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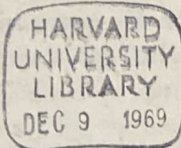
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BOOK ISSUE

# CONGRESS

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ing all the more their singular failure.

Of course, some less portentous themes may also account for the recent popularity of the Jewish novel. Some of them were at one time predominantly the problems of Jews, but have now spilled over into the general world. Inter-marriage, such as is depicted in *The Rabbi*, has become an increasing source of concern to other groups and faiths. The question of resistance—when suffering must yield to determined defensive action—is of mounting importance in an age of social and political unrest. The fact that ours is an epoch of intense racial confrontation arouses interest in a minority which has withstood humiliation and debasement—not only to rise above its past, but to achieve an economic and intellectual status which is the envy of many.

**F**inally, we cannot wholly discount the fact that Nazi villainy created at least a mild empathy for Jewish suffering which, in its turn, has generated curiosity. The fact that, despite suffering, Jews have had the *Galgenhumor* to keep laughing—and mostly at themselves—has intensified this curiosity. The Jewish comic novel—more abundant than ever—has enjoyed a considerable popular success, as evidenced by the work of Bruce Jay Friedman.

The Jewish bestseller has by now surely lived through its most glorious period. Its preeminence in fad-loving America is not likely to last much longer. This, however, is not denying a long life and a glorious one to Jewish novelists, especially the serious ones who currently reign supreme on the literary Olympus. But the general public tires easily of the same subject. It will tire shortly of the Jew as it has already tired of the business tycoon, the political opportunist and degenerate Southerner. Besides, problems change and others will require a subject other than the Jew as their real or symbolic embodiment. The literary reader, on

the other hand, will continue to read Jewish authors of quality for the in-

trinsic quality of their work—independent of other considerations.

## Jewish Writers In Britain

Sidney Du Broff

**B**ritain is not a very literary country—books are the prerogative of a rather limited minority. There are more than fifty-two million people on this small and overcrowded island, yet if a book reaches the not-very-astronomical figure of two thousand copies sold, the publisher breathes a great sigh of relief, delighted to have broken even. A Jewish novel, publishers often figure, will sell an extra thousand copies; Jewish people frequently present them to each other as gifts, and Jews, like other people, like reading about themselves.

While the class structure in England has changed somewhat since the time of Dickens, the class system remains firmly entrenched.

It was into this class-oriented society that the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe came, as the working class, into working-class areas, and soon absorbed what the milieu offered by way of attitudes, values, and speech. For the working class, "culture" means "them"—the middle class—which they dislike intensely, and ridicule, mostly out of jealousy.

But culture for the middle class means a bit of light entertainment, plays that amuse, books that help to pass the time. They do not want to be touched by the conflictual situations created in the reality that is serious fiction; for them, living is the unpleasant interval between being born and dying. Therefore, if this interval can be sweetened by a bit of diversion, then this is what the majority want.

Then what of Jewish creators of fiction; where do they fit; what do

they write; do they even exist? They do, though certainly not to the same extent as in America. Since conflict is the material from which fiction is born, and since the main preoccupation of almost everybody in Britain is to avoid conflict, the conditions for the birth become very different from those in America. How do a basically emotional people, as Jews are, fit into an unemotional society? They become like their neighbors, at least on the surface.

Literary success is not a goal sought with the same zeal as commercial success, since the ethos of the country places higher value on commerce than literature. Jews are a part of the society; a Jew in Britain is more likely to make himself a separate entity by his own choosing, rather than to have been excluded by the society. This in itself robs the Jewish writer of a rich source of material. Therefore, Jewish fiction is sometimes of little Jewish consequence in showing us what English Jews do, are, and think, except by default, by showing that their difference within the society is small. Bernice Rubens in her book, *Madame Sousatzka*, tells of a little boy who takes piano lessons from an old woman, both of whom happen to be Jewish, but it is of virtually no consequence in this very charming and readable book.

*Mendel* is an early book of Jewish interest by Gilbert Cannan, based on the life of the painter, Mark Gertler, who lived in London's East End, and whose work hangs in the Tate Gallery. *Mendel* keeps telling his gentile artist friend that he is different because he is a Jew; the friend keeps telling him he is dif-



ferent because he is an artist. Even Mendel's gentile, upper-middle class girl friend does not find him obnoxious because he is a Jew, but because he is an uncouth bohemian.

In Wolf Mankowitz's *A Kid for Two Farthings* anti-Semites do not lurk in the East End street market. Here a practicing Irish-Catholic girl helps a little Jewish boy. Alexander Baron, an extremely powerful and talented author, wrote about British soldiers in Italy in *From the City, From the Plow*. One of the soldiers appears to be Jewish, which is of no consequence, or holds any special interest or awareness for his non-Jewish buddies, as contrasted to Irwin Shaw's *Young Lions*. In telling about himself the soldier says that he comes from the East End and that the family motto is, "Spit in your beer and nobody will drink it." A later book, *The Lowlife*, is mainly about Jewish people, but provides no real insight, except for the occasional glimpse into Jewish life. It is the story of an inveterate gambler, whose gambling frequently leads him into financial trouble, which he usually attempts to solve by borrowing money from his rich sister whose husband is a bookie (a legal profession in England).

Janina David, born in Poland, lived through the war there in Warsaw, later in a convent, and then through the uprising against the Germans. Migrating to Australia, she spent about ten years there, then came to England in 1958, where she has lived ever since. Her nonfiction work, *A Touch of Earth*, is extremely well told. But it would appear that little of England has rubbed off on her; her first novel, *A Part of the Main*, is about Australians, many of them new immigrants, a number of whom are probably Jewish. But it is neither interesting nor well-written, which is unfortunate since she is a writer of obvious talent.

Chaim Bermant is an extremely funny man. Polish-born, coming to

Glasgow at the age of eight, he writes about his experiences with engaging verve.

In *Ben Preserve Us*, Mr. Bermant relates, with considerable humor, the adventures of a young unmarried Scottish rabbi. One of these adventures consists of being given the telephone number of a congregant's daughter down in London who turns out to be a prostitute. *Berl Make Tea* is about a perpetual loser who in desperation decides to go to Israel, is treated in a courtly manner by the *Aliyah* personnel when they are led to believe that he has a private income, is thrown out of the office when it is revealed that he hasn't.

His latest book, *Here Endeth the Lesson*, of no Jewish interest, about a philandering school teacher, sounds as if it had been dashed off one evening. Having abandoned Jewish topics, he would appear, for the moment at least, to have written himself out.

But Chaim Bermant has a foot in Israel, a foot in Scotland, and a third foot in London. Who reflects Jewish English literature, with all of his feet? Probably Bernard Kops.

Bernard Kops, creator of *The Dissent of Dominick Shapiro*, was born in London's East End, and comes from a very poor working-class family. In his early forties now, he is a man able to step back and look at his society with an accurate and critical eye. He took dope, had a psychological collapse, went hungry—for food, for knowledge, for a way to find himself. He married a girl he loved, a girl from a "respectable" background whose family in the beginning did not approve of him. She appears to be what he needed—the ability, the knowledge that someone believed in him, that what he was doing was right.

In his autobiography, *The World is a Wedding*, he tells how before the war Sir Oswald Mosley and his fascists would come to the East End to speak and provoke the Jews in order to get publicity. The mounted

police protected the fascists. One of them hit Bernard Kops' brother on the head with a truncheon. A few weeks later the cousins waited for the cop in a doorway and took care of him.

Mosley tried to march through the East End. The barricades were up, and the mounted police were protecting the marchers. The East End was determined that Mosley would not pass. They covered the street with marbles, so the police horses would stumble and fall. The fascists did not get through; it was the beginning of the end of Sir Oswald Mosley's power.

**D**ominick Shapiro, hero of Mr. Kops' book, is sixteen, with long hair. He is a rebel—not for anything—but against everything. He has no ideology, no cause. School, family, society—they are all oppressors. But none of them really demands very much from him.

The parents don't mind a little rebellion either; they think it is healthy for a growing boy. The father will even drive him over to the barricades in his car. The mother will pack him a lunch—a boy has to eat, even in a revolution. Have a good revolution they will say, and maybe you should take an umbrella in case it rains. Only don't forget it, and remember, be careful. With such a parental attitude, rebellion against them becomes particularly difficult. The society is also tolerant; there is room for rebels—not as outsiders, but as part of the society. England is proud of its rebels, and does not discourage them as long as they do not offend against public order.

But Dominick is going to rebel even if it is permitted. He rejects the values of his parents. His father owns a dress factory. They are reasonably well off; money is not a problem, except for having too much of it. His parents love each other, which Dominick finds repellent—at their age—and they love him, too. He



even loves his parents, which he definitely does not want to do. He would like to love mankind, but most of it is not worthy of his love.

At a formal wedding reception, Dominick appears in his great-grandfather's old, tattered, dark-brown fur coat which he refuses to remove despite the heat, and onto which his mother affixes a flower. Getting drunk, he disgraces himself, is threatened with a parental beating. This results in his departure from home; he accepts the apple and the ten pounds his mother slips him on the way.

In Soho he comes amongst his own; money talks even amongst those who hate money, and Dominick soon has friends: Chris, an Anarchist London-School-of-Economics dropout whose father is a stockbroker; Daffodil, daughter of a conservative Socialist Member of Parliament; and several others. He is invited to share their derelict house where the moon is shining through the roof. It is cold in, as well as out. They begin chanting, because they are cold, and their teeth are chattering. It reminds Dominick of prayers.

"We accept Buddha but not Buddhists."

"We love animals but hate people who love animals."

"Death to the Beatles and all that conformist crap."

Dominick and Daffodil take a fancy to each other. "He felt the jutting bones of the top of her leg. She was bloody skinny. It was a bit of a disappointment."

In the morning Dominick throws away his watch, disposes of his shoes under an approaching Jaguar automobile, and proceeds barefooted, despite it being January, to hitchhike to St. Ives, Cornwall, with his new friends, where Dominick wants to set up a colony and live the dematerialized life.

They arrive in St. Ives. They are cold, hungry, tired. The natives are hostile. Then Daffodil reveals five

pound notes she had held in secret for such an emergency as this. The others are jubilant, except Dominick. "Traitors!" he cries out. "Throw the money away. Burn it. Chuck it in the sea. We are supposed to start from scratch. Here! Not with tainted money."

Dominick is disillusioned, refuses to go on with the others to Penzance. Alone, he takes refuge in a rowboat on the beach, until the local policeman comes and picks him up for vagrancy. His parents are notified, and ultimately he appears in court, with his father pleading on his behalf. The father explains to the Magistrate that they are of the "Jewish persuasion," which means the height of respectability, and Dominick is released.

He has rebelled, and the revolution is over. He rebelled against everything instead of for something. He then has his hair cut short, his old clothes burned. He is the new Dominick, a respectable-looking one.

