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Main front cover image

Auschwitz survivors and World Jewish Congress (WJC) representatives during a visit to Auschwitz, conducted a day prior to the official ceremony commemorating the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the camp on 27 January 2015 (see Ann Harris' article in this issue). The picture, taken by Shahar Azran, shows (left to right), Robert Singer (CEO, WJC), Natan Grossman (Germany), Samuel Beller (US), Florence Sprung (US), Manny Buchman (US), Mascha Schainberg (South Africa), Marcel Tuchman (US), Rose Schindler (US), Jonny Pekats (US), Henry Korman (Germany), WJC President Ronald Lauder, Mordechai Ronen (Canada), Joseph Madrowitz (US), Edgar Wildfeuer (Argentina).

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REFLECTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The Adventures of Joachim (Hayyim) Gans - the first professing Jew in North America	
<i>Gabriel A. Sivan</i>	5
On writing the history of Oranjia, Cape Town's Jewish Orphanage	
<i>Veronica Belling</i>	16
Samuel Sher – Philanthropist Extraordinaire	
<i>David A Sher</i>	20
Auchwitz – 70 Years Later	
<i>Ann Harris</i>	25

ART AND LITERATURE

Revealing Invisible Realms of the Spiritual Universe: The Art of Abigail Sarah Bagraim	
<i>Ute Ben Yosef</i>	27
Retrospective Recognition of German Jewish Artists - Local Connections	
<i>Gwynne Schrire</i>	36
Isaac Bashevis Singer: Mystic – and Sex Maniac?	
<i>Maurice Skikne</i>	44

FICTION

Child of Zululand	
<i>Zita Nurok</i>	47

BOOK REVIEWS

The New Reform Judaism – Challenges and Reflections	
<i>Beverley May</i>	52
Jewish Life in South West Africa Namibia: A History	
<i>Naomi Musiker</i>	55
I was a boy in Belsen	
<i>Marcia Leveson</i>	57
Justice: A Personal Account by Edwin Cameron	
<i>Ralph Zulman</i>	58

NEW POETRY

<i>Charlotte Cohen, Rodney Mazinter, Maurice Skikne</i>	62
---------------------------------------------------------------	----

READER'S LETTER

<i>Stephen Becker</i>	63
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THE ADVENTURES OF JOACHIM (HAYYIM) GANS — THE FIRST PROFESSING JEW IN NORTH AMERICA

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Gabriel A. Sivan

Standard works on Jewish history have fostered the impression that the first Jews to arrive in North America were refugees from Pernambuco (Recife), a short-lived Dutch colony in Brazil subsequently recaptured by the intolerant Portuguese. Mostly Sephardim, these fugitives from the Inquisition disembarked in New Amsterdam from a French privateer, the *Sainte-Catherine*, in early September 1654.¹ Although their arrival is said to have marked the beginning of Jewish settlement and communal life in the United States, they were not the first Jews in North America. That distinction must be credited to Joachim (Hayyim) Gans, a mining engineer and metallurgist from Prague, whose revolutionary techniques earned him an invitation to England from the Society of Mines Royal in 1581.

While gathering material for the North American chapter of *The Jewish Emigrant from Britain*,² I came across the story of Joachim Gans and his adventurous career in the late 16th Century. Anglo-Jewish historians such as Israel Abrahams knew that Gans was brought to England from Bohemia in order to make vital improvements in the nation's mining industry at a time when conflict with Spain was brewing.³ They found evidence of his activity in England but were not aware of his role in a scientific expedition to 'Virginia', backed by Sir Walter Raleigh, which made him the first professing Jew to set foot in North America.⁴

Historical background: the Jews in Bohemia

We cannot begin to appreciate the significance of these events without outlining their historical background. Bohemia was part of the Holy Roman Empire and throughout the Middle Ages Jews living there suffered recurrent massacres and expulsions. In the early 16th Century, however, their position began

to improve as Renaissance ideas took hold in Central Europe. Hebrew printing flourished in Prague, where Gershom Kohen's press rolled out many works, including an edition of the Passover *Haggadah* with its famous woodcuts (1526). There was further improvement during the reign of Emperor Rudolf II of Habsburg (1576–1612), a tolerant ruler who made Prague his capital and surrounded himself with artists and men of learning. Some Jews became wealthy and influential, Jewish culture prospered, and great rabbis lived and taught there – notably R. Judah Löw ben Bezalel (c. 1520–1609), the celebrated Maharal of Prague, a mathematician as well as a Talmudist and theologian, whose association with the fashioning of a *golem* became a popular legend. One of the Maharal's disciples was David Gans, who wrote works on astronomy, mathematics and the recording of Jewish and general history.⁵

Joachim Gans and the Bohemian mining industry

There is no lack of information about David ben Shlomo Gans (1541–1613). A native of Lippstadt in Westphalia, he studied rabbinics in Germany and under R. Moshe Isserles (Rema) in Cracow before moving to Prague in 1564. He then engaged in secular studies and worked alongside Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler at the city's astronomical observatory. Far less is known about Joachim (Hayyim) Gans, who was born in Prague around 1550, but the fact that both men pursued activities exceptional among Jews of their time does suggest that they were closely related. Their outlook was based on scientific enquiry and they “not only accepted the revolutionary ideas of the Renaissance but put them into practice — David in the field of astronomy and mathematics and Joachim in mineralogy and metallurgy”.⁶

Joachim Gans received his training in the *Erzgebirge* (Ore Mountains) straddling the border between Saxony and Bohemia. This was a German-speaking region noted for its mining and smelting operations. Silver mined there was often minted on the spot. One silver coin, the *Joachimsthaler*, owed its name to the Joachim Valley where it was minted and that name was eventually shortened to *Thaler*, a designation for any silver coin, which became

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the American *dollar*. Copper was also mined in the region and Gans became an expert in metallurgy, the technique of extracting various metals from their ores. His knowledge of advanced smelting techniques brought him to the notice of powerful men in England who already employed mineral specialists and metallurgists from Germany and Austria.⁷

Working in England (1581-1585)

