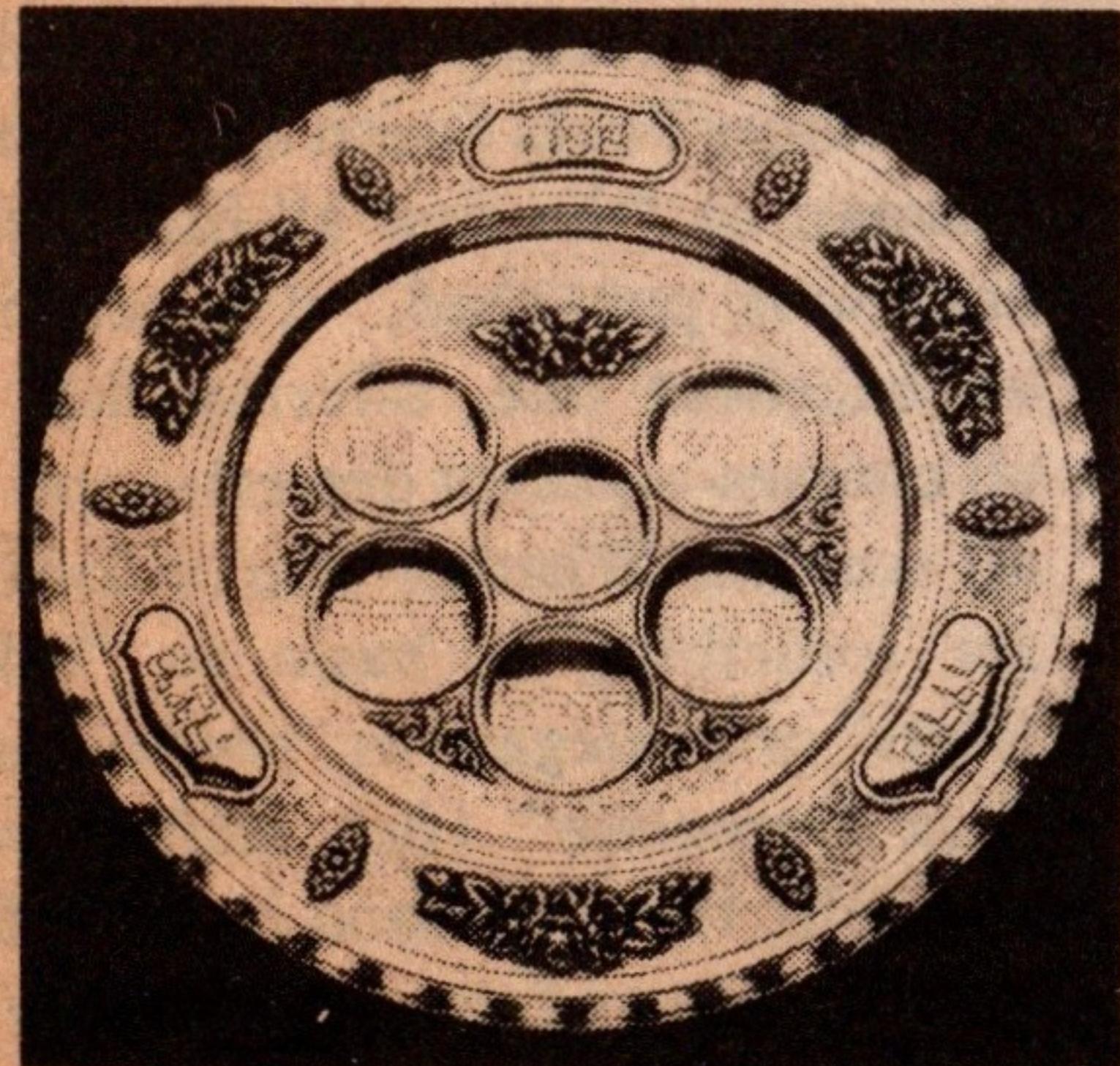
When all is said and done, however, chicken soup—not entirely facetiously considered the staple of