## Jewish Life in Yiddish Letters

Joseph C. Landis

**I**t is—or should be—not a coincidence but an act of celebration that a survey of Yiddish literature \* appeared on the 60th anniversary of the international conference that was convened at Czernowitz (in what is now Rumania), to discuss the status and the needs of Yiddish. Called at the instance of a group of Yiddish writers and intellectuals, including Dr. Nathan Birnbaum, David Pinski and Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky, the delegates met to issue a declaration of the rights of Yiddish and to discuss a variety of cultural problems, ranging from the need for studies in Yiddish grammar, spelling and lexi-

\* *Yiddish Literature: Its Scope and Major Writers*. By Charles A. Madison. Frederick Ungar. \$10.00.

But he has learned that true revolutionaries look respectable; the phonies wear the uniform.

In his latest book, *By the Waters of Whitechapel*, Mr. Kops has, sadly, failed to produce a work of comparable quality to *The Dissent* of Dominick Shapiro. A part of the book tells of a close-to-forty East End Jewish man, at times a kind of poor man's English "Portnoy." Tied to his mother, a candy-store owner, himself unemployable, he pretends, for the sake of a girl, to be a highly successful well-placed lawyer, and steals some of his mother's money to help with the deception. Much of the book seems to be rather vague fantasy, all of which is a shame since Kops is an author of very great talent.

British Jewish fiction does not appear to be entering an era any more golden than that of non-Jewish British fiction. In a world filled with great turmoil, Britain remains an island of relative calm, almost as an act of defiance.

cology to the problems of the Yiddish press and the Yiddish stage.

The conference initiators could not have envisioned the magic that would thereafter cling to the word "Czernowitz." While it established no permanent organization, and the realization of its aims was left to agencies not established as a result of its decisions, the glow of Czernowitz grew with each passing year. It inspired that whole generation of Yiddish writers and intellectuals and cultural activists who were fired by the spirit of Czernowitz to carry forward the Jewish renaissance in Yiddish until other fires desolated the Yiddish heartland. No one would, of course, assert that there would have been no literature in Yiddish during

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the past half-century had Czernowitz never come to pass. Yet that literature might well have been far less significant, for a Czernowitz somewhere was necessary to effect two major results without which the very concept of a modern literature in a modern Yiddish language could never have been formulated: the vindication of the dignity of Yiddish as a language and the proclamation of a rationale for a Yiddish literature in its relation to Jewish life.

Yiddish had come to Czernowitz as the speech of the masses. Its status had fallen victim to the scorn of German *Maskilim* urging enlightenment on the East European Jewish world, whose medievalism they saw symbolized by its Jewish dress, sustained by its Jewish orthodoxy, expressed in its Judeo-German patois, and flaunted by the fanatically pietistic Hasidic sect, which perversely found exaltation in that very dress and orthodoxy and speech. This "bastard jargon," which stained the respectability of Hebrew in Gentile eyes, needed to be ridiculed out of existence. And *Maskilic* efforts made "jargon" a synonym for "Yiddish."

Yet, though the label stuck, it lost its sting; it was, in fact, elevated by the thing it was intended to degrade, so that in time a Sholem Aleichem could without self-denigration refer to himself as a *zhargonisher shrayber*. But even that Cinderella transformation of the epithet could not be grounds for its further toleration, and Yiddish emerged from Czernowitz not, indeed, as "the national language" of the Jews, as its most ardent advocates had urged, but as "a national language," an honor the speech of the people was now to share (not without bitter challenge) with Hebrew, the language that intellectuals could—and sometimes did—speak and write. After Czernowitz no one could speak of a *zhargonishe literatur*. After Czernowitz no intellectual found it

necessary to hide behind a pseudonym as Mendeleyev and Sholem Aleichem had done.

If Czernowitz proclaimed the dignity of the Yiddish language, it also clarified and reasserted the role of Yiddish creativity as both an expression and an instrument of the cultural rebirth and modern transformation of a people. At Czernowitz Yitskhok Leybush Peretz emerged, even more strikingly than before, as the ideological leader and guide of that cultural renaissance, a role he had increasingly filled during the years when his home in Warsaw at Ceglana #1 had become the most famous address in Yiddish literary history. And at Czernowitz was struck that spring whose flow sustained the heroic generation that wrote books in Yiddish and built schools and published periodicals and carried on research and boldly dreamed of a true modernization of Jewish life—not modernization through assimilation which was the danger and the direction of the German Haskalah, but the transition to a modern cultural nationality which would include religious and non-religious alike within the compass of Jewish being; which would foster the secular creativity of a world-wide people; and which would move a Jewish people bound by cultural and historic loyalties into the twentieth century.

"Secularism is the will of God," remarked Horace Kallen in another connection. For the generation that was young at Czernowitz, it was, indeed, an act of secular piety, a profoundly felt fulfillment of national *mitzvahs* to participate in the great venture of Jewish renewal. It was to be another renewal in the history of a people whose resurgences after catastrophe or crisis extend from Sinai to Israel. As the enclave of orthodoxy crumbled under the impact of emerging capitalism and Western ideas, as its self-sufficiency and self-containment were assaulted by persecution, pov-

erty and emigration, modern Yiddish literature arose both as a symptom of the major upheaval in Jewish life and as a salvation, however brief.

Sixty years have passed since Czernowitz, years during which bitter controversies between Yiddishists and Hebraists erupted and raged and finally, with increasingly rare exceptions, died away. Czernowitz as a linguistic, literary, and cultural event of the first magnitude, as an ideological symbol of the national importance of Yiddish and Yiddish literature, is now not an issue but a fact to be seen in the historical perspective of sixty years. And during these sixty years, both the language and the literature have grown in depth and subtlety and scope. If Jewish creativity in Spain gained for that period of Jewish history the designation of a golden age, how shall we denominate the achievements of the Age of Yiddish and of the literature in Yiddish? Of its writers in prose, whose contributions to world literature have been substantial, and of its even greater, if less widely recognized, successes in poetry? Surely, one would have thought, the history of that writing would have been a twice-told tale.

Yet it is an astonishing fact that no history of Yiddish literature has ever been written in Yiddish. Periods and persons have been intensively studied, but no survey from the earliest writers of Yiddish to the present has been done in Yiddish. A history of Yiddish literature by Meyer Pines did appear in 1911, but it was a translation of his French doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne. Older Yiddish writing has been the subject of comprehensive surveys such as those by Max Erik (Zalmen Merkin) and Nokhum Shtif and is, of course, covered in the monumental multi-volumed history of Jewish literature, *Di Geshikhte fun Literatur bay Yidn*, by Israel Zinberg, but Yiddish literature of the twentieth century, the years of its



maturity, is not included in any of these. The primary resource for the past half-century must still remain the Zalmen Reisen biographical dictionary, *Leksikon fun der Yidisher Literatur* and the work which brings Reisen up to date, the Congress for Jewish Culture *Leksikon fun der Nayer Yidisher Literatur*, of which the eighth and final volume is soon to appear.

In English, of course, efforts to deal extensively with Yiddish literature have been extremely few. Leo Wiener's pioneer *Yiddish Literature in the XIX Century* (1899) was followed by A. A. Roback's cursory *The Story of Yiddish Literature* (1935). Sol Liptzin's selective *The Flowering of Yiddish Literature* (1963) completes the list.

It is in this perspective, then, that Madison's book should properly be seen: it is the first effort either in Yiddish or in English to put together a substantial survey of Yiddish writing from the beginnings in the fourteenth century to the present. If the result is not a "comprehensive history"—and the disclaimer is Madison's—it is still the most substantial repository of information of its kind available. Charles Madison is himself a venerable figure in the history of Yiddish studies in the United States. After Leo Wiener he was, along with Isaac Goldberg, among the most persistent of those who sought to bring Yiddish letters to the attention of the American reader. The studies of Yiddish writers which Madison contributed to *Poet Lore* during the 1920's seem to have been the nucleus for the present volume.

Those early essays have grown into a book which consists of chapters on fourteen major writers from Mendele to Bashevis Singer, introduced by a survey of Yiddish writing before Mendele and interspersed with chapters on Yiddish literature in Soviet Russia, in the United States, and in Israel. Facts, dates,

even summaries of works not yet translated into English are all available, along with two bibliographies, one a substantial if incomplete bibliography of Yiddish writings in English translation and the other of critical and historical studies (which, most regrettably, does not indicate which are in Yiddish and which in English). The result is a volume which, despite its faults, should prove enormously useful as an introduction to Yiddish literature.

In addition, it lays the groundwork for the more ambitious work

which remains to be done. There is, of course, much that Madison finds it necessary to omit and much that he does not undertake. He does not, for example, undertake to convey a sense of the continuity of a literature in its relationships and interactions within itself and with other literatures.

When the larger critical history of Yiddish literature is written, its method and its judgments will certainly be different from Madison's; but whoever does it will be grateful to this substantial volume.

## The Genius of Isaac Babel

Isidore Haiblum

The round face looks out at us from the dust jacket; there is a half smile on the full lips, the eyes are partially obscured by the oval, steel-rimmed spectacles, but one is certain the eyes must convey an all-knowing worldliness, an all-inclusive intelligence.\*

Irving Howe has said, "Babel is one of the literary masters of our century . . . a genius."

And we can't help feeling he must have been a delightful person too. His letters are full of humor, humanity, concern for people, devotion to art. The snapshots in the 1964 volume of letters show a Babel radiating good humor, warmth and wisdom. They come at us with an immediacy that wipes away the years.

And there is the art itself—those glowing stories that seem to have a life of their own—and the legends that have developed around it: legends of a Jew who rode with Cossacks, who kept a diary on horseback, who put it all down, left nothing out. Budyonny, the Cossack Commander, was later to dispute Babel's veracity, but today when we wish to under-

stand those turbulent and bloody times we turn to Babel.

Yet his stories are no mere histories. Babel's art could only have come out of the Russian soil, a synthesis of Jewish and Russian roots. Yet it appears to transcend time and place; it speaks of the human condition. The scenes depicted on Babel's pages seem, in many instances, never to have been recorded before. This is work of the highest order and it belongs to all the ages.

The facts of Babel's life are often obscure. He was a secretive man who played his cards close to the vest. Humor often veiled his true intentions. By the mid-thirties his reticence was no longer a laughing matter. This was the time of the great repression; by 1939 Babel was to be one of its victims. The Soviet government itself, therefore, has been somewhat reluctant to bring to light all the details at its disposal.

Babel was born in 1894 in Odessa in the Moldavanka district. His father owned a warehouse. Until he was sixteen, Babel studied Hebrew, the Bible and Talmud; he knew Yiddish well (an important point, as we shall see), and later, English,

\* *You Must Know Everything*. By Isaac Babel. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$5.95.