For both economic and political reasons, the English authorities were anxious to develop their mining industry so as to make the country independent of foreign supplies. In 1564, Queen Elizabeth gave the monopoly over mining and smelting gold, silver, mercury and copper in Wales and eight English counties to Daniel Höchstetter and the Rev. Thomas Thurland. At the end of the year, they founded the Society of the Mines Royal, whose stockholders included Sir William Cecil (Lord Burghley), the Earl of Leicester and other English investors. They hired over 100 German and Austrian miners, who produced the first large yields of copper in the realm, at Keswick in the Lake District, in 1567.⁸

George Nedham, the clerk of the Society of Mines Royal and one of its shareholders, was keen to secure the lease of the Keswick copper works for himself after Höchstetter died in 1581. Nedham suspected that the mines were not operating as efficiently (and profitably) as they might and, having heard of Joachim Gans's revolutionary techniques, he consulted Sir Francis Walsingham, the Society's governor, with a view to appointing Gans as their new managing director. Nedham was presumably unaware that Gans was a Jew. However, as Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State and chief spymaster, Walsingham ran the intelligence operations against Spain, which also uncovered enemy agents at work in England. Dr. Hector Nuñez and one or two other Marrano (crypto-Jewish) merchants in London, posing as refugee Protestants, supplied him with vital intelligence. If Walsingham knew who they (and Gans) really were, he may not have cared a hoot.⁹

One obvious question is how George Nedham first contacted Joachim Gans and how Gans reacted to his proposal. Nedham spoke fluent German and it seems likely that he preferred meeting Gans in person, at Joachimsthal, to conducting long-distance negotiations with the Bohemian technologist. On the one hand, Gans may well have thought twice about accepting a post (however lucrative) in England, the first European kingdom from which Jews had been expelled nearly three hundred years earlier in 1290. On the other hand, exiled Sephardim arriving in Prague after 1500 would have brought news of the

Spanish Inquisition and its horrors, which may have been one inducement for Gans to accept Nedham's offer — in the hope of striking a blow against their common enemy.

Once he arrived in England, Gans took up a managerial post at Keswick, studying the mines, urging various improvements and then increasing their output. We have a detailed account of his work there in the enthusiastic reports that Nedham submitted to Sir Francis Walsingham, which have been preserved in official documents of Queen Elizabeth's reign.¹⁰ They do not tell us if Gans spent any time in London at this stage, although he had a home there several years later. Nor is there evidence of any contact between him and the crypto-Jewish merchants in England; keeping his distance from them was just as well in view of later events.¹¹

At Keswick, the headquarters of the Society of Mines Royal, Gans determined that the current mining operations were hopelessly outdated and inefficient. After making a thorough chemical analysis of the ores and their composition, he introduced a new, far quicker and cheaper method of smelting them to separate the copper from arsenic, iron, antimony and other "hurtfull humors". This technique involved reducing the ore to powder and 'roasting' (i.e., heating) it four times only, instead of sixteen times (as was then the practice), before channeling water through the powder. Not only did his method purify the copper at an unprecedented speed — in four days rather than four months — and use peat instead of wood, a more expensive fuel; it also furnished the Society with two commercial by-products — vitriol (sulphuric acid) and copper sulphate (copperas or "coppris") which was used to dye textiles.¹² As a Jewish chemist, Gans would have known that the ink used by a *sofer stam* (traditional scribe) had copper sulphate (*kupervasser* in Yiddish) as one of its ingredients.

The success and profitability of these new techniques prompted Nedham to take Gans down to "the great work" at Neath, near Swansea in South Wales, where he may have helped to build the Mines Royal smelter in 1583 or 1584. An improved version of his method was, in any case, put to work there and also in Cornwall, where the old mines were reopened.

Nedham, Walsingham and their associates were delighted with "Master Jochim Gaunse", because they understood the military importance of larger and cheaper copper supplies. English foundries chiefly manufactured cannon from cast iron, which was easy to produce but unmalleable and easily cracked at that time. Heavier and bulkier than bronze guns firing the same weight of shot, those made from iron were also prone to internal corrosion and apt to explode. However, a bronze alloy of

copper and tin or zinc, known as gunmetal, was tougher than cast iron. Bronze cannon installed on an English man-o'-war proved safer in use and more accurate when firing on enemy ships, and the Spanish galleons were mostly armed with inferior guns.¹³

King Philip II of Spain, a zealous Catholic, had many scores to settle with England. After the death of his wife, Mary I ("Bloody" Mary), it reverted to Protestantism under her half-sister, Elizabeth, whom the Pope had excommunicated in 1570. English privateers, such as John Hawkins and Francis Drake, constantly raided Spain's American colonies and plundered Philip's treasure ships. While officially regretting these depredations, Queen Elizabeth took her share of the loot and even rewarded some buccaneers with knighthoods. Worse still, England supported Spain's enemies on the Continent — the rebellious Dutch Protestants and the French Huguenots led by Henry of Navarre. The situation had become intolerable and Philip was determined to teach the English a stern lesson.¹⁴

Anglo-Jewish historians lost sight of Joachim Gans between 1585 and 1589 as there was no reference to him in British Government documents for that period. Fortunately, that gap has been filled by two British-trained scholars: David Beers Quinn,¹⁵ a professor at Liverpool University hailed as "the pre-eminent authority on the history of early European exploration of North America"; and Ivor Noël Hume,¹⁶ the chief archaeologist at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia.

The 'Virginia' Expedition (1585-1586)

Sir Walter Raleigh, the Elizabethan soldier, sailor and courtier, now enters the picture. In 1584, a scouting expedition he had sent across the Atlantic reported that some of the

Native Americans encountered there wore copper ornaments as badges of rank. This aroused hopes of finding gold and silver as well as copper in North America. Hearing that Raleigh was keen to dispatch a new and larger expedition, Queen Elizabeth granted her favorite a royal patent to explore the territory north of Spanish-controlled Florida and found an English colony there. However, to become governor of the colony, which he named Virginia in honor of the queen, Raleigh had to establish a permanent settlement in America before his patent expired in 1590. Mining and smelting operations would make this settlement economically viable and ensure its permanence.¹⁷

