

Most of the Jews of Melbourne came during the last thirty years from Eastern Europe. Amongst them are many professionals—writers, teachers; consequently, there are many Yiddish institutions in that city.

The majority of Jewish children in Melbourne receive their education in the Yiddish day schools. The largest of these, Mt. Scopus College, has an enrollment of about 1500. Children begin school in kindergarten and are prepared to enter the university when they are finished with Jewish high school. Seven hundred children attend the Lubavitch Yeshiva and because all of their subjects are taught in Yiddish, the graduates of the Yeshiva are well-versed in that language. The other day schools in Melbourne have smaller enrollments. The Zionist organization has a modern Hebrew school and their other experimental day schools, the Peretz School and the Sholom Aleichem School, unfortunately, have been changed from three afternoons a week to Sunday Schools.

The Jewish population of Sydney, on the other hand, stems mostly from Germany and Hungary. For that reason, Yiddish as a language did not play the unifying role in the cultural life of that city as it did in Melbourne. Sydney has three day schools, but they are not as important in the education of Jewish children as those of Melbourne.

There is a very large percentage of Jews in the Australian universities—some estimate as much as 70% of Australian Jewish youth—and the Jewish student organization is active in Jewish life as well as in the universities proper.

But I had a feeling that the Jews have not really settled down spiritually in this country. The entire way of life—language, culture, manners—are still not theirs. They are making strenuous efforts to enhance themselves economically, but I do not think they have managed to forget the legacy of the Hitler years. It is noticeable in every Yom Tov, in every Yizkor, and I felt it very much one evening when Yevgeni Yevtushenko, the Russian poet, came to Melbourne and gave a reading of his poems. He read "Babi Yar" in Russian, and then Rachel Holtzer read it in Yiddish. More than 6,000 people sat in the hall.

It was as if those assembled had put Yevtushenko on the stage to be their Hazzan and the reading of the poem became a mass prayer. You could hear the music of the poem accompanied by tears and sobbing. No, they have not forgotten those bitter war years in Europe.

In Australia, the saying goes that "Sydney is a warm city with cold Jews," and that "Melbourne is a cold city with warm Jews." The truth may lie more correctly in the fact that Melbourne has a much higher percentage of recent immigrants and has not, as yet, shown the results of acculturation evident in Sydney. However, many Jewish leaders have recently expressed the fear that generally there has been a loss of Jewish identity through assimilation and intermarriage and they are trying to combat this loss through a concerted effort.

Here, as elsewhere in the Jewish world, the Six Day War played an important role as a cohesive force in Jewish life. An interesting commentary is that the "cold" Jews of Sydney outdid the contributions of the "warm" Jews of Melbourne. Zionism is very strongly felt in the life of the Jews in Australia, but organized Zionism is in a state of crisis as is true of Zionist organizations the world over. Nevertheless, the Australian Zionist Federation has raised considerable amounts of money to rebuild Israel.

Only recently, I received a letter from a young Jewish girl in Australia who said: "I sat for a week, next to the TV and radio, thinking about what I can do to help Israel. I came to the conclusion that I ought to go and settle there. It is impossible that we young Jews should merely shed tears when Israel



*The author with the Russian poet, Yevgeni Yevtushenko, in Melbourne.*

is in trouble, and rejoice only when Israel is victorious. We must take an active part in the life there, and this can only be accomplished by settling in Israel." She is on her way now. There are many other young people in Australia who are planning or have already come to settle in Israel. No matter how good life is for the Jews in Australia, its youth, like youth the world over, is looking for a deeper meaning in life, and Israel is that far-off beacon to many of them. □

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# ISAAC BABEL

By ISIDORE HAIBLUM

ISAAC Babel, to our great sorrow and loss, is gone. Some 30 years have now elapsed since he fell victim to Stalin's relentless purges; being both an artist of the highest caliber and a Jew made him doubly vulnerable. History will at least record that he was in good company; perhaps only the poet Ossip Mandelstam among the proscribed, before and after, was his literary peer (excluding those like Mayakovsky who perished by their own hand), but untold thousands of lesser writers, many of whom had not yet reached their prime, were also, in one way or another, liquidated: of the Russian authors there was Pilnyak, Koltsov, Mirsky, Vorkonsky, Tretiakov; the Yiddish-Soviet contingent included Izzi Charik, Moshe Kulbak, Peretz Markish, David Bergelson, Itzik Feffer. . . . Babel, who wrote in the language of the former, was far closer in spirit to the latter.