French and German. He attended the Nicholas I Commercial School of Odessa and remembered it as "gay, rowdy, noisy and multilingual." The Jewish quota excluded Babel from the friendly neighborhood university; instead he went to the Kiev Institute of Financial and Business Studies. It was in Kiev that Babel met his future wife Evgenia. Nathalie, Babel's daughter, writes, "This was an era of social unrest and intellectual exaltation; my parents were determined to live heroically. My mother refused to wear the furs and pretty dresses her parents gave her. My father, to harden himself, would walk bareheaded in the dead of winter without an overcoat, dressed only in a jacket."

Babel graduated, went on to Petersburg in 1915. He says of this time, "I didn't have a residence permit and had to avoid the police, living on Pushkin Street in a cellar rented from a bedraggled, drunken waiter. Also . . . I began to take my writing around to editorial offices, but I was always thrown out. All the editors tried to persuade me to get a job in a store, but I didn't listen to them. Then at the end of 1916 I happened to meet Gorky." Gorky published Babel's first stories and advised him to go out in the world. Babel did just that. He volunteered for the army in 1917, served on the Rumanian front until 1918 when he contracted malaria. That ended the first phase of his military career.

**B**ack in Odessa, in 1919, Babel married Evgenia. But this was the period of the civil war, Babel believed in the Soviet dream, and in 1920 reenlisted in the army. He was assigned to Budyonny's cavalry—as a supply officer—and also held down the job of correspondent for ROSTA (later to become TASS). Nathalie tells us, "At the end of the year he was reported dead, but ultimately returned, completely exhausted, covered with vermin, and suffering from acute asthma."

Recovery took time. The asthma was to plague him the rest of his life. 1923 finds him taking a cure in the mountains and beginning work on the Red Cavalry stories. He had already completed the Odessa cycle, those incredible tales of Benya Krik and the Odessa Jewish underworld.

Babel hit the jackpot with Red Cavalry. In 1924 he moved to Moscow. By 1925 Konstantin Fedin was writing, "Babel is the rage of Moscow. Everyone is mad about him." Nathalie Babel adds, "The City was at his feet, the women included."

1925 was also the year Babel's sister, wife and mother respectively left the U.S.S.R. They were not to return and from that time onward Babel was only to see them on his occasional trips abroad.

By the 1930's it had all begun to turn sour. Darkness was spreading over Russia: the purges, the mass deportations, the witch hunts and executions. Babel kept writing, but few of his works were published—they didn't conform to the party line. Money problems loomed large. He was out of the country in 1932 and again in 1935; but both times chose to return. Why?

"His life centered on writing," Nathalie Babel tells us in her introduction to "The Lonely Years," "and it can be said without exaggeration that he sacrificed everything to his art, including his relationship with his family, his liberty, and finally even his life . . . Babel was convinced that a writer mutilates himself and his work when he leaves his native country . . ."

There were other ways, perhaps, that Babel could have saved himself. The Soviet authorities kept after him to produce the standard obsequious works called Socialist Realism; they didn't think it was asking too much. But Babel did. He writes in a 1935 letter, "And then my literary endowment is such that I can only handle ideas that I have thoroughly worked out, ideas that, on top of that, must be original, other-

wise they don't interest me, and even if my own life depended on it or my child was dying before my eyes, I would be unable to get results by trying to force myself."

There is no doubt that Babel knew the score only too well. Once he whispered to Ilya Ehrenburg, "Yezhov (head of the NKVD during the '36-'38 terror) is only the instrument." Ehrenburg goes on to say, "This is the only piece of good sense I remember hearing during the whole of that time. Babel saw and understood what was going on better than any of us." Nathalie Babel writes of those last years, "He lived in silence and secrecy. Only a few people knew of his terrible anxiety, of his certainty that he would eventually be destroyed like the others."

Babel was arrested in May, 1939. He is reported to have said, "I was not given time to finish (Ne dali konchit)." His unpublished manuscripts—a trunk full—were confiscated. What that trunk contained is a matter of speculation. Babel had been experimenting with longer forms; he had been aiming at a new objectivity. There may have been novels, certainly a great many short stories, a number of plays. They all went up in smoke—virtually his entire output of the thirties, a time when he was at the height of his artistic powers. As the Germans converged on Moscow in December of 1941, the archives of the secret police were fed into the furnaces; Babel's manuscripts were part of those archives. By that time, Babel himself was probably dead.

Apparently no clear record of what his "crimes" might have been has reached the West. In those days it was enough to be a man of honor, an independent artist. That he was a Jew probably added to the offense. Ehrenburg calls the accusations against Babel "absurd." The Soviets have tried to make amends. Babel's "rehabilitation" document states, "The sentence . . . is revoked on the basis of newly discovered circum-



stances and the case against him is terminated in the absence of elements of crime." Babel's name has gone back into the encyclopedias; his collected works have appeared in Soviet editions (although not all the stories have made it into the canonized fold); some stray works have turned up in Russian journals.

**S**o we only possess a part of Babel's output, and if we wish to understand his greatness we must go to these surviving works. Babel was a word master. His stories are ablaze with sparkling metaphors and similes; there is an element of constant surprise in their appearance; they seem to come from nowhere—bursting like strings of firecrackers. Some of the images remind us of Chagall: "His high hat sways above us like a little black tower," or "Gedali and I walked up the main street. White churches gleamed in the distance like buckwheat fields. The wheel of a gun carriage groaned around the corner. Two pregnant Ukrainian women came out of a gateway, their coin necklaces jingling, and sat down on a bench. A shy star began to gleam on the sunset's orange battlefield, and peace, Sabbath peace, rested upon the crooked roofs of the Zhitomir ghetto."

The words seem to flow effortlessly, as if by some enchantment. But Babel sweated for his effects. He rewrote endlessly, polished constantly; it took him months. Twenty-six drafts of a story seems to have been a commonplace. "No steel can pierce the human heart so chillingly as a period at the right moment," Babel had said. He set himself fantastic limits: none of his stories were to exceed twelve pages. The longest work that has come down to us is the beginning of the unfinished novel, "The Jewess." The English text is sixteen pages.

His conciseness is astounding. Complexity is never sold short; the experience is rendered in all its richness—it comes at us like a clap of

thunder. But it's all done in a handful of paragraphs. Babel said, "The point is that Tolstoy was able to describe what happened to him minute by minute, he remembered it all, whereas I evidently, only have it in me to describe the most interesting five minutes I've experienced in twenty-four hours." Given, in part, to allay bureaucratic suspicions concerning his sparse productivity at this time, there is still enough truth in this statement to illuminate Babel's craft.

**T**he theme of Jewishness is central to Babel. He brings the gift of Yiddishkeit to Russian literature: its humor, its irony, its laughter, its very speech. Babel's Benya Krik stories, the childhood reminiscences, the Jewish encounters in *Red Cavalry*, are imbued with this spirit. He was no stranger to Yiddish literature, its folk tales. Always his own man, everything he touched was transformed, polished and purified, by his inner vision. But the spirit of Yiddish—its idiom and syntax—glows with a special lustre in Babel's work.

He straddled two worlds: the Jewish and the Russian. Like a master card sharp he'd shuffle the deck, mixing humanism and lustiness, and could come up with a hand that balanced both.

And there is nostalgia and wistfulness in parts of Babel, a bitter lyricism:

"... Do you remember Zhitomir, Vasily? Do you remember the Teterrev, Vasily, and that evening when the Sabbath the young Sabbath tripped stealthily along the sunset, her little red heels treading on the stars?"

The slender horn of the moon bathed its arrows in the black waters of the Teterrev. Funny little Gedali, founder of the Fourth International, was taking us to Rabbi Motel Bratzlavsky's for evening service. Funny little Gedali swayed the cock's feathers of his high hat in the red haze of the evening. The candles in

the Rabbi's room blinked their predatory eyes. Bent over prayer books, brawny Jews were moaning in muffled voices, and the old buffoon of the zaddiks of Chernobyl jingled coppers in his torn pocket. . . . It goes on this way, one of the *Red Cavalry* stories—it's called "The Rabbi's Son" and the splendid translation used here is by Avraham Yarmolinsky.

None of the above quotations will be found in Isaac Babel's *You Must Know Everything*, stories 1915-1937. This volume is made up of twenty-five stories invaluable annotated by Nathalie Babel, a Babel interview circa 1937 and four reminiscences by Soviet authors. Max Hayward is responsible for the excellent translation. With the publication of this book the bottom of the barrel has been scraped. It will probably, barring some miracle, be the last "new" Babel collection to turn up.

**T**his collection is not the best way to make Babel's acquaintance, but for those who already know his work the appearance of any new material, no matter how slight, must be a cause for joy.

Some of these stories are first rate. "You Must Know Everything," the title story, is Babel's earliest known work of fiction. It belongs to the childhood cycle, tells of his laborious schooling under grandma's watchful eye and his longings for release. The depiction of the boy and his grandmother are two rings in the chain of Jewish continuity: the times change and while the generations change with them, they are still recognizable within the framework of a broad and meaningful tradition. Less complex than later Babel, the spirit of Shalom Aleichem permeates this tale. Yet the touches of Babel's own particular magic are already there.

"Shabas Nahamu" is uncharacteristic Babel, but kind of fun anyhow. It is the author's only Hershele Ostropoler tale, and there are more than a few laughs in it. Nathalie Babel tells



us in her notes, "Between 1918 and 1923, Hershele, the folk character, was ousted by Benya Krik the Jewish gangster."

Speaking of Benya, he appears again in the 1924-25 story, "Sunset" (later to become a play). Some of the flamboyance is gone, as Nathalie Babel points out, but the story seems as "richly textured as anything he ever wrote."

"The Jewess," more objective in style than previous works, is sixteen opening pages of a novel that may or may not have been completed elsewhere. All we have are the sixteen pages. Again, it deals with the problems of continuity and change. Boris, a Soviet hero, has missed his father's funeral, due to state business. He returns to the Shtetl of his birth—which he sees as stagnant, a dead end—in order to bring his mother and sister back with him to Moscow.

But will there be a place for what is best in the Jewish tradition in the new Soviet society? The unfinished manuscript gives no answer. . . .

The rest of the short pieces vary in quality—but none are without some interest or value—depicting, as they do, Babel's artistic growth, or highlighting episodes of Soviet history.

The Babel oeuvre in English translation consists of five volumes. These things are a matter of taste, of course, but in my view the Avrahm Yarmolinsky translation of some of the author's most important stories, tops them all. Originally published in 1948 by Schocken Books as *Benya Krik, the Gangster and Other Stories*, the book is soon to be reissued in an expanded paperback version. Yarmolinsky has the knack, and the reappearance of his translations is good news for Babel devotees.

Modern Artist," which he reprints in full. He said, among other things: "Our society no longer calls upon the artist to paint man's image, to depict historical events, to record the life of his time . . . What is left for the artist to do?"