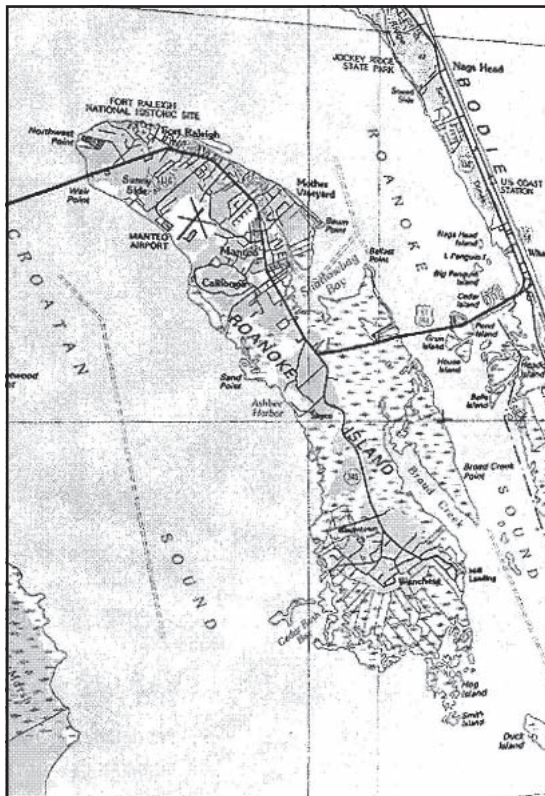
Apart from Elizabeth, those who supported this venture included Sir William Cecil (Lord Burghley), the queen's High Treasurer, and Sir Francis Walsingham, her Principal Secretary of State. Elizabeth expected to receive "a fifth part of the profits of gold and silver ore", as laid down in the patent that Raleigh had been granted. Walsingham realized that only Joachim Gans and his German mining experts could determine whether commercially important ores were present in the area, and he may well have urged Raleigh to include these men (and Thomas Harriot, an English naturalist) in the team recruited for his expedition.¹⁸

Numbering over 100, the prospective settlers and those accompanying them set sail for North America in the early summer of 1585. Raleigh, who had meant to be their leader, was detained in England by the queen and it was his cousin, Sir Richard Grenville, who assumed command of the *Tyger* and a few smaller ships. According to their instructions, Harriot would keep a record of the territory's animal, vegetable and mineral resources while Gans (known to his companions as "Doughal Gannes") would assay the ores from which English investors hoped to make their fortune.¹⁹

On 29 June 1585, three days after reaching the islands off Cape Hatteras,²⁰ the *Tyger* ran aground when her pilot tried to steer the vessel through an inlet into Pamlico Sound. In order to free Grenville's flagship, the crew were compelled to jettison many of their provisions along with some of the heavy equipment (including the furnace) that Gans had stowed on board. It took nearly a month for Grenville to discover a safe passage through the Outer Banks into the Sound and then moor his ships at the north end of Roanoke Island, where a fort was built to accommodate the settlers. Now called the Fort Raleigh National Historic Site at Manteo, North Carolina, it was the first English settlement in the New World, established 35 years before the Pilgrim Fathers disembarked from the *Mayflower* in Massachusetts. Joachim Gans thus became the first Jew to reach and explore the coastal region of North America.



Sir Walter Raleigh, 1552-1618



Roanoke Island - map showing location of the fort

Gans' initial task was creating a new furnace to replace the steel assay oven thrown overboard before the *Tyger* landed. While excavating the Roanoke site in 1990-1995, a team of archaeologists led by I N. Hume discovered that he had used locally fired bricks to build this oven, which was capable of reaching a temperature of nearly 2000 degrees Fahrenheit to melt copper.²¹ Gans then left the fort with expeditions headed by Ralph Lane, the interim governor, travelling along the shores of North Carolina and Virginia in a vain search for precious metal. A 130-mile journey by boat in the winter of 1585-6 took them as far north as Chesapeake Bay, but proved equally disappointing.

Gans was ready to make friends with the Roanoke, Croatan and other local tribes, but Governor Lane's treatment of these 'savages' was comparable to that of the Spanish conquistadores in Mexico and Peru. As the explorers rowed west, battling powerful currents on the Roanoke River, their supplies ran out and the Native Americans on whom they relied for their survival fired arrows at them instead of providing food. While they had managed to find copper ore and to note how the 'Indians' smelted it, Lane's men were practically starving when they returned to the fort.

They now faced an attack by hostile tribes and the supply ship promised by the Society of Mines Royal had failed to arrive. Luckily Sir Francis Drake, aboard his flagship, the

Golden Hind, stopped at Roanoke Island after raiding the Spaniards in Florida. He offered to take the weary and apprehensive settlers back to England, and they left on 17 June 1586, having spent almost a year in the New World. Two weeks later, the long-delayed supply ship arrived to find the place deserted; the fifteen-man garrison left to defend it was never seen again. Raleigh's third attempt to establish an English settlement on Roanoke Island (in 1587) resulted in the ill-fated "Lost Colony", all of whose members disappeared without a trace.

After their return to London, Thomas Harriot published *A Briefe and True Report of the New Land of Virginia* (1588) while Gans delivered samples of metal-bearing ores to the queen and reported that the land had great economic value. The Roanoke Island site contains abundant evidence of his technological work there and has been called the 'Birthplace of American Science'.²² Instead of losing heart, the English stuck to their plans and the next major expedition founded a permanent settlement, at Jamestown in 1607. Had Gans and Harriot presented a negative report of 'Virginia', there might have been no Jamestown and no English presence south of New England, thereby allowing Spanish territory to extend all the way north from Florida to Pennsylvania.²³

Prelude to the Armada (1586-1588)

Once back in England, Joachim Gans resumed work for the Society of Mines Royal. He would have visited Keswick and Neath, suggesting further improvements, and he now took up residence in the fashionable Blackfriars district of London. Gans presumably felt safe there and, although we have no portrait to judge by, it seems unlikely that anything in his dress or appearance distinguished him from non-Jews of the time. Yet how could he lead a Jewish life where there were no synagogues, no kosher provisions, no *luach* to keep track of the festivals and no way of observing Shabbat?

As “a foreigner among the English and a Jew among the Christians” (to quote Grassl’s phrase), Joachim Gans must have found it especially hard to maintain his religious beliefs and practices in the Roanoke settlement. He might have abstained from forbidden food on health grounds, but what other subterfuges existed? According to Professor Quinn, “there is little doubt that throughout his stay [Governor] Lane would hold regular services in the colony on Sundays, but, without a clergyman, these would consist only of the reading of extracts from the prayer book and the Bible, together with the singing of Psalms”.²⁴ Could Gans refuse to participate and thus risk being ostracized by the Christians on whom his life

depended more than 3000 miles from home; or should he betray his religion by paying lip service to the Anglican faith? Gans may well have felt that discretion was the better part of valor, silently bowing his head like everyone else – while mentally reciting the *Shema*. His situation was more favorable in London, however, for he could do as he liked in the privacy of his home.