Eastern European cooking, as well as the most-famous symbol of Jewish motherhood in the mouths of Jewish comedians—will probably remain a favorite in the kosher kitchen for many years to come. It has also been given an additional boost recently when physicians at a leading medical center declared it a bonafide cure for colds! *Mother Wonderful's Kitchen Soup* is contrived entirely around this "Jewish penicillin." Author Myra Chanin has used gentle and not-so-gentle humor in this picture book (as well as photos of her own mother) offering advice to Jewish mothers on how to intrude into your daughter's life and kitchen by buying a chicken and making it into soup for her and her family. Feminist readers may find it a bit insulting, stereotypical and offensive—unless they can extract from it only the "how-to" components.

With all these culinary choices available to experienced and not-so-experienced cooks, any table laid before family and guests for this or any other Holy Day or season can be as colorful, rich, dramatic and diversified as the abundantly bountiful history of the Jewish people.

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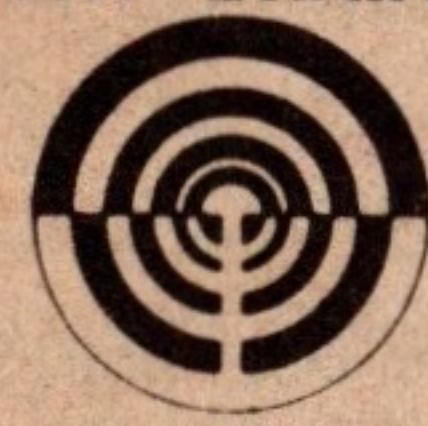
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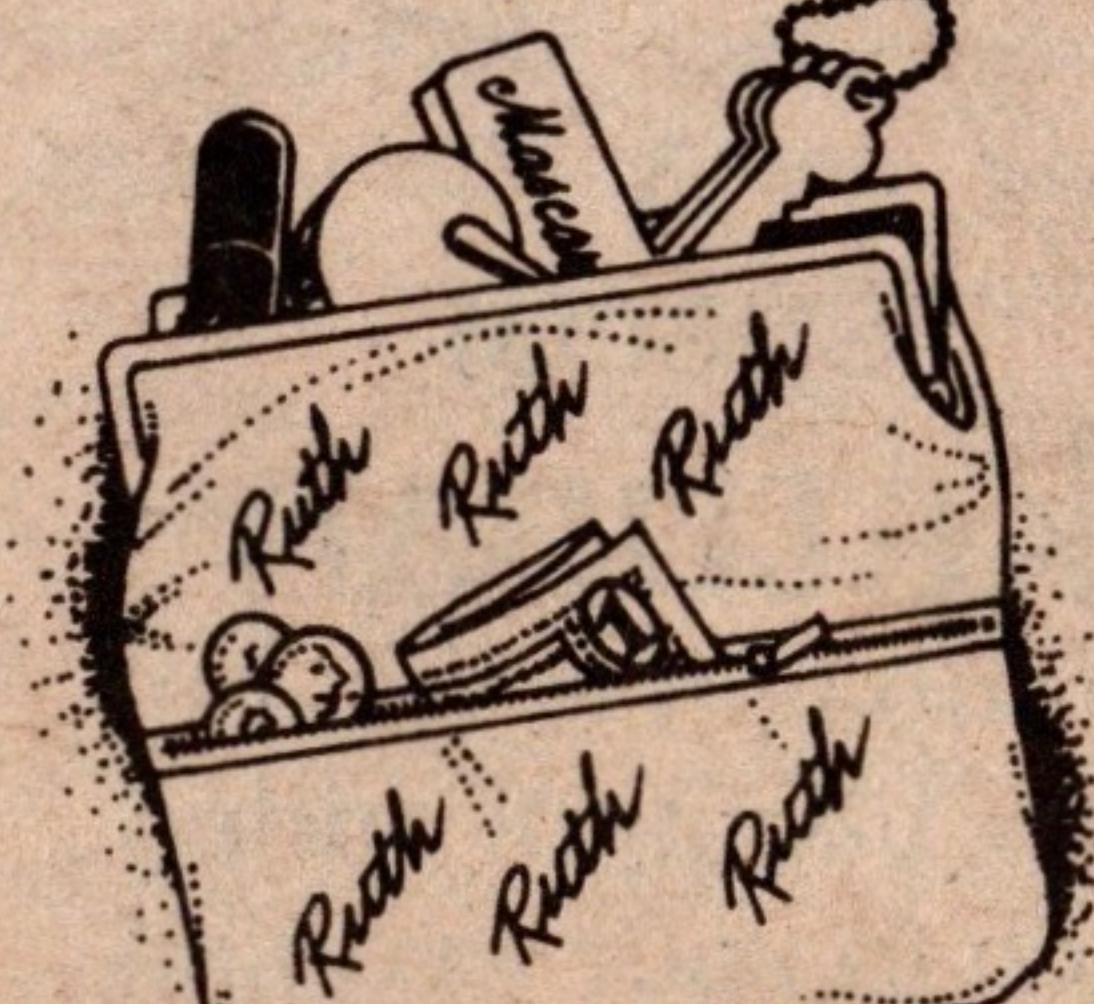
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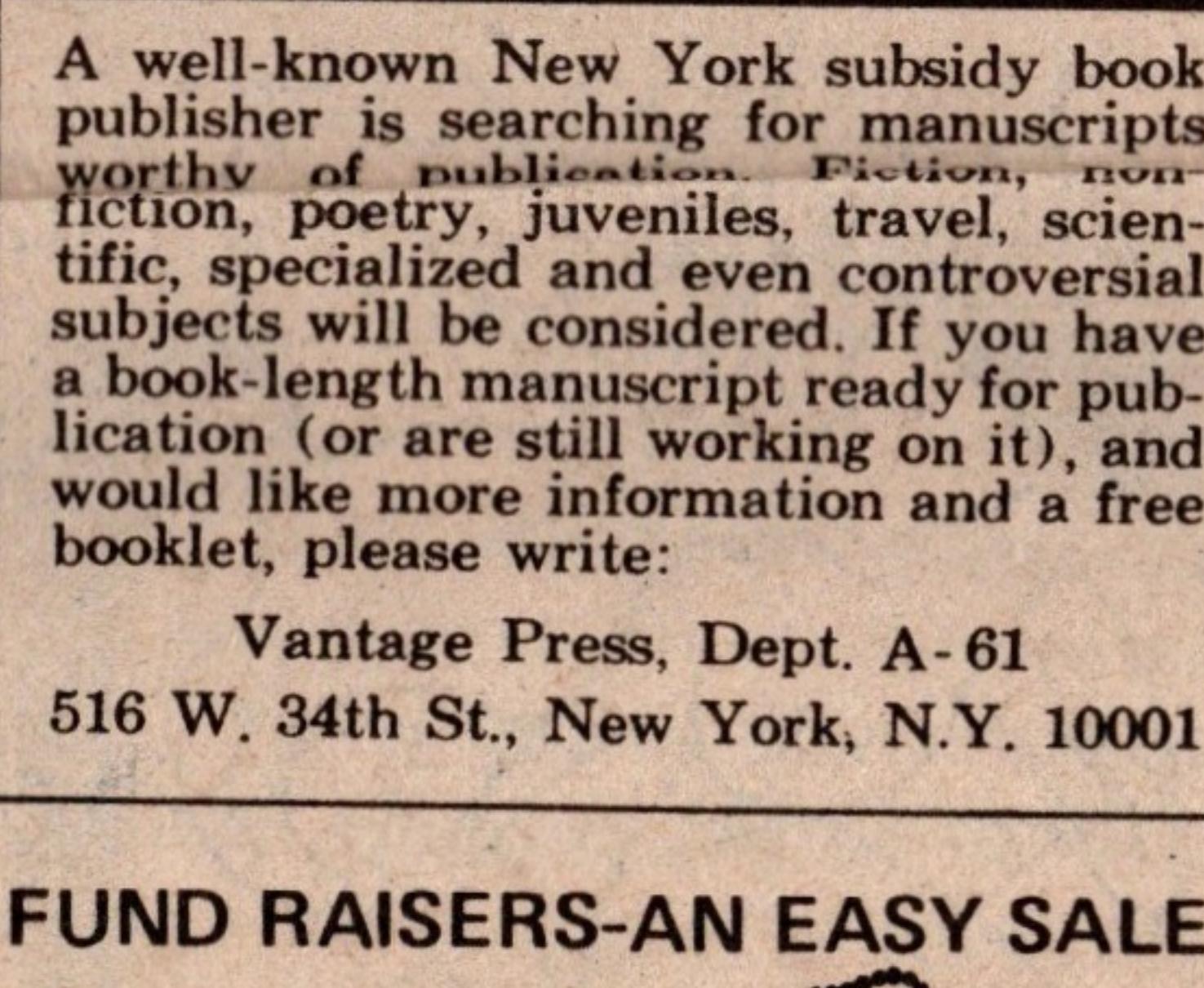
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On my long walks through New York, I passed fish stores and butcher shops. The huge fish that yesterday was swimming in the Atlantic now lay stretched out on ice with a bloody mouth and blank eyes, fare for millions of microbes and for a glutton to stuff his pot-belly with. Trucks stopped before the butcher shops and men came out carrying heads, legs, hearts, kidneys. How frivolously the Creator squandered His powers! With what indifference He disposed of His masterworks into the garbage!