But Soyer stubbornly, and very wisely, remains himself, and, as the illustrations demonstrate, achieves stunning results in depicting nude models, portraits of family and friends, and vistas of cities, using his skills in a warm, tender spirit of humanistic comprehension of the Universe. He continues to be thrilled by the art treasures of Europe, and seeks out all Rembrandts wherever he goes. He was enchanted by Jerusalem whose Old City reminded him of El Greco's Toledo; in Tel Aviv, he had a heated discussion with a much younger colleague, Naftali Bezem, who leans to Symbolism and feels that "realistic art is powerless to describe such events as the Nazi extermination of the Jews or the atomic destruction of Hiroshima." While the narrative is rambling and lacks organization, many acute observations are interspersed in it, and the writer's sincerity and frankness have a definite charm.

## A Variety of Art Books

Alfred Werner

I WOULD LIKE TO DRAW ATTENTION here to several new art books that, for a variety of reasons, are not likely to be reviewed adequately in the daily press or in the mass media. Among them, I must single out *My Life, My Art*, by Reuven Rubin (Funk & Wagnalls, \$25.00). Rubin is now the dean of Israeli artists. But what a hard road it was for the gifted yet underprivileged youngster Reuven Zelicovici from the ghetto of Galatz, Roumania, to establish himself as a painter and to receive recognition in the cultural centers of the world. It was a very long, arduous *aliyah*, indeed. Yet the septuagenarian writes with wit and humor, about his early hardships, about Jerusalem's Bezalel School where, instead of getting any real art instruction, he learned to carve ivory boxes for sale to tourists, and about his difficult journey to Paris.

The fascinating life story is brought up to the period of the Six-Day War, when Rubin's son David,

a soldier in the Israeli army, opens the Bible at random to put his finger on a passage that reads, "And ye shall chase your enemies. . . ." The book contains numerous fine illustrations, some in color, of Rubin's works.

The American artist, Raphael Soyer who, with his twin brother, Moses, will shortly celebrate his seventieth birthday, offers us, in *Self Revelation* (Random House, \$12.50), a medley of short pieces—reminiscences, thoughts on art, and excerpts from a travel journal. Soyer looks at the world around him in a mood of cheerful resignation. For him, as an artist, the human figure is the alpha and omega. The nonfigurative, non-representational art that has dominated the scene for at least twenty years is irritating to him, and when he walked through the collection of contemporary art at London's Tate Gallery, he could not help recalling a statement he made as a participant in a symposium, "Alienation of the

H. H. ARNASON's *Jacques Lipschitz: Sketches in Bronze* (Praeger, \$16.50) contains a brief foreword by the artist who expresses his pleasure over having—in good photos by James Moore—all his surviving sculpture sketches assembled: "It is the first time in my life that the work is all together and presented chronologically, showing the total stream of my thoughts, ideas, and encounters."

In his text, Mr. Arnason, who was formerly a museum director and has known and admired Lipschitz for many years, surveys the artist's development from the academic classicism of his student days in Paris to the very free, very daring shapes of recent years. The collected *maquettes* are important for our understanding of Lipschitz' intentions: the original terra cotta sketches "which have the germ of a larger idea" were only recently cast in bronze to insure their preservation (there also exists a set of plaster casts, intended for a Lipschitz museum that is still a dream). It is fascinating to see how a tiny sketch, only eight inches high, served as a point of departure for the gigantic *Prometheus and the Vulture*, which is probably Lipschitz'



best known work. Going over these more than one hundred and sixty photographs is like accompanying the artist on his six-decade journey and watching what he calls "my first inspirations and encounters." His spontaneity, his inventiveness, his skill made him become a top-ranking sculptor of our time.

MAX J. FRIEDLAENDER (1867-1957) was not an artist, but one of Germany's greatest art historians. For several years, prior to the Nazis' takeover, he held the much-coveted position of Director at Berlin's Kaiser Friedrich Museum. Nazism forced his emigration to Amsterdam where the old gentleman miraculously survived while most of his coreligionists were shipped to the death camps in Eastern Europe. In the slim volume, *Reminiscence and Reflections* (New York Graphic Society, \$4.50), Friedlaender speaks about two great colleagues in Berlin, Wilhelm von Bode, who appointed him as an assistant, and Friedrich Lippmann, director of the Berlin museum's print collection, who favored Friedlaender because he shared his interest in German art.

Friedlaender notes, with uncoined irony, that in Berlin it was the Jews who occupied themselves with German art as researchers and collectors, while the "Aryans" were predominantly interested in the Italian Renaissance. In a note on Berlin art collectors he remarks that one prosperous Jew there had learned from the Rothschilds that "the only respectable way to show increasing wealth was in the form of precious works of art."

EVEN A man as deeply involved in German cultural life as Privy Councillor Friedlaender was constantly aware of a gap between him and his non-Jewish surroundings, long before Hitler had managed to isolate and finally annihilate the Jews. In North America, however, Jewish residents did not feel, nor were ever made to feel, that they were outsiders who did not "belong." This is what can be gathered from *Portraits of Jews*, by Hannah R. London (Charles S. Tuttle Company, \$12.50). Even before the establishment of the United States, well-to-do Jews in Newport, New York, Norfolk, Savannah, Charleston, New Orleans and other cities were fully accepted by their Christian neighbors and commis-

sioned the services of the foremost portraitists without any misgivings or afterthoughts. The best known of these American artists of the Colonial and Federal periods, and the 19th century were Robert Feke, Chester P. Harding, G.P.A. Healy, Henry Inman, John Wesley Jarvis, several members of the Peale family, Gilbert Stuart, and Thomas Sully. Also included in the book are paintings by a great Englishman, Sir Joshua Reynolds—portraits of two members of the famous Franks family. In many cases, the sitter is known, while the artist's name has been lost. Many of the sitters played important roles in the political and cultural life of the Colonies and, later on, the young Republic. The Seixas, Gratz and Touru families are well represented. Jarvis painted Mordecai M. Noah, editor, publisher and U.S. consul in Tunis, who wanted to found a Jewish colony at Grand Island on the Niagara River; the portrait of Uriah P. Levy—who, as Commodore, was the highest ranking officer in the U.S. Navy at the time of his death in 1862—has been attributed to Thomas B. Reed.

Of the artists included in the book only one was Jewish: Jacob H. Lazarus (1822-1891), a pupil of Henry Inman. Strangely, the text makes no mention of this. Apart from this omission, *Portraits of Jews* is a most valuable contribution to the cultural history of the U.S. and its Jewish citizens. It is noteworthy that the Jews of Newport were the earliest patrons of Gilbert Stuart.

FOR ITS seriousness of approach, I must also recommend *Secular Art with Sacred Themes*, by Jane Dillinger (Abingdon Press, \$7.50). Unlike Miss London's book, it deals mainly with 20th century art, in particular with works on religious themes by André Derain, Marc Chagall, Giacomo Manzú, Pablo Picasso and the American, Barnett Newman. The author, however, also makes references to Thomas Eakins' *Crucifixion* of 1880. She deplores the fact that this great picture landed, not in a church, but in a museum, and she indicts the churches of this country as having been "indifferent or hostile to the gifts of their artists." She also states, with sadness, that hardly any fine modern works of art can be found in either synagogues or churches, and believes that this state of affairs has considerably contrib-

uted to the alienation and insecurity of our metaphysically inclined practitioners of the arts. It is in consequence of this that "the secular world, rather than the synagogue or the church, has been the milieu in which the artist pursued the truths he perceived."

Personally, I cannot get enthusiastic about Newman's series of fourteen paintings, entitled "Stations of the Cross." To me, they are more or less mechanical applications of black and white pigments on a vast scale, and I wonder how, without the provocative title, anyone, whether Christian or, like the painter, Jewish, could have grasped the meaning of these rectangles that differ from each other only through the occasional addition of a detail such as an extra vertical line. But Chagall's "Calvary" and "White Crucifixion" should be deeply moving to anyone, whether believer or agnostic, Christian or Jew. Miss Dillinger tries to explain and explore these, and the other pictures in the book, with a nimble and subtle mind.

TO MANY of us, social action has taken the place originally occupied by religious service. Others think that through religious fervor, coupled with social consciousness, quite a few of the ills of society can be eliminated. Be that as it may, for the past several hundred years Western artists have often used religious subject matter to convey their anger at prevailing social conditions. This can be gathered from the scholarly and lavishly illustrated book, *The Indignant Eye*, by Ralph E. Shikes (Beacon Press, \$12.50). Hieronymous Bosch, through his pictures, denounced the corruption of the church and the evil ways of the clergy. More recently, Georges Rouault, in his prints, made use of the story of Christ to criticize sharply man's inhumanity to man.

In this very important book, the United States is well represented by more than forty artists. John Biggers is a Negro; his very touching drawing, "Cradle" shows a dejected black mother holding three small children. Many pages are devoted to Ben Shahn, who died last March (a memorial exhibition is currently held at New York's Kennedy Galleries). In the book, Shahn is characterized as one who used his broad satire and sharp wit "to attack those who would crush the human spirit."



# A Conversation with ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

*In reading what follows, the reader should imagine a young, bespectacled man of 65. He sometimes sits casually, more often sprawls comfortably on his bed in his cool hotel room in Tel Aviv. The torrid summer air is under control, as is ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER. One feels he has everything quite in hand. His attractive, ever-present secretary, tempted to insert an occasional comment during the course of the interview, is silenced with the only heat that invades the room: "Quiet or I will kill you!" Smiles cross faces. Serenity, self-confidence, security are pervasive, writes DOLORES LIEBER, who interviewed Mr. Singer for the Jerusalem Post on his second visit to Israel.*

DOLORES LIEBER: Since much of your work is in a sense a "remembrance of things past," have you ever contemplated a work along the lines of Proust's? Your *In My Father's Court* is episodic.

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER: I believe that among a good writer's qualities is that he not bore the reader. If a reader gets tired reading a book, it is bad writing. For this reason I would not write 18 volumes. I couldn't finish Proust. This lengthiness is against writing. A writer is an entertainer. Many professors wouldn't agree with me, but I say that whenever there is a chance the reader will skip, it's better for the writer not to take this chance. Writers who write such long novels are writing for professors.

LIEBER: But could Proust have endured if professors alone read him?

SINGER: Others read him for scientific reasons. The same is true of Jules Romains in *Men of Good Will*. I am not sure that O'Neill is an exception to this rule. Plays, too, shouldn't last longer than two hours. If a novel is longer than 1,000 pages, it is no longer a novel.

LIEBER: I was thinking rather of your own need as a writer to find a form, not what would please your readers. Hasn't the stream of consciousness as a form ever appealed to you?

SINGER: I am against the stream-of-consciousness form as a main pillar of literature. Also, we can afford only one Joyce, Proust, Kafka, not more.

LIEBER: Would you tell us something about your early life other than the known facts that you were born in Poland, that your father and grandfather were rabbis, that your mother was what is called a "rationalist," and that you went through the usual *shtetl* influences, emigrating to the U.S. in 1935?