Meanwhile, the conflict between England and Spain had reached boiling point. In 1587, Sir Francis Drake led a naval force that destroyed a Spanish fleet in the port of Cádiz, thus delaying a threatened invasion of England that had received the blessing of Pope Sixtus V. Drake called his victory “singeing the King of Spain’s beard”. The execution of Mary Queen of Scots that same year, for her involvement in a Jesuit plot to murder Queen Elizabeth and replace her on the English throne, gave Philip II the pretext he needed to launch his “Enterprise of England”, the Spanish Armada.

Dr. Hector Nuñez, the Marrano merchant and physician referred to earlier, enjoyed the confidence of Lord Burghley and Sir Francis Walsingham. Nuñez is said to have left his dinner table to bring Walsingham the first report of the Armada’s arrival in Lisbon.²⁵ Spain’s fleet of 130 ships, with 8000 mariners and 18 000 troops on board, set sail from Lisbon on 28 May 1588. The plan was for them to navigate the English Channel to a rendezvous off the coast of Flanders; there the Duke of Parma’s army of 30 000 men would join the invasion on barges and the fleet would then escort them to a landing-place on the Thames near London.

British historiographers have tended to misrepresent Philip II’s aims and to exaggerate the “decisive victory” of England’s sea dogs in their confrontation with the Spanish Armada.²⁶ Philip meant to punish England with a temporary invasion, but he realized well enough that restoring its people and throne to Catholicism was virtually impossible. Nor was the defeat of the Armada anything more than one battle in a long and grueling land and naval war between England and Spain (1585-1604). Drake’s fire-ships only had a minor impact on the Spanish fleet and the sea battle of Gravelines (8 August 1588) was not a “titanic naval clash” but a short, inconclusive engagement. Even so, the Armada failed to achieve its goal. The English devised new tactics, used lighter, more maneuverable ships and had better, fast-loading guns at their disposal, whereas Spain’s heavy galleons relied on single-firing cannon and were hard to navigate in the English Channel. Although the planned invasion did not take place and a ferocious storm hit the Armada as it sailed around the British Isles, destroying less seaworthy vessels, most of the Atlantic class

galleons returned safely to harbor in Spain and Portugal.²⁷

This was no great English naval victory, but it boosted the nation’s morale and convinced Elizabeth’s Protestant subjects that they enjoyed Divine favor when waging war against the Church of Rome and its Spanish agents. Commemorative medals were struck bearing the inscription: *Flavit Jehovah et Dissipati Sunt* (“The Lord blew, and they were scattered”). This Latin paraphrase of Exodus 15:10 had the *YHVH* tetragrammaton written in Hebrew,²⁸ an unintended acknowledgment of the part Joachim Gans played in defeating Philip II’s Armada.



Medal struck to commemorate the defeat of the Spanish Armada

At the age of 40, Gans had already led an eventful life in Bohemia, England and North America. His most dangerous adventure was about to begin.

A Perilous Disclosure

After an interval of several years, Gans is mentioned once again in official English documents.²⁹ Apart from German, Czech and Yiddish, he now spoke English fluently and had made the acquaintance of Protestant gentlemen and clerics wishing to master classical Hebrew so as to read the “Old Testament” in its original language. This was a risky business in an era of theological controversy.

From time to time, on his journey from London to the Mines Royal operations in South Wales, Gans stayed overnight at the inn of Richard Mayes in Bristol, awaiting the arrival of a coastal vessel that would take him down the Bristol Channel to Neath. It so happened that he and an assistant named Jeremy Pierce had a discussion there about “the Old and New Testaments” on Friday, 12 September 1589. A chance remark by Gans led Pierce to suspect that his boss was

a heretic. Later in the day, Richard Curteys, an Anglican divine whom Gans knew well, came to see him at the inn. Before these two met, however, Pierce secretly warned the clergyman that Gans was an 'infidel' because he had denied the divinity of Jesus. When Gans entered the room, Curteys decided to put him to the test, first doing so in Hebrew. To make quite sure that all the bystanders would hear the foreigner's 'odious' reply, he switched to English: "What! Do you deny Jesus Christ to be the son of God?" Gans then fell into the trap, boldly maintaining his opinion that "there was but one God, who had neither wife nor child... What need has Almighty God for a son? Is He not almighty?"³⁰

We can only hazard a guess as to the reason why Gans chose to shed his disguise after so many years. Perhaps he was tired of living a double life and believed that his services to the crown would stand him in good stead. Losing no time, Curteys went straight to the local authorities, gave sworn evidence and had Gans arrested. While under interrogation on 15 September, he declared himself to be a circumcised Jew, born in the city of Prague, also affirming that he had received a Talmudic education, had never undergone baptism and did not believe a single article of the Christian faith.³¹

Bristol's mayor and aldermen were perplexed. As a self-confessed Jew, Gans could be charged with defaming the Christian religion but not with heresy. They decided that the case was not theirs to handle and on 17 September referred it, with all the incriminating evidence, to the Privy Council in London. However, several members of the Privy Council, headed by Sir Francis Walsingham, the Queen's Principal Secretary of State, and Lord Burghley, the High Treasurer, had a vested interest in the Society of Mines Royal and knew how much of its success was owed to Joachim Gans.

These powerful men were well aware that Jews did not seek to convert Gentiles to their faith and posed no threat to the established Church. The grave offence that Gans had committed was not proclaiming his Jewish faith but openly denying the fundamental beliefs of Christianity. Such a challenge could not be tolerated, and both Catholics and Anabaptists had been put to death for lesser offences. Nor could this distressing affair be kept under wraps, as Walsingham and Burghley might have preferred. John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of All England, was also a member of the Privy Council and the Ecclesiastical Commission that he headed was authorized to entrap suspects by any means, including torture. Burghley had criticized its operations in a letter to Whitgift (1583), stating that "this kind of proceeding too much favors

the Romish Inquisition". If, as seems likely, Joachim Gans had been imprisoned to await trial, he would have come to the notice of the Anglican inquisitors and placed himself in a very dangerous situation.