A master craftsman, he labored long and ardently over each of his pieces and published relatively little during his lifetime. Natalie Babel, his daughter, tells us, "His fame rests mainly on some fifty short stories, most of them collected under the title *Red Cavalry*." These are works of the 1920s. By the 1930s, Babel was already judged unprintable by the censor; Socialist Realism was the rule then and no deviations were tolerated. "A dozen stories and a few journalistic pieces were all he published in the thirties," Natalie says. Too much the artist to compromise, he wrote for himself and it was this "silence" which ultimately condemned him. When he was seized by the secret police on May 15, 1939, at his home in Peredelkino, a trunk full of unpublished pieces was also taken. As the German forces besieged Moscow in December of 1941 (Babel was probably dead by this time), the archives of the NKVD were fed into the furnaces; Babel's entire output of a decade—there may have been novels, assuredly a large number of short stories, at least a few plays—went

up in flames. The tragedy is incalculable. For Isaac Babel was one of the most remarkably gifted authors of the age.

So much of what he touched has about it the aura of greatness. His tales are incredibly compact lyric gems—even the violence surges with a sweeping lyricism—not a word seems misplaced; whole pages glow with a dazzling brilliance. Babel is known to have rewritten relentlessly. Twenty-six drafts of a story seem to have been a mere commonplace. He said, "no steel can pierce the human heart so chillingly as a period at the right moment."

It was Babel who brought "yiddishkeit" to Russian literature—its laughter, its irony, its very speech. The Benya Krik stories, the childhood reminiscences, the unforgettable Jewish encounters in *Red Cavalry* are alive with this spirit. The special nostalgia of a people caught in the currents of swift change—so common to modern Jewish literature—was ever present in Babel.

He had one lifelong habit for which we must be thankful: he entrusted copies of various short stories to friends for safekeeping. In the last few years, finally, these stories have begun to surface.

*You Must Know Everything*<sup>1</sup> is a collection of this sort, containing rediscovered material from the Babel oeuvre. The volume is composed of twenty-five stories, a 1937 Babel interview and four reminiscences by Soviet authors. Natalie Babel has done a splendid job in editing and expertly annotating these works and Max Hayward has supplied the admirable translations.

The title story adheres to the author's childhood cycle, and is his earliest known attempt at fiction. "The handwritten manuscript," Natalie informs us, "came to light in the Soviet Union only very recently. It was published for the first time in 1965. . . ." In it Babel pictures

1. Farrar Straus & Giroux (also in soft cover).

his growing up, depicts his endless schooling under grandmother's stern guidance—she was vastly ambitious for him, as what grandmother isn't?—and his incessant yearnings for escape. Elements of Sholem Aleichem abound here; writers such as Isaac Bashevis Singer still work variations on the theme. Less complex than later Babel, his own brand of verbal magic is already clearly stamped on this tale.

"Shabas Nahamu," another early story (1918), is uncharacteristic Babel. It is the author's only Hershele Ostropoler effort, but it bubbles over with good humor and laughter and is a joy to read. Benya Krik, the Jewish gangster, was ultimately to take Hershele's place, the leading character in the famed Odessa cycle. This same Benya appears in this collection in "Sunset," a story which was until recently quite unknown. It is a welcome addition.

Whether Babel ever completed a novel is a matter of speculation; none has, in any case, come down to us. But sixteen opening pages of one can be found under the title *The Jewess* and it hints at what might have been. More objective in tone than the short stories, it deals with the old dilemmas of continuity and change. Boris, a Soviet hero, has, due to pressing state business, missed his father's funeral. He returns to the shtetl of his birth—which he views as stagnant, a dead end—to bring his mother and sister back with him to Moscow. The implicit question: will there be a place for what is best in the Jewish tradition in the new Soviet society? remains unanswered in the few pages we possess.

The remainder of the short pieces in this book of discoveries vary in quality, but none is without some interest, charting, as they do, Babel's artistic growth, or highlighting episodes of Soviet history.