SINGER: Although I came from a Hassidic house, for some strange reason my friends were girls. As a rule this was taboo, but there weren't any boys with whom I could associate. Also, my father was always busy, and my mother really didn't keep the dogma 100 per cent. The result was that I remained a child longer, unlike other Hassidic children. For a writer that's necessary—a light childhood, not bound by dogma. I had a more or less happy-go-lucky childhood. I didn't go to *heder* for a few years, and my parents didn't force me. They were what you call permissive. I had a lot of freedom. From childhood on, I was an entertainer. Against the tough boys I fought back verbally. There is no better education than a poor childhood. Wealth and overprotection often go together, and can do much harm.

LIEBER: Although you studied at a *yeshiva* you did not become a rabbi. Can you tell us why? What fascinated you about the Kabbala? What are your religious feelings? In the *Magician of Lublin* you say: "God was one thing, these man-made

dogmas another. But was one to serve God without dogmas? . . . An abstract faith inevitably led to sin."

SINGER: I couldn't have become a rabbi because I am against dogma, although I believe in higher powers. And, also, I was on the border of being frivolous. Speaking of the Magician, you can't really serve God without dogmas. Especially with children. That's why he had to lock himself up. His lack of dogma led him to the abyss. I was and am more the Magician before he locked himself up than after. You see, I believe in everything or nothing, not the boring lives most people live.

I believe what I wrote about abstract faith leading to sin, but I can't be different. Maybe it is because I never brought children up. They compel you to discipline yourself. I have a son, but he was brought up in a kibbutz, so I could do as I pleased. To get to the Kabbala, it is a most wonderful philosophy. All man-made, not revealed, and just because it is man-made, I admire it. It tries to explain the cosmos as much as we can explain it. It is pantheistic: God is the cosmos and vice-versa. It has all the good qualities of Spinoza except that it believes in free will, and for Spinoza God is a machine imprisoned by His own laws. In the Kabbala, God is a free agent, even a moody person, a Man! He even has sex. Spinoza considered lovers insane, but the Kabbala says that sex in this world is a form of universal sex. The notion of God as a lover pleases me. He gets angry, too, as lovers sometimes do. Sensuality and mysticism go together.

LIEBER: You have said that you really believe there are spirits in this world, that man has a soul, that there are forces and spirits in this world about which we know little, which influence our lives, that psychological research is a science of the future, that you believe in reincarnation, possession by devils, and that there are proofs that these things exist. What proofs?

SINGER: Not scientific evidence, but proofs to *me*. Not laboratory proof. I always feel the hand of Providence on me, and the forces against Providence. I feel the fighting of the powers. The war between Israel and the Arabs, for example, is a spiritual war. Providence in the long run will



be on our side.

LIEBER: In your story "From the Diary of One not Born," your protagonist takes pleasure in being a demon, "half spirit, half demon, half air, half shade." He ends on the "path of corruption." "Blood" is about murder and lust. In "Short Friday" the blissfully happy couple is asphyxiated and dies, going to Paradise. Your characters Gimpel and Hindele suffer a good deal. There are arch-Devils and evil spirits in your stories. Why so much viciousness, suffering and triumph of evil?

SINGER: My sort of corruption hasn't to do with killing. It is a kind of play with passions. For me it has to do with love-making and sex, not murder. The murderer wants to destroy God's creation. I am against this. When I say corruption, I mean it in the pious sense. Even in "Blood" the murder is together with sensual passion. It is always with other things. In "Short Friday" the lovers' death is connected with their love. They are like Romeo and Juliet who've had so much together and die together.

In *The Slave* they are the opposite of vicious. Jacob and Wanda are not vicious. But being vicious is part of the human comedy. You can't just write about people who are living happily. Literature must deal with the exceptional in life, either good or bad.

LIEBER: Why did you end "Taibele and her Demon," a superb story, so tragically?

SINGER: Because it made for a better story. You know, these adventures can't go on for ever! He might have tired of her. These jokes are sometimes not jokes . . .

LIEBER: Some critics have objected to your use of the demonic as overdone.

SINGER: In my large novels, *The Family Moskat*, *The Slave* and *The Manor*, I have proven that I can do without it.

LIEBER: Why is Gimpel as he is?

SINGER: He and Jacob are almost saints, but not like St. Francis. Gimpel wants to believe. He *enjoyed* being betrayed. Many people protest

violently while they are being betrayed, but they enjoy it. He was a masochist. There are millions of Gimpels walking around. One can say there's a Gimpel in each of us!

LIEBER: What would you say are the recurring themes in your work?

SINGER: Always reminding people that there are powers in the world that we don't know, that the supernatural is here, among us.

LIEBER: The Irish writer, Frank O'Connor, has said that he prefers the short story as his medium because it is the nearest thing he knows to lyric poetry, and Faulkner has said that "maybe every novelist wants to write poetry first, finds he can't and then tries the short story, which is the most demanding form after poetry. And failing at that, only then does he take up novel writing." What do you think about this?

SINGER: I have my own idea about the short story. It's the only medium in which a writer of prose can do an accomplished thing. Even the greatest novels have flaws, even *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. The novel gets a power of its own. It's not that the short story is near to poetry. The short story is ideal for the perfectionist.

LIEBER: Mauriac has said that every novelist has to invent his style for himself. How would you describe your own?

SINGER: We live in a century where the art of story-telling is forgotten. There are too many psychologizers and sociologizers. It is forgotten that the main art of the writer is to tell a story. Each story has its own style. I'm definitely not a psychologizer. I'm against those who try to be more Freudian than Freud. I'm happy to be a story-teller in a time when he is out of fashion.

LIEBER: Is there a hidden pattern behind an author's work, what Henry James called "A figure in the carpet?"

SINGER: I can give you one clear answer. When I sit down to write, I must be sure that no one else can write it. Even my adversaries admit that's true, and if they don't, it's too bad!

LIEBER: Do any of your characters represent yourself?

SINGER: They all do; they're all part of me. My stories are not strictly autobiographical, but a man is not only what he does but also what he thinks.

LIEBER: Do you live vicariously through your characters?

SINGER: Perhaps. You see one can do anything that way—conquer the world! There one is free. And that is why I am against censorship. Only the writer should curb himself.

LIEBER: Can you say anything about the process of turning a real person into a fictional one?

SINGER: I always take two or more real people and make them into one. I place a contemporary in the 17th century. Originally the material must be people I know or think I know—after you leave, I may use you. Circumstances change, not humans.

LIEBER: Do you keep a notebook, diaries, letters?

SINGER: Yes, but only lately, because someone told me the universities would be interested in them. Until a few years ago, I threw everything out.

LIEBER: How far removed in time do you have to be from an experience to describe it?

SINGER: Sometimes long, sometimes short. I recently visited Lisbon, and a few weeks later I wrote "Sabbath in Lisbon." But that's rare. There are no rules. Mostly I need distance.

LIEBER: Have you ever described any type of situation of which you have had no personal knowledge? Something entirely imaginary?

SINGER: Very many. However, I know from experience that you can't really completely invent. Nature always has more imagination than the greatest writer. I heard about a Taibele, maybe in Boccaccio, but my way of describing her was unique. If you invent well, it's already true.

LIEBER: Can you describe any technical problem that especially bothered you in one of your works?



SINGER: I always have technical problems. If the technique isn't right, the content isn't right. But somehow, I manage to get out of all complications. Thank God for the garbage pail too. There the problems are solved! As a matter of fact, *Satan is Gogol* was in the pail, but, luckily, I had a maid who was slow to throw things out, so I finished it.

LIEBER: Have any writers especially influenced you in your work?

SINGER: Knut Hamsen, Gogol, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

LIEBER: What did you learn from Poe and (E. T.) Hoffman?

SINGER: Since I'm in love with the supernatural, it was unavoidable that I should like them. I forgive them their other faults because of it. Especially in Poe I find a kindred spirit, and through him Baudelaire and Verlaine. But I wouldn't say they taught me much. It's the subject matter, not the form. Poe didn't give his heroes blood and flesh as I try to do.

LIEBER: Do you still read novels? What do you think of the *nouveau roman*, and the future of the novel form?

SINGER: The novel may end up like modern poetry if it doesn't renew itself. It must stop trying to be a branch of psychology. It should be a story, or else it won't be read. I seldom read novels. I can't finish most of them. I read recently Conrad Richter's *The Trees*. There must be others, but I can't remember them now.

LIEBER: Do you consider yourself an American writer? Don't you feel isolated in your subject matter, not *engagé*? Why don't you write about things basic to the American experience?

SINGER: I do consider myself an American writer, and they do too. I have been elected to the American Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. I wrote a story—"Alone"—that takes place in Miami, although you might say that isn't American reality. I also wrote "A Wedding in Brownsville." I have recently sold some stories to the

*New Yorker* and to *Playboy*, about America. In my latest collection, *The Séance*, there is a story about New York. And I don't feel isolated.

LIEBER: Does writing come easily to you? How do you work? Do you take notes of situations and people you meet?

SINGER: I do take notes. I begin to work in the morning, between phone calls. It is not difficult because I enjoy it. If a writer doesn't enjoy his work, the chances are the reader won't. The opposite is not always true! But all pleasures are mixed with suffering. Writing is like sex; it is sometimes difficult to know when enjoyment or suffering start.

LIEBER: Can you describe any aspect of the Israeli scene which you would want to write about?

SINGER: I have already written a few stories about Israel. One was given the silly title "The Prodigal Son." I had called it "Brother Beetle." One will come out in the *New Yorker* soon. I write about Israel as a guest. I wouldn't dare to write as an insider. The same is true about America. I never felt I knew it enough, so I always write about immigrants.

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# Stephen S. Wise: Wholeness and Integrity

■ *Stephen S. Wise: Servant of the People—Selected letters.* Edited by Carl Hermann Voss. Jewish Publication Society. \$5.50.

Reviewed by

Arthur J. Lelyveld

OUT OF THESE SENSITIVELY SELECTED letters, there emerges the portrait of a massive person. Stephen S. Wise was great because he was great in love, great in compassion, great in human warmth and great in righteous indignation. There were those who were misled by his dramatic power in the pulpit to suspect him of artificiality. The popular cliché of the little men whose admiration was tainted by ambivalence was, "He would have made a wonderful actor." But the miracle of Stephen Wise—preeminent orator, colorful public figure and distinctive, vivid personality that he was—is that he was always himself, always real, even in his most dramatic moments. These letters make this fact evident in a multitude of ways. For one thing, Rabbi Wise loved children. More important, children loved him—and children can spot artificiality at fifty yards.

One component of his wholeness revealed in these letters was his rugged self-respect as a Jew. He would not suffer indignity or injustice to his people. In this, his *midat hadin*, his aspect of justice, warred godlike and constantly with his *midat harachamim*, his aspect of compassion. Thus he wrote to his good friend, Fanny Mayer Korn, in 1948:

I think we Jews have no occasion to set out to do things which will make non-Jews feel that we are helpful and unvindictive. We have done that throughout two thousand years of Christian life. It is non-Jews who practice less than justice to the Jew. It is Jews who practice more than charity to Christians. I think it would be an act of needless self-chastisement for Jews to send help to the Arab refugees, and thus appeal to the friendly judgment of the Christian world.