Both George Nedham and Sir Francis Walsingham must have been particularly disturbed, because they were initially responsible for bringing Gans to England. In the event, however, it was apparently Gans who devised the means of his own salvation. This emerges from a document preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, which is a manuscript copy of the one Gans originally addressed to Walsingham.³² It bears no date, but must have been sent well before the Secretary of State's death on 6 April 1590. The document chiefly consists of a 41-page manual supplying details of a new method for the production of saltpetre, an essential component of gunpowder. Gans ascribed the method to Lazarus Ercker, head of the Imperial Mines in Bohemia, and stated that he was providing an English translation of Ercker's work in "High Dutch" (*Hochdeutsch*, i.e., German). This was more than just a translation, however, because it clarified many points in the original treatise. Gans made a free offer of the work, which would enable the English to manufacture their own saltpetre at low cost. He knew how badly it was needed, even after the Armada's recent defeat, while England and Spain were still at war. His covering letter merely asked for Walsingham's protection, "hoping thereby to be defended from all adversaries in this my good meaning".

Knowing how useful Gans had been (and might still be), Walsingham must have taken the hint because an enquiry was made by the Privy Council, on 1 October 1589, as to the amount of gunpowder remaining in Her Majesty's storehouses, how much it cost and who supplied it. Furthermore, there is no record of Gans having been brought to trial or executed. All trace of him simply disappeared. Cecil Roth's conjecture that he was discreetly freed and deported³³ is a fair guess. So what became of the great metallurgist? Roth tried to identify "Gaunse" with Zalman ben Seligmann Gans, who died in 1619 and was buried in the old Jewish cemetery in Prague,³⁴ but there is no reason why he should have changed his Hebrew name and no evidence to suggest that the two men were one and the same.

Gans' later years were cloaked in mystery until 1985, when Gary C. Grassl received a letter from Paul Frank, a member of the New York Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews. Frank stated that he was a maternal descendant of Joachim Gantz, a "Brunswick Jew" who bought a fine house in Česka Lípa (Böhmisch-Leipa) in 1596. Now if Joachim Gans was forced to leave England in 1589

or 1590, that would have given him enough time to settle in the Duchy of Brunswick and return to his native Bohemia a few years later. Česka Lípa is a small Bohemian town located about 70 km north of Prague and some 110 km north-east of Jachymov (Joachimsthal) in the Ore Mountains, where Joachim Gans first embarked on his career. According to the State Jewish Museum in Prague, Jews bearing the surname Gans who lived in Česka Lípa and Prague belonged to the same family. The town's synagogue was burnt down on *Kristallnacht* (9-10 November 1938) and many tombstones in the old Jewish cemetery, dating from 1574, were then used for building purposes.³⁵ If, in fact, the metallurgist was buried there, his *matzevah* was probably destroyed by Sudeten Nazis.³⁶



Tombstone of a modern Joachim Ganz (1813-1903), Bohemia

Addendum: Joachim Gans and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*

It has been asserted that Joachim Gans was the model for the "heroic Jewish scientist" in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*.³⁷ Having decided to investigate the basis for that claim, I had almost completed this final section of my article when a little-known but masterly treatment of the subject, by Professor Lewis Samuel Feuer, came to my attention.³⁸ As indicated below, Feuer's conclusions serve to validate those I had reached before reading his paper.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626), who first made his name as a jurist and parliamentarian, rose to eminence during the reign of King James I, becoming Attorney General (1613) and Lord Chancellor (1618). Three years later, as

Viscount St. Alban, he fell into debt and his career ended in disgrace when political enemies brought about his downfall on a charge of corruption for which he was declared unworthy of holding any future office. Thereafter, Bacon devoted himself entirely to the philosophical and scientific work that led to his being called the "Father of Experimental Science".



Sir Francis Bacon

Written around 1623 and published a year after his death, Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) is an incomplete work of fiction variously described as "an allegorical romance" or "utopian science-fiction novel". It tells how the crew of a ship lose their way in the Pacific and land on the island of Bensalem (Hebrew: *Ben Shalom*, "son of peace"), where they discover the inhabitants to be of mixed decent, kindly and knowledgeable folk, pious yet tolerant, and of high moral character. The ideal commonwealth of Bensalem reflects the author's own ideas and aspirations — notably Salomon's House or "the College of Six Days' Work", a research facility where teams of investigators, intent on cultivating the natural sciences, collect data, conduct experiments and apply the knowledge they gain to produce "things of use and practice for man's life". The story told here is merely a shell containing the real substance, the inductive or 'Baconian' method of scientific enquiry, which had a revolutionary impact, inspiring the creation of Britain's Royal Society under Charles II in 1660. It is also thought to have served as "an early blueprint" for modern scientific research institutes.³⁹

Prominent among the inhabitants of *New Atlantis* is the merchant Joabin. "He was a Jew and circumcised: for they have some few stirps of Jews yet remaining among them... of a far differing disposition from the Jews

in other parts". What distinguishes them from other Jews? — The fact that they do not have "a secret inbred rancour"

against Christians and even display a high regard for the Christian messiah. Jerry Weinberger, a political science professor at Michigan State University, observes that Joabin is credited with being wise, learned and skilled in matters of government. However, in view of deep-seated contemporary prejudice, Bacon calls Joabin 'wise' and "the good Jew" to emphasize that he is particularly benign.⁴⁰ The character of Joabin has aroused considerable attention, since Bacon's vision of a utopian America in the *New Atlantis*, where there would be freedom of religion and Jews might perhaps have an equal status with the dominant Christian population, was ahead of its time.⁴¹ Furthermore, this philo-semitic work "stands out as an exception to the dreary anti-Jewish sentiments that pervaded the great Elizabethan writers such as Marlowe and Shakespeare".⁴²

Endeavoring to find someone who could have provided Bacon with "the prototype of the Jew Joabin of Bensalem", Lewis Feuer wonders whether there was a Jew in England "whom Francis Bacon might have known, met, or heard of" and who "shared [his] enthusiasm for technological and scientific revolution". He suggests one candidate after another, the first being Dr. Roderigo Lopez, who fell victim to political intrigue. "In our own time", Feuer notes, "a so-called 'Doctors' Plot' in 1953 alleged that a small group mainly composed of Jewish physicians had conspired to murder several Soviet leaders; a wave of fear, quasi-hysteria and suspicion spread among the Russian people". An anti-Jewish nightmare atmosphere prevailed, but a few weeks after Stalin's death "the Soviet régime acknowledged that the case had been concocted by its secret police." Similarly, in 1594, London's populace was incited to demand the execution of Lopez. "Even Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus* was altered to associate its somber physician with 'Doctor Lupus'..."⁴³