It is no accident that in Yiddish this work is titled *Belief and Doubt* or *The Philosophy of Protest*.

Again and again, faced with the realities of injustice which he sees everywhere, Singer has contemplated suicide. But fortunately he has never once attempted to carry out the deed. Instead he has produced a huge body of first-rate work (nearly half of which is still in Yiddish in the back files in the *Jewish Daily Forward*), has been translated into over 60 languages, and gone on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978. Not bad for a confirmed pessimist.

Love and Evil takes its author through the mid-30's. Along the way we encounter his many lady friends, a host of intriguing minor characters,

and his famed novelist brother Israel Joshua Singer, author of *The Brothers Ashkenazi*—who first introduced Isaac to world literature, and whose intervention helped Isaac come to America in 1935—thus, no doubt, saving his life.

Singer was for a time married in Poland, but no wife accompanies the author through these pages. In an "Author's Note" at the beginning of the volume he denies that this memoir tells the complete tale of his life. In fact, during his long career, Singer has repeatedly returned to his memoirs, either in fictional or autobiographical form. But many of these works are unavailable in English. Only the devoted Yiddish reader who has followed Singer for 30 years through all his autobiographical variations in the *Forward* can, by reading between the lines, begin to piece together most of the story. And even this mythical reader would have no easy time of it. Sabina, Singer's communist mistress in *Love and Exile*, is called Bronya in the author's earlier and untranslated memoir *From the Old and New Country*. This same character is called Sonya in the untranslated novel *After-Growth*, and Dora in the English version of *Shosha*. The events that befall this composite character are never quite the same. For Singer loves to experiment and is far more interested in telling a good story than turning out a formal autobiography. Singer notes, "I call the writing (of *Love and Exile*) spiritual autobiography, fiction set against a background of truth, or contributions to an autobiography I never intend to write."

Spellbinding Narrative

Singer's method is seen to work. In *Love and Exile* he has succeeded brilliantly in creating a spellbinding narrative that is in many ways amazingly honest; Singer emerges, warts and all. His story is a moving one that both enlightens and delights, and in the process restores a chapter of our own history that is long gone.

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