The Christian world has permitted six million . . . Jews to be slain, with the very minimum of protest. Chris-

tendom does nothing for the Jew, or next to nothing. If Arabs are in difficulty at this time, let the Christian world help a handful of Arabs, as it has neglected and wronged and even permitted to be slain, millions of Jews.

There is here, too, a great story of courage; not only public courage, but courage in personal illness and loss, and the courage to move forward in integrity of conviction whatever the roadblocks thrown in his path or threatened by the Lilliputians. Not the least significant aspect of his courage was his ability to carry the incredible burden of his prescience. Long before all others, he was alert to the fact that Adolf Hitler spelled menace incarnate. In 1931, he was proposing that there be planning "in advance" for Hitler's possible coming to power, and in 1933 he already understood that Hitler's program intended the total destruction of the Jewish people. "I am," he wrote, "going through days and nights of hell."

THESE WERE the days of what Carl Voss calls "lonely agony" and Stephen Wise knew both its intensity and its source. In a letter to George Kohut in 1932 he assessed the pain of his remarkable awareness, saying, "If one be a hundred years behind one's time, one may remain blissfully unconscious of belatedness. But if one be a month or three months or a year, as I usually am, ahead of one's time and ahead of events, it is little less than a personal tragedy."

He knew in 1938 that if war came the Arabs would "take their place with the Fascists and Nazis, where their leaders, if not their people, belong," and he had already said in 1922 when others were blithely optimistic, "There will always be Arab difficulties."

But the remarkable strength of his personality was that his prescience did not lead him to despair. His courage and his hope were invincible. His forebodings led him to face reality and to wrestle with it.

His greatness was in the sum of a host of traits—all of them far more important than his superb oratorical

ability—and all of them come through in these letters: his unshakable integrity, his generosity of spirit, and his wit and wonderful capacity to laugh.

There are sparks from his wit all through the volume, sometimes playful, as in his complaint to his tailor, "The trousers, after being worn a year or two, get a little too radiant in the seat, when I should gleam at the other end of my anatomy."

His largeness of spirit was evident in his tolerance of opponents and his generosity to colleagues. Even those with whom his relationship was, to say the least, at times uneasy, were recipients of his praise. Typical were his encomia for Abba Hillel Silver: "a remarkable man"; "the ablest rabbi in America, barring no one"; and "a really excellent address was made by Silver." He was capable of just anger and he was not one to abide a slight or to suffer fools easily but he was quick to forgive.

His influence on two Presidents, born of close personal association, played a shaping role in their relationship to Palestine and despite the built-in frustrations of Wilson's and FDR's situations, he helped establish the tradition of American support for Zionist aspirations.

And how perceptively he was able to characterize the great and near-great with whom he met:

On Wilson: ". . . his faults are almost wholly those of manner . . . in matter, he is distinctly great and will have a very great place in history. . . ."

On Harding: "I think America has gotten exactly what it deserves. . . . There is probably not a bigger man on the Common Council of Portland than the President. . . . It [America] repudiated the best because of minor faults. It now has the worst because of minor virtues."

On Balfour and Brandeis: ". . . Balfour [is] a bigger man than Brandeis, but Brandeis is a greater spirit than Balfour. The one is a full-orbed personage, and the other a luminous personality. . . ."

WISE'S COURAGE, his generosity and his all-embracing humanity remained strong to the very end. Indeed, as a rare recording testifies, his voice and his power were still miraculously inspiring in an address he made during his last illness. Weakened as he was and only two weeks before



his death, he showed that his grace, his concern for others and his gifts of expression were undiminished. Thank God, he lived to see the fulfillment of his lifelong dream, the establishment of a Jewish State. But when, quoting Jacob *avinu*, he said at Boston's Ford Hall Forum on his

75th birthday, "I am too small for the greatness of the mercy which God has shown us," he was voicing a feeling that no one who really knew him could ever accept. Stephen Samuel Wise was never "too small" for anything. Would that we had but a portion of his spirit among us today.

## 'Judaism': The Depths and Shallows

- *Prayerbook Reform in Europe*. By Jakob J. Petuchowski. World Union for Progressive Judaism. \$10.00.
- *Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought*. Edited by Bernard Martin. Quadrangle. \$5.95.
- *Men of Dialogue: Martin Buber and Albrecht Goes*. Edited by E. William Rollins and Harry Zohn. Preface by Maurice Friedman. Funk & Wagnalls. \$7.95.
- *9 1/2 Mystics*. By Herbert Weiner. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. \$6.95.
- *Man and God*. By Eliezer Berkovits. Wayne. \$12.50.
- *The Judaic Heritage*. By R. Brasch. McKay. \$7.50.
- *Bring Forth Mighty Men*. By Howard Singer. Funk & Wagnalls. \$6.95.

Reviewed by

Jacob Neusner

IN THE STUDY OF JUDAIC THEOLOGY and religion we encounter two sorts of books, books *about* "Judaism" and books *within* the Judaic tradition. The former generally supply a rigid and one-dimensional definition for something known as "Judaism," that is to say, they "ism-ize" the rich and complex religious life of Jewry, not merely systematizing its beliefs in a sound, theological framework, but reducing the whole thing to a few banal propositions. These propositions—"Judaism"—then are set into relationship with other sorts of isms, such as socialism, or liberalism, or psychology, or what have you. The result is "Judaism and . . ." The other sort, books within the Judaic tradition, not only reflect but contribute to the subtleties and complexities of a religious life many centuries old and immensely rich. They make no effort to reduce those complexities to a few simple-minded propositions.

Jewish laymen favor the former kind of book. They appreciate the

simplicity of an easy definition, which permits them to make statements about "Judaism" and confidently to assert that "Judaism teaches . . ." They cannot be bothered by the difficulties of analyzing what it is they really assert when they say "Judaism teaches . . ." They are impatient with the necessities of study. They are too ignorant to recognize the difficulties of defining anything so intractable as a profound religious tradition. They furthermore have no very rich experience of Judaic religious life to begin with, so it seems not only convenient but also quite proper to translate their shallow notions into an "ism" and then to speak in its name.

One would expect a proliferation of books about "Judaism," books proposing to tell anyone anywhere about the "ism" of the Jews. It is therefore astonishing that besides this sort of trash, we every year receive serious, thoughtful, and penetrating books as well. Among the books before us, only *The Judaic Heritage* typifies everything wrong with "ism-izing" that heritage. The others in various ways constitute impressive testimony that the intellectual life of Jewish religion flourishes unimpaired by the philistinism of the Jews.

CONSIDERING THE minimal commitment made by ordinary Jews in affiliating with the Reform movement—for many choose Reform Judaism thinking it is the least demanding mode of Jewish religiosity—one can hardly expect Reform Rabbis and scholars to meet the challenges of formulating profound theology and creating meticulous, careful scholarship. Yet that is just what happens. It is as if the virtuosi of Reform Judaism demonstrate by the exceptional sophistication of their theology and scholarship the error of their congregants in seeing the Reform movement as the lowest common

denominator within Judaic religious life.

J. J. Petuchowski's study of *Prayerbook Reform in Europe* is a meticulous, detailed, and brilliant inquiry into the very center of reforming efforts, the revision of traditional liturgy. It was, after all, in the synagogue that the reforms in the first instance made a practical difference.

Petuchowski leaves nothing unstudied. He provides a careful bibliography, a description of classic liturgy, then a play-by-play description of what Reformers did and said in general, and then a line-by-line account of the major portions of the liturgy. The traditionalism of the Reformers is highlighted. What the various rituals had in common was "primarily the conviction that every generation has the right to introduce changes into the liturgical material inherited from the past." He points out that while no one doubted that right earlier, in the nineteenth century "it was precisely that right which was at issue."

What complicated matters was change in the setting of faith. Universalism and rationalism now predominated. Petuchowski notes, too, that an eschatological fervor affected the early Reformers, leading to a de-emphasis of God's particular concern for Israel. Petuchowski supplies extensive notes, bibliography, indices. The work is a major contribution to Jewish scholarship, and in its way is the best account of the inner life of early Reform Judaism.

An equally valuable contribution to Reform Judaism, the essays edited by Professor Bernard Martin, show how vigorous and sophisticated are the efforts of present day Reform rabbis and theologians. The fact is that Judaic theology today is shaped more by Reform rabbis than by any other single group. Here we find issues squarely faced, not obliterated with sentimental rhetoric (as in the Union Prayerbook) or overwhelmed by meretricious appeals to an unexamined heritage.

THE THEOLOGICAL enterprise in the end serves to describe the religious experience. But theology is not religion, merely its intellectual byproduct. The religious life is portrayed in other modes as well, such as novels, art, music, dance. But it is perhaps most vividly present in relationships among men and between men and God. In *Men of Dialogue*



we may observe how the religious life was lived, not merely described. Buber and Goes came together in postwar Germany, when contact between Jew and Christian was apt to be problematic. But they made contact.

Maurice Friedman describes Goes as "above all . . . representing and embodying the German-Christian conscience in its search for an honest way to acknowledge its guilt toward the millions of Jews exterminated by the Nazis." The book contains extensive writings by Goes, who is not widely known in this country, and writings of Buber as well, to show the "similarity of thought and intellectual propinquity" between the two men. It is a splendid spiritual document.

Still, the scholarly editors ought to have placed the relationship into the context of other such encounters. Albrecht Goes is not the only significant German thinker to come into dialogue with Buber in particular, and with German Judaism in general. I looked in vain for an appreciation of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, who, along with Buber and Rosenzweig, created the modern appreciation for the centrality of dialogue, of speech, of relationship. The book remains, therefore, a document to be used in a further inquiry into a remarkable anomaly.

Who has not encountered authentic Judaic existence in the writings of Herbert Weiner? His *Wild Goats of Ein Gedi* is certainly the most perceptive account of Israeli religious life. His magazine articles have captured time and again the very vital human experience available in Judaic tradition as lived by traditional and not-so-traditional Jews. He is one of the few expositors of Judaic piety in our day.

None can be ungrateful to have *9 1/2 Mystics*, a voyage into the arcane world of Kabbala today. Weiner describes the book as the record of a "search for the life secrets of a mystical tradition . . . a series of encounters wherein individuals and groups who claim intimate acquaintance with this tradition are challenged to relate their hidden wisdom to the problems of our day."

Two sentences stand out. First, "Where philosophy ends, there the wisdom of the Kabbala begins." Second, "The danger consists of the fact that every movement away from

the ordered surfaces of life risks an encounter with chaos." From here, the journey begins, a journey from mystic to mystic, from depth to depth. As Weiner learns, so he teaches his reader, in easy stages.

A book so full of profundity is not always so pleasant to read as this one. Weiner's secret is to focus on individuals. Through their color and life the Kabbala shines forth. He does not stay with obscure, romantic figures, but writes also about Gershom Scholem and Martin Buber. Above all, the subject is himself, and that is as it should be.