As Queen's Counsel Extraordinary, Francis Bacon was present at the trial of Roderigo Lopez and wrote a memorandum hostile to the accused that was probably read by Queen Elizabeth and her current favorite, the Earl of Essex.⁴⁴ Thinking back in his dismal later years, Bacon may well have regretted authoring that document, which blackened the Marrano physician's character. Allocating Jews a role in the cultural and scientific life of his *New Atlantis* was therefore, perhaps, Bacon's attempt to make some amends for what he had thought and written in the past. Nevertheless, the model he sought was not Roderigo Lopez, who "had no special involvement in the scientific movement... or in the birth of experimental investigations".⁴⁵

An even less likely model was Don Yitzhak Abrabanel (1437-1508), the eminent Jewish philosopher, Bible commentator and statesman, who had served loyally as treasurer at the Portuguese and Spanish royal courts.⁴⁶ "Neither his services to the government nor his wealth availed him, however, when the Jews were banished from Spain". A homeless exile, he finally settled in Venice and his fortitude, despite the ingratitude he has experienced, may have strengthened Bacon's feeling of kinship with the victims of religious persecution. Even so, Abrabanel's outspoken criticism of monarchy as a political institution and his admiration for the Italian republics would not have won Bacon's approval.⁴⁷

Who, then, could have inspired the figure of Joabin in the *New Atlantis*? My reason for proposing Joachim Gans was based on a number of facts and logical conclusions: (1) Lord Burghley was Francis Bacon's uncle; (2) Burghley was in a position to tell his nephew all he needed to know about Gans, the Society of Mines Royal, the "Virginia" expedition and the Privy Council investigations; (3) In 1609-10, Bacon himself played a leading role in the establishment of England's North American colonies. Lewis Feuer, settling on 'Gaunse' as Joabin's prototype, notes that "the one industry in which Bacon took a personal interest was mining, in particular the mining of copper".⁴⁸ It had both national and industrial importance, since copper was needed for the making of English cannon and for the wiring in wool cards. Burghley was "the resolute statesman" who turned copper mining into an Elizabethan monopoly, thus heralding the era of capitalist development in England.⁴⁹

Pointing out that Gans was a rare individual, "brilliant, imaginative, daring, outspoken, and with a creative chemist's intuition", Feuer surveys his career in England and his role as "Minerall man" in the short-lived Roanoke plantation.⁵⁰ Later, at a critical point in the nation's history, this foreign Jew came to the rescue of a great industry. "When the English gunners sailed in their galleons and improvised warships in 1588, their freshly cast cannon were of brass, not of iron; one ventures to think that as they embattled to disperse that sinister line of canvas — Spain's Armada — their aim was all the truer for the metallurgical processes proposed by the Bohemian Jew, Joachim Gaunse".⁵¹

An account of "the last tragic episode of his career", the theological dispute in Bristol and his dispatch to the Privy Council in London, then follows.⁵²

Could Bacon have met and known Gans during the late 1580s? As a Reader in Law at Gray's Inn, as Lord Burghley's nephew and as a friend of Walsingham, Bacon would almost certainly have heard of the Jewish technological

genius and his accomplishments. Feuer thinks it “not unlikely that Bacon met and talked with him”, but too close an association with the “rationalistic Jewish monotheist” would have been risky and imprudent in an era of growing Puritan fanaticism. There were also limits to the role he could confer on the Jews in the scientific community of Bensalem. “For all his sympathetic portrayal of Joabin, it was clear that Bacon would afford no suggestion that the Jews in the New Atlantis had more than an advisory, pioneer or stimulating role”.⁵³

Analyzing Joabin’s lengthy commendation of a Bensalem institution known as the Feast of the Family, Jerry Weinberger asserted that “Joabin [is named] after the vicious Joab who, among other perfidies, helped King David murder Uriah the Hittite... Are we to conclude that Bensalem, with its science and technology, has turned Joab into an angel and solved the problem of unruly human desire?”⁵⁴ Weinberger has surely missed the point. Bacon could readily quote the Bible and the idea that he named his “good Jew” after such a dubious character is utterly preposterous. He has neither detected the close phonic resemblance between *Joabin* and *Joachim* nor (it seems) heard about Fort Raleigh and the archaeological discoveries on Roanoke Island.⁵⁵ The name Bacon gave to his interlocutor was therefore a half-hidden allusion to the Jewish technologist Joachim Gans.

Finally, the various theories regarding Gans’s disappearance must be considered. When Lewis Feuer published his article, the intriguing evidence mentioned earlier (on page 12) was not yet available. “Some believe the Privy Council evaded the difficult legal issues and banished him, and that Gaunse may have returned to Prague”, Feuer relates. “Others hope that he was protected by his previous employers, whose revenues his researches had enhanced — the shareholders of the Mines Royal Company, especially the two Privy Councillors who knew him personally, Lord Burghley and Sir Francis Walsingham”. Did they allow him to die broken-hearted and forgotten in prison; or did they arrange for him to live quietly on a pension in Blackfriars, conducting experiments and avoiding theological controversy? Gans would then have been a lonely man, separated from his fellow Ashkenazim in Central Europe and shunned by the suspicious Marranos whose culture was very different from his own.⁵⁶