In all, five Babel collections have appeared to date in English. Another may soon be forthcoming. No two are quite alike. His major works

(Continued on page 15)



habits—in Israel as everywhere else—reflecting the home and family situation, the economic and social structure of the community and even the country's climatic conditions. And who knows? Perhaps the resourcefulness Israelis show in later years and the independent, almost aggressive spirit they display may be due to the way they played as youngsters. □

## ISAAC BABEL

(Continued from page 12)

have been translated by three men: Walter Morison (*The Collected Stories*),<sup>2</sup> Andrew R. MacAndrew (*Lyubka the Cossack, and Other Stories*)<sup>3</sup> and Abraham Yarmolinsky (*Benya Krik, the Gangster and Other Stories*).<sup>4</sup>

Morison's volume contains 57

2. Meridian Fiction, New York.

3. A Signet Classic.

4. Schocken Books (all three available as paperbacks).

titles under three sub-headings: Red Cavalry; Tales of Odessa; and Stories. The translations are certainly adequate, but there is a slangy clumsiness about some of them that raises more than a few doubts. The prose rhythm often seems unnecessarily jerky. In *Awakening*, Mr. Morison somehow mistakes the Russian word *Yiddish* for *Hebrew*, and a Yiddish grandmother ends up delivering a speech in unlikely Hebrew vernacular. One must wonder about Morison's general competence in rendering the Jewish milieu—its customs and very soul, if you wish—that Babel so lovingly depicted.

The MacAndrew collection consists of fifty stories, arranged in chronological sequence, and this is an innovation; a slight Babel tale, *The Trial*, makes its English debut here. Once more the translations are adequate, but some lines seem far too laconic, others overly choppy. The choice of synonyms, at least for one reader's taste, occasionally seems less than inspired.

The Yarmolinsky volume is the slimmest, containing only ten stories, all of a Jewish nature: three from Odessa, three from Childhood, and four from The Revolution. Morison has translated one, Bernard G. Guerney a second. The rest are the work of Yarmolinsky, and more power to him. His highly polished translations reveal a beauty, a kind of prose, an idiomatic verve and a truly haunting nostalgia that is miles ahead of the competition. All of Babel should be read—for he is a wonder—but to experience him full force one must begin with Yarmolinsky.

*The Lonely Years*<sup>5</sup> consists of nine previously untranslated stories—"Froim Grach" concluding the Odessa cycle—and the author's private correspondence. Again edited by Natalie Babel, this collection, which appeared in 1964, is indispensable for understanding Babel's art and Stalin's Russia. Both are enthralling subjects.

5. Noonday (paperback).

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# THE DRUZE W

**T**HE Druze village of Daliya (Daliyat El HaCarmel) in the Carmel Mountains has a population of nearly 7,000. This is Israel's Arabic-speaking, non-Moslem minority, which serves loyally in the Israel Defense forces and police.

The elders of the village still maintain the old tradition which keeps the women inside their homes. Unlike other Arab women, Druze women are not socially underprivileged. On the contrary, it is traditional in the Druze community to respect the wife and discuss family affairs with her. Some Druze men say, "I never do anything without asking my wife for her opinion!"

The Druze woman always had the right to work as long as her work was done in her home. Beautiful embroidery, sewing, carpet and basket weaving were often a source of income for the family. She also

helped her husband or her father in the fields.

But progress and education have set a new pace in this mountain village.

In May 1970, the first Druze woman from Daliya shook hands with a man. It was Tufacha Halabi, 21, wife of Musbach Halabi, who shook hands with President Shazar during the ceremony in which her husband handed the President his book written in memory of the fallen soldiers of Daliya in the Six Day War and the days following... "I am pleased," said the President, "to be the first man to shake hands with a Druze woman!"

A second revolution in Daliya took place in October of the same year when the first nursery in a Druze village opened its doors to 36 toddlers, the sons and daughters of the first women who had challenged the old tradition and dared



go to work outside their homes. It was launched by Moetzet Hapoalot/Pioneer Women, true to its long tradition of pioneering social service installations for Arab and Druze women, for Jewish immigrants and Israeli families from all walks of life.

The story of the nursery for working mothers started in 1968 when Israeli industrialist Dov Lautner came to the secretary of the Workers' Council in Daliya with an exciting proposition: the opening of a pantyhose factory which would absorb 200 workers, most of them women.

Amal Nasr Eldin knew how to seize this opportunity. Forty-two years old, born and bred in Daliya, who had studied under the auspices of the Ministry of Defense, a former pupil and friend of the late Abba Khoushi, Mayor of Haifa, Amal represents the young generation in the local Council of Daliya.

He accepted the offer and mobilized the first nucleus of workers. The management of Gibor offered a two months' course for the future workers in their Ma'alot plant.