Weiner so devotes himself to the other, to the person before him and to the object of study, that he forgets he is in the end the most striking and interesting character of all. His forgetfulness is our discovery. But where is he? And what does he stand for, if he is not forever a peripatetic tourist looking in on other peoples' lives? For this purpose, theology is necessary, and journalism—even a journey into mysticism—not enough. When Kabbala ends, philosophy (here, philosophical theology) must once again begin. I cannot believe Weiner has nothing to say in his own name.

RABBI ELIEZER BERKOVITZ here covers ground better explored by others. He asks, What is the faith of the Bible? The answers are framed in essays on the knowledge, spirit, and name of God, the concept of holiness, the Biblical meaning of justice, and so forth. The method is to expound the meanings of key words and to show how they are used in various contexts. It is the hoary method of exegesis of texts.

Occasionally the author confronts the results of earlier scholars. But in general he writes as if he were the first to speak. The absence of a bibliography is not insignificant. On the contrary, it signifies that the author has followed the way of many traditional scholars, each of whom treats himself as the beginning of the way and ignores the achievements—and mistakes—of others.

How is it possible to write on Biblical theology without a single reference to Abraham J. Heschel? I could not find evidence that Berkovitz has taken seriously Heschel's *The Prophets* among other monumental works. And Heschel is only one among many. The considerations introduced into Biblical theology by

Johannes Pedersen, then criticized by James Barr, are absent. The result is another exercise in autodidacticism. On holiness, for instance, we hear about Gesenius, Rudolph Otto, and W. Robertson-Smith, but Berkovitz seems deliberately to ignore other contemporary Jewish writers on the same problem. On *hesed*, he bypasses Nelson Glueck's justly famous dissertation, now available in English. His treatment of Job is equally solipsistic.

Biblical theology is a field with its own discipline and achievements. Berkovitz seems not to have done his homework.

*The Judaic Heritage* joins the overcrowded ranks of books about "Judaism." Brasch treats the Jewish way of life, Jewish literature, customs ("Their origin and present-day meaning") Jewish "symbols," and the Jew in the world. The book thus covers ground already trampled by many other large and clumsy feet. I do not know why the author found it necessary to write it.

HOWARD SINGER'S *Bring Forth Mighty Men*, like Herbert Weiner's *9 1/2 Mystics*, is a journalistic account of religious life, in this instance, the spiritual world of the State of Israel. Singer introduces a highfalutin question, namely, the nonviolence of the Jewish people, but he quickly turns to vignettes of Israelis in the Six-Day War. These are not merely colorful, but often profound and moving. In the end, Singer confronts the American Jewish community with a scathing critique of Jewish organizational life, a critique extending to the everyday realities of why people join and support organizations, what they get out of affiliation, and what happens to the money they provide.

Singer further treats the several defense organizations and the liberal bias of Jewish institutional life. He rejects the view that when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he was carrying the Americans for Democratic Action platform. He calls into question the pronouncements in the name of "Judaism" of various left-wing Jewish politicians, and asks why it is important to address American politics in the name of "Judaism" at all.

The question he raises cannot be dismissed. He is a responsible and thoughtful critic, a persuasive writer, and often brilliant observer.



# Understanding and Misunderstanding Israel

- *The Long March*. By Jacques Soustelle. American Heritage. \$6.95.
- *The Emergence of the Middle East: 1914-1924*. By Howard M. Sachar. Knopf. \$12.50.
- *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation, 1948-1967*. By Nadav Safran. Pegasus. \$10.00 (Cloth). \$2.95 (Paperback).

Reviewed by

**Arnold Ages**

SINCE THE SPECTACULAR ISRAELI victory in June 1967 a veritable torrent of books have poured forth from the world's presses. First came the journalistic accounts with their slipshod treatment of fact and theory. Then came the apologetic works, heavy on rhetoric but light in judgment. Now two years after the event the sober and reflective essays are making their appearances.

In this latter category one must place the thoroughly competent monographs by Howard Sachar of George Washington University and Nadav Safran of Harvard.

Classifying Jacques Soustelle's new book on Israel is not quite as easy because it partakes of the three approaches described above. Soustelle, moreover, has become in his defense of the Jewish state more Catholic than the Pope. Indeed in reading *The Long March* I was reminded of Voltaire's criticism of certain Biblical texts, *dans un livre saint un peu d'exactitude ne nuirait pas* (in a holy book a little accuracy wouldn't do any harm). If one can paraphrase this in terms of history books as well it becomes eminently applicable to Soustelle's tendentious account of Israel's struggle for independence.

Sachar's *The Emergence of the Middle East*, while dealing only tangentially with the development of Israel, is still an extremely valuable contribution to our understanding of a period when Turkish hegemony held sway in the Levant. The author analyzes in an unsensational way the process by which Turkey's empire crumbled before the onslaught of British power. What is significant, however, is Sachar's meticulous attention to detail. We learn, for example, that Britain's victory over the

Turks was by no means assured in the early days of the conflict. More than one English commander was relieved of his post in the Palestine sector after the British suffered losses two thirds greater than the Turks themselves experienced.

On the Palestine question the author devotes many pages to a dissection of the various clandestine treaties and promises which were made to both Arabs and Jews. One of the authors of those "agreements" was Sir Mark Sykes, a man whose pro-Zionist sympathies were, in part, stirred by ambiguous feelings towards Jews. "His Zionism stemmed in part from personal snobbery," writes Sachar, "a dislike of the 'hyphenated' and 'diluted' Jews who were beginning to make their way in English society. In truth, Sykes was unshakably convinced that the Jews were incapable of becoming a 'normal' people until they produced 'a virtuous and simple agrarian population' rather than, as he saw it, financiers, cosmopolitans and radicals."

Sachar is objective about the Zionist movement and is critical of its early attitude or lack thereof towards the nascent Arab nationalist movements. "Zionist spokesmen had rarely considered the inchoate, largely illiterate Arab community as a political factor," asserts Sachar. "They were largely indifferent to the heated press campaign that Arab nationalists, most of them Syrians, were mounting against Jewish settlement and land purchases in the Holy Land during the immediate prewar era."

Sachar is quick to point out, however, that while the Zionists were delinquent in their recognition of Arab rights the British themselves felt exactly the same way. During the war the latter never saw any inconsistency between its patronage of the Arab revolt and its encouragement of Zionist aspirations, "or between the terms of its original promise to Hussein and its subsequent declaration in favor of a Jewish national home in Palestine." Sachar stresses the fact that even those who were involved in drawing up treaties dealing with Arab territories (like McMahon, Sykes or Picot) never considered the possibil-

ity that the peoples liberated from the Turks would expect to govern themselves.

NADAV SAFRAN refers to a variation of this argument in his *From War to War*. He points out that Arab spokesmen have debated *ad nauseum* whether Palestine was included as a geographical entity in the promises made by the British to both Jews and Arabs. The fact that Arabs engage in this kind of exegesis raises an even more important consideration, according to Safran. Why is it that until recent times no one ever asked whether the British had had the right to distribute territories in the Middle East? Because, the author argues, "at that time the fledgling Arab nationalist movement was so weak and so dependent for the realization of its aspirations on the British as to leave the latter completely free to act, bound only by their own conscience and judgment." Readers will appreciate the cogency of this argument at a time when Arab apologists are trying to convey the impression that Palestine has been, as if from time immemorial, an Arab polity.

This is only one example of the critical acumen which informs the larger part of Professor Safran's exhaustive analysis of the Arab-Israeli impasse. His monograph benefits, moreover, from the author's extraordinary command of Arab source materials, particularly newspapers and periodicals. This is no doubt due to the fact that Safran was born in Cairo and lived for several years in Israel.

This firsthand experience in the Middle East has provided him with a familiarity about his topic which few can match. His book is, to my knowledge, the first one that analyzes in depth the logistical problems of the belligerents and the heavy economic burdens which are the concomitants of military preparedness. In this sector the author traces the defense needs of Israel and the Arab countries and tribes to ascertain the percentage of funds which are channeled into the war effort. He does this, moreover, with actuarial exactitude in charts and graphs.

The thing which pleases most about *From War to War* is Safran's ability to deal with a monumentally complex subject and still maintain a prose style which is at the same time attractive and quick moving. In this he is superior to Sachar who has a



tendency to lapse into the professorial jargon of the history teacher. But I should hasten to add by way of mitigation that Sachar's principle area of investigation, the Turkish empire, is not a subject which lends itself to an easy, engaging style.

Safran, on the other hand, is dealing with a highly volatile situation, —one that is making headlines today. And although he tries to wend his way through the miasma of propaganda with commendable objectivity there is no doubt about where his sympathies lie. This becomes particularly apparent in his references to the infamous Dir Yassein incident. The latter was an Arab village in the Jerusalem corridor. Units of the Irgun Zvai Leumi are alleged (according to Arab versions) to have murdered every man, woman and child in this unarmed village and to have dumped their mutilated bodies in the town well.

The strident voice of Arab propagandists has consistently cited this episode as the cause of the Arab exodus from Palestine in 1948. When news of this "atrocities" spread the Palestinian Arab population was seized with panic and sought refuge among fellow Arabs in adjacent territories.

Safran does not attempt to refute the specifics of the Dir Yassein tragedy. He argues, however, that before Dir Yassein there were several cases of mutual massacre—in the Haifa refineries and in Balad al-Shaykh. These were duly reported in the press and in the Arab papers details were embellished and exaggerated in the most gruesome and macabre fashion. (After the Bagdad hangings this seems more than plausible.)

Despite the raucous publicity

which attended these regrettable excesses, there was no stampede among the Arab community. "Furthermore, after Dir Yassein and when the tide of war turned in favor of the Jews," Safran asserts, "the Arabs did not want to leave their homes in areas that fell to the Israeli forces notwithstanding the tales of real and alleged massacres, and had to be physically kicked out. "The fear and terror argument, plausible as it sounds, and probably relevant in some individual cases, simply does not accord with the main facts."

PROFESSOR Safran's perceptive observations on the Dir Yassein canard are highly original and can be contrasted effectively with Jacques Soustelle's treatment of the same subject in *The Long March of Israel*,—a kind of French-Catholic-Zionist-Revisionist-Ultra view of the State of Israel. Soustelle predictably relies on Menachem Beigin's *Revolt* for his information on Dir Yassein. Soustelle is thus not concerned with the larger significance of the incident; he tries to exonerate the Irgun by arguing that the warning broadcast to the inhabitants of the village was the first stage in an act of war that "was preceded by a gesture of humanity."

I should not have been surprised at Soustelle's efforts to explain away the Irgun's handling of the Dir Yassein raid because from his point of view neither the Irgun nor the Stern gang could ever have done anything wrong. If one didn't know better, one would get the impression from Soustelle's book that Jabotinsky, Beigin and Yellin plus units of the organizations mentioned above all by themselves conceived, created and sustained the State of Israel. Of course, Soustelle does not entirely ignore such peripheral but insignificant characters like Herzl, Weizman, Ben Gurion and Dayan—they are given their due recognition but as shadowy foils who reflect the true genius of the Revisionist heroes.