I tend to the view that he managed to leave England and find his way home to Bohemia. At any rate, from what we know, Gans was the only Jew in Elizabethan England whose scientific interests and social aims largely coincided with those of Francis Bacon. “They shared the same concern for ‘plantations’, for colonial exploration. Both were concerned with the development of a new scientific technology”. Only Joachim Hayyim Gans could

have sat for the portrait of Joabin, the Jew of the *New Atlantis*.⁵⁷

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Jacob R. Marcus in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972; hereafter *EJ*), 15:1586.
- 2 *The Jewish Emigrant from Britain 1700-2000*, ed. Gabriel A. Sivan (Jerusalem: Israel branch of the Jewish Historical Society of England, 2013); reviewed in *Jewish Affairs* (Chanukah 2013), pp. 47-48.
- 3 In England he spelt his name “Gaunse” or “Gaunz”. See Israel Abrahams, “Joachim Gaunse: A Mining Incident in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth”, *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions*, vol. 4 (London, 1903), pp. 83-101; idem, in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: second ed., 1925), vol. 5, p. 576; and Lucien Wolf, “Jews in Elizabethan England,” *JHSE Transactions*, vol. 11 (London: 1928), pp. 2, 22, 34. Years later, Cecil Roth provided similarly incomplete details in *A History of the Jews in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, second ed., 1949), pp. 142-3, and *EJ* 7:337 (s.v. “Gaunse”). See also *EJ* 3:805 and 11:1438.
- 4 To shed light on the missing years (1585-89) of Joachim Gans’s career, I have utilized material published by Gary C. Grassl, together with authoritative works by David B. Quinn, Ivor N. Hume and other writers, which indicate the vital role Gans played in this expedition.
- 5 *EJ* 7:310-311; André Neher, *David Gans (1541-1613): disciple du Maharal de Prague, assistant de Tycho Brahe et de Jean Kepler* (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1974).
- 6 Quotation from Gary Carl Grassl, “Joachim Gans of Prague: The First Jew in English America”, in *American Jewish History*, vol. 86, no. 2 (June 1998), pp. 195-217.
- 7 According to Israel Abrahams (“A Mining Incident”, p. 84), these experts were headed by Joachim Höchstetter of Augsburg, whom Henry VIII commissioned in 1528 to develop the mineral resources of his kingdom. Joachim’s descendants, Daniel and Daniel Jr, retained his business interests.
- 8 See Maxwell Bruce Donald, *Elizabethan Copper: The History of the Company of Mines Royal, 1568-1605* (London: Pergamon Press, 1955); David Bridge, “The German Miners at Keswick and the Question of Bismuth”, *Bulletin of the Peak District Mines Historical Society*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Summer 1994); Ian Tyler, *Goldscope and the Mines of Derwent Fells* (Carlisle: Blue Rock Publications, 2005).
- 9 See note 25, *infra*.
- 10 *Calendar State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth, 1581-90* (London, 1865), vol. 152, item 88, March 1582; reproduced by Israel Abrahams in “A Mining Incident”, Appendices A-B, pp. 93-99.
- 11 An antisemitic storm was aroused in 1594 by the show trial and execution of Dr. Roderigo Lopez, the royal physician, who had been accused of conspiring to poison Queen Elizabeth. For the background, see Lucien Wolf, “Jews in Elizabethan England”, p. 31; Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos* (Philadelphia: JPSA, 1932), p. 257; *A History of the Jews in England*, pp. 139-144; *EJ* 11:489-90; and David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England, 1485-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 49, 108. London’s Marrano community, which had no legal status, was expelled in 1609: see *EJ* 6:752.
- 12 Maxwell B. Donald, *Elizabethan Copper*, pp. 76, 209, 214-5,

- 299; David Bridge, "The German Miners at Keswick", p110.
- 13 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Cannon"; Chuck Meide, *The Development and Design of Bronze Ordnance, Sixteenth through Nineteenth Centuries* (Williamsburg, VA: The College of William & Mary, November 2002), especially p. 11.
 - 14 See below, "Prelude to the Armada".
 - 15 Quinn edited *The Roanoke Voyages 1584-1590. Documents to Illustrate the English Voyages to North America under the Patent Granted to Sir Walter Raleigh in 1584*, 2 vols. (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1955); and published, inter alia, *Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).
 - 16 Hume's works include *The Virginia Adventure: Roanoke to James Towne: An Archaeological and Historical Odyssey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).
 - 17 The following account is partly based on details published by Gary C. Grassl, who has written extensively about Joachim Gans. Two key articles published by him are "Joachim Gans of Prague: The First Jew in English America" (see note 6, supra); and 'Joachim Gans of Prague: America's First Jewish Visitor', *Review of the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews*, vol. 1 (1986-87), pp53-90.
 - 18 Quinn, *The Roanoke Voyages*, vol. 1, p. 123 (note 3); *Set Fair for Roanoke*, p92.
 - 19 Hume, *The Virginia Adventure*, p77.
 - 20 All of the places mentioned here are given their modern geographical names.
 - 21 Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke*, p405. Over 100 remains of Joachim Gans's metallurgical work unearthed there include fragments of crucibles, assayers' retorts and chemical glassware, rusted nails, quantities of charcoal and lumps of bog iron and copper oxide, together with Native American pottery. See Hume, *The Virginia Adventure*, pp73-81, 84.
 - 22 Hume, 'Roanoke Island: America's First Science Center', *Colonial Williamsburg*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Spring 1994); Gary C. Grassl, *The Search for the First English Settlement in America: America's First Science Center*, foreword by Ivor Noël Hume (Washington DC: 2012), especially pp. 221-243.
 - 23 It was only after the Treaty of London (1604), which brought the conflict with Spain to an end, that the English were free to establish permanent colonies in North America: see also below.
 - 24 *Set Fair for Roanoke*, p96.
 - 25 Wolf, "Jews in Elizabethan England", pp. 23-24; Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, p. 140; *EJ* 6:752, 12:1274.
 - 26 See, for example, Colin Martin and Geoffrey Parker, *The Spanish Armada* (London: Penguin Books, 1999; second ed., 2002). A truer picture emerges from Wes Ulm's detailed survey entitled "Top 10 myths and muddles about the Spanish Armada, history's most confused and misunderstood battle": http://wesulm.bravehost.com/history/sp_armada.htm, ©2004.
 - 27 Wes Ulm, op. cit. In point of fact, Spain's leaders never referred to "the Invincible Armada". That term was a later invention by historians of the patriotic British school.
 - 28 See the accompanying illustration. This early use of the "original sacred tongue" in English seals and emblems may be linked with the Regius chairs of Hebrew at Oxford and Cambridge founded by Henry VIII in 1540. The New England Puritans were zealous advocates of Hebrew language study, and "generations of students at Harvard and Yale were required to learn Hebrew as the prime key to the Old Testament". The tetragrammaton and another Hebrew phrase adorn the seal of Columbia University, a tradition maintained by other colleges of the American Colonial period. See Gabriel Sivan, *The Bible and Civilization* (Jerusalem/New York, 1973), pp. 236-7.
 - 29 *Calendar State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth, 1581-90* (London, 1865), vol. 226, item 40, September 1589; reproduced by Israel Abrahams, "A Mining Incident", Appendices C-F, pp. 99-101.
 - 30 As transcribed by Israel Abrahams ("A Mining Incident", p. 100), the deposition reads: "I the said Richard Curteys spake in the Hebrue tounge to this effect that Jesus of Nazareth the kinge of the Jews whome the Jewes crucified was and is the sonne of God at which tyme he answered me in the Hebrue tounge he is not the sonne of God whose replie beinge so odious I spake in the englishe tounge to the ende that others beinge there present might heare it and witnes his speeche, what do you denie Jesus Christ to be the sonne of God, at which tyme he awnsvered what needeth the almighty God to have a sonne, is he not almyghtie".
 - 31 According to his testimony before Mayor Robert Kitchen and Bristol's aldermen on 15 September 1589 (Abrahams, *ibid.*), "Jeochim Gaunz of the Cytie of London... affirmeth and saythe that he the said Jeochim ys a Jewe borne in the Cytie of Prage in Bohemia, and that he was Circumcised and hath bin alwayes instructed and broughte yppe in the Talmud of the Jewys and was never Baptized, neyther dothe he beeleeve any Article of our Christyan faithe for that he was not broughte yppe therein".
 - 32 *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquess of Salisbury preserved at Hatfield House, Hert-fordshire* (London, 1923), Cecil Papers 276.5.
 - 33 *A History of the Jews in England*, pp142-3.
 - 34 *EJ* 7:337. According to André Neher (op. cit., pp. 26-27; see note 5 above), Seligmann Gans was the astronomer's grandfather.
 - 35 *EJ* 5:314-5; *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001), vol. 1, p. 239.
 - 36 Curiously enough, the tombstone of a modern Joachim Hayyim Gans (c. 1813-1903) has survived in the Jewish cemetery of Rožmberk nad Vltavou (Rosenberg an der Moldau), a township in the far south of Bohemia close to the Austrian border. Its traditional inscription gives his Hebrew name (צ'עף אַאָדוֹ) and states (in German) that he "died on 28 February 1903, in his ninetieth year, deeply mourned by his children". The fact that this Bohemian Jew was a namesake of 'our' Joachim Gans is intriguing: the much-traveled scientist may perhaps have had Jewish descendants.
 - 37 Gary C. Grassl, "Joachim Gans of Prague": see note 6 above.
 - 38 Lewis S. Feuer, 'Francis Bacon and the Jews: Who was the Jew in the New Atlantis?', *Jewish Historical Studies (JHSE Transactions)*, vol. 29 (London, 1982-86), pp. 1-25. I am grateful to Rabbi Raymond Apple for supplying me with a copy of this article. An eminent sociologist and one-time radical, Lewis Feuer (1912-2002) became an incisive critic of left-wing movements after World War II. While writing on the history and sociology of Jews and Judaism, his studies deal mainly with the history of ideas, the relationship between philosophy and psychoanalysis, the corrupting influence of Marxist ideology and America's role as a bulwark against tyranny and authoritarianism in the modern world.
 - 39 Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://www.iep.utm>.