Now this reviewer is not insensitive to the historical achievements of people like Jabotinsky. I read with admiration, for example, the account of the latter's charismatic leadership in Odessa where he and Meir Dizengoff organized a Jewish self-defense league. Only the most myopic observer could fail to be impressed, moreover, with Jabotinsky's visionary qualities. One can understand Soustelle's report that news of the latter's

death even penetrated the concentration camps and caused intense sadness among the inmates.

The problem is that Soustelle is supposed to be writing a book about Israel not about the Revisionist movement. Regrettably the two are inextricably mingled in his mind—resulting, I think, in a most unfortunate book.

It is unfortunate because Soustelle invests every episode in Israel's history with a jarring right-wing coloration. The portrait of the British mandatory power is typical of this attitude. In Soustelle there is a kind of fusion of historical French antipathy for the English and the Irgun's own fanatic hostilities. The author sees only evil in the British presence in Palestine. In the thirty years during which England governed Palestine, Soustelle sees only malevolence and exploitation. British officers, we learn, even organized anti-Semitic units to harass Jewish settlements—a kind of Wingate operation in reverse.

Soustelle has nothing to say, however, about Britain's contributions to Israel: the construction of highways and the port of Haifa, the organization of the civil service and the provision of medical facilities. Soustelle feels that because the British didn't see the situation in Palestine exactly like Jabotinsky, Moshe Rosenberg, Stern and Shmuel Katz saw it,—then obviously they were evil people devoid of scruples. His thesis is simplistic as well as malicious.

*The Long March of Israel* is a well-written book. Soustelle's elegant French manages to come through the Shirley Tomkiewicz translation. I suspect, however, that the English rendition is also responsible for several gaffes. The second paragraph on page seven, for example, is incomprehensible. The *maskilim*, moreover, did not write in Biblical Hebrew (p. 15) whether or not that was their high aim. To write that the ancient Hasidim were people who "think only of the invisible kingdom," shows the influence of a Christian rather than Jewish orientation. Finally there is no such place as Kfar Guiladi, an obvious typographical error for Giladi.

Soustelle's bibliography is impressive and one is constrained to acknowledge that the author has unearthed some rather interesting facts. He is among the first, for example, to show that assertions about the so-

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called Jewish vote in the United States lack statistical corroboration. Soustelle also provides the reader with some startling quotations from Napoleon that confirm the emperor's "Zionist" leanings. Another surprise which emerges from the book is the little publicized fact that in 1934 a number of German Jews returned to the *Vaterland*. With regards to Ger-

many and its policy towards Palestine, the author reproduces some pertinent documents from the Nazi period—documents which show the unholy alliance between Hitler and the Arab leaders.

It is unfortunate that these highly interesting sidelights are embedded in a book so essentially distorted and misguided.

Marines, eastward to stop the Russians if they carried out the threat.

The conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States over the Middle East leads Mr. Velie to observe:

Once we face up to the fact that the cold war has not abated, we will realize that the chief protagonists in the Near East conflict are not the Israelis and the Arabs. The chief protagonists are the United States and the Soviet Union. The Israelis and the Arabs are merely pawns in the larger conflict.

After discussing the prospects of peace and stable relations between Arabs and Jews, Velie proceeds to analyze what the results of an accord would be for the United States and the Soviet Union:

With peace, the Russians would lose their chief instrument of penetration—the arms diplomacy that has flooded the Arab world with weapons. With peace and stability, Arabs won't depend on Russians for arms, they can turn to the richer West for help in developing their backward economies.

Velie's conclusion places us back where we started from, where the Middle East may again become the stage on which imperial interests compete, confuse and inflame. British, Russian or American development of this area means continued conflict and instability. Only the strict neutralization of the area, economic cooperation between countries in the Middle East as suggested by Israel, can bring peace and well-being to the area. Certainly, the continued hostilities which necessitate an Egypt mortgaging her cotton crop for twenty years for Soviet arms, and Israel allotting a mammoth share of her national budget for armaments, cannot solve the problems of hunger, disease and illiteracy in the Middle East.

A valuable portion of the book deals with the Soviet Union's role in aiding the birth of the State of Israel, and then, less than a decade later, playing a role that moved from a negative attitude to a supplier of arms and military experts to Arab countries and even as an inciter of war. Mr. Velie recalls the Soviets' cynical brinkmanship when it supplied the Syrian government with false information that the Israeli units were massing for war on the Syrian borders.

The vicious attacks by Russia af-

## The War after the War

■ *The Israelis*. By Ruth Bondy. Funk & Wagnalls. \$5.95.

■ *Challenge of Israel*. By Misha Louvish. Ktav. \$5.95.

■ *Countdown In The Holy Land*. By Lester Velie. Funk & Wagnalls. \$5.95.

Reviewed by

Lillian Elkin

ISRAEL'S REMARKABLE VICTORY in the 1967 war inspired feelings of hope and euphoria that were palpable in the fall and winter of the following year. Books and articles describing the Israeli army and its extraordinary military leaders deluged the world even as nerves became frayed waiting for peace and a recognition by the Arab world of the realities that could induce them to negotiate a settlement that would end the bitter Middle East strife. Although Israelis have remained determined and confident of their ability to protect their land, the Arab terrorists' war against Israel's civilian population, the continued forays by Arab armed forces, have dashed whatever hopes there were that reason would prevail and that negotiations would shortly ensue.

Indeed, after the brief outburst of optimism, many Israelis were convinced that they were again living in the interim between wars. Students, especially those facing army service, were reluctant to talk much about future plans or careers. Whether the students were Left, Center, or Israeli Right (which is not American Right), there was a recognizable core of agreement: they faced an agonizing struggle for survival and could not afford the luxury of rebelling against the generation gap or the Establishment so endemic in the Western nations.

I READ the books under review in anticipation that one of them would deal with Israel since the Six-Day War. But, with the exception of Ruth Bondy's bright and well-written profile of the Israelis, sometimes a little too arch, the others in the main deal with the events before the State and the Six-Day War.

*Challenge of Israel*, by Misha Louvish, is a rather conventional discussion of Israel in terms of its efficacy in solving "the Jewish problem." It is a competent, if pedestrian treatment of the subject. Certainly the material is useful and interesting: the Arab, British and Jewish conflict, the ingathering of one million and a quarter immigrants, and the war of 1967. But in less than three hundred pages, Mr. Louvish is compelled to constrict and distill material that demands broader and more intensive treatment. The subject of kibbutzim of Israel, as an example, a unique and indigenous economic, social and defense unit in Israel, is handled much too sketchily. Although the kibbutz population is 4 per cent of Israel's total, its impact upon Israeli society is almost immeasurable socially, politically and culturally.

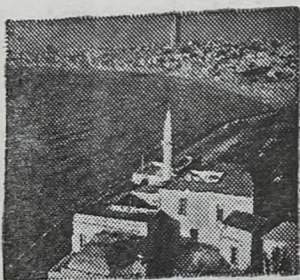
*Countdown In The Holy Land*, by Lester Velie, is a provocative account of the Six-Day War and the tragic events that erupted in June 1967. The author presents an almost hour-by-hour description of two days in June when the hot wire sizzled between the United States and the Soviet Union and almost plunged the entire world into a nuclear confrontation. According to Velie, the Russians threatened to intercede directly in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the United States sent three task forces of the Sixth Fleet, including



ter the Six-Day War in her press, radio and in the UN, are well-known. Her attacks on Israel have been far more vicious and unceasing than even her propaganda assaults

on the United States for its acts in Vietnam. Israel, in Soviet eyes, has committed an unpardonable sin: she is a small, independent nation in a strategic area conceived by the Soviet

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Union as vital to its interests. For those who believe that the United States represents a stable ally for Israel, Velie offers a complete account of the United States' equivocal position on the Middle East. A pro-Arab State Department, along with Great Britain, fought against the establishment of the State. In the War of Liberation in 1948, the Egyptian Air Force flew American Dakota bombers over Tel Aviv. The United States, along with the West, placed an embargo against arms to the Middle East when the Arabs were well-armed and Israel resources were slender.

The United States has continued to arm Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Israelis have had to contend not only with Soviet tanks and installations, but also American arms in Jordan. Although many Israelis still harbor some confidence in the United States, the Six-Day War has convinced even them that the only firm ally Israel can count on is the Jewish people.

The events of the Six-Day War disturbed the world's stereotypes of the Jew. Suddenly a new breed of Jews—Israelis—seems to have emerged. Ruth Bondy describes the new amalgam of Jews in Israel with understanding, humor and occasionally waspishness. For those addicted to travel posters and brochures, the book may be upsetting but never dull. There will be moments of anger, disagreement and annoyance. Ruth Bondy may tell secrets when the strangers are listening, but she tells them with love. The Israelis come alive, attractive in their humanness.

In her epilogue she discusses movingly the question: What does it feel like to live in a small beleaguered and unbefriended nation? She writes poignantly:

We in Israel must be incorrigible optimists if, every few months, we can drop some of our illusions and still have enough left to stand another disappointment in the world's attitude towards us. No matter how realistic we are and how often we repeat that we can depend on none but ourselves, deep inside hope springs eternal that we are wrong. We simply find it difficult to reconcile ourselves to the thought that we, a mere handful, stand alone against the world.

Miss Bondy's book is bracing in its realism, in its freedom from cant and for expositing with clarity and vigor the attitudes and feelings of the Israelis.

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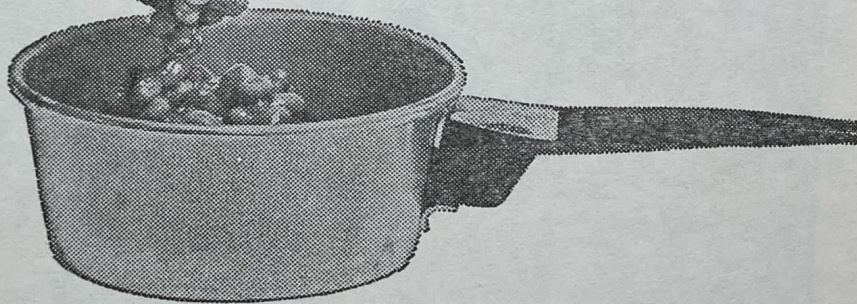
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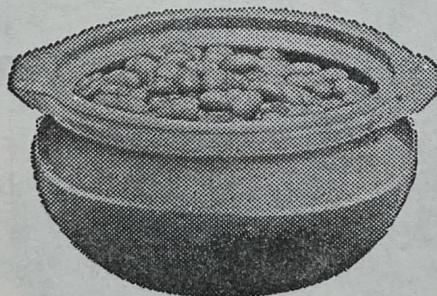
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