- [edu/bacon](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2434). The published text of *New Atlantis* is in the public domain and can be downloaded (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2434>). There is also a LibriVox sound version of the book (15 November 2011) recorded by Bill Boerst.
- 40 Introduction to *Francis Bacon: New Atlantis and The Great Instauration*, ed. Jerry Weinberger (Wheeling, IL: Crofts Classics, 1989), pp. xxv-xxvi, xxxi.
- 41 Jews would not be readmitted to England (unofficially) until 1656. Another essay of relevance, by Claire Jowitt, is “‘Books will speak plain’? Colonialism, Jewishness and politics in Bacon’s *New Atlantis*,” Part 7 of *Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis. New interdisciplinary essays*, ed. Bronwen Price (Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 129-155.
- 42 Feuer, op. cit., p1.
- 43 Ibid., p3.
- 44 *A True Report of the Detestable Treason, Intended by Dr Roderigo Lopez, A Physician attending upon the Queen’s Majesty*. Unlike Essex, a leader of the anti-Spanish war party, Elizabeth was not convinced that Lopez was guilty and delayed signing his death warrant for nearly five months. She also allowed his widow, Sarah, to retain most of the property belonging to her late husband, the alleged planner of regicide.
- 45 Feuer, op.cit., pp3-5.
- 46 Without identifying him by name, in his *Essays* and *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon evidently refers to Don Yitzhak Abrabanel when he quotes “a certain Rabbin”. He had no doubt read Latin translations of Abrabanel’s Bible commentaries.
- 47 Feuer, p6.
- 48 Ibid., p7.
- 49 Ibid., p9.
- 50 Ibid., pp9-12.
- 51 Ibid., pp10 and 23 (note 56).
- 52 Ibid., pp12-14.
- 53 Ibid., pp15-16, 19-20.
- 54 Weinberger, ‘On the miracles in Bacon’s *New Atlantis*’, Part 6 of *Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis*, ed. Bronwen Price, p110. Cf. Weinberger’s previous article, “Science and Rule in Bacon’s Utopia. An Introduction to the Reading of the *New Atlantis*”, in *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 10 (1976), p882.
- 55 Feuer (p20) likewise observes that “with only one consonantal alteration, [Joabin] is the given name of Joachim Gaunse. The chief alteration with a ‘b’ to Joabin leads to the further suggestion that he is the son of Job. (The Hebrew spelling of ‘Job’ almost coincides with that of Joab; it interchanges the order of the vowels.)” In a footnote (p 25, note 105), Feuer proceeds to refute Weinberger’s assertion that Joabin was named after Joab: “This hardly jibes with the character of the Jew of the *New Atlantis*, a pacific, earnest merchant with none of Joab’s traits...”
- 56 Feuer, ibid., pp. 14, 15, 21.
- 57 Ibid., pp. 20-21.

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ON WRITING THE HISTORY OF ORANJIA, CAPE TOWN'S JEWISH ORPHANAGE

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Veronica Belling

Editor's note: December 2014 saw the launch of a new history of the Jewish orphanage in Cape Town, entitled *From Cape Jewish Orphanage to Oranjia Jewish Child and Youth Centre: A Hundred Years of Caring for Our Children, 1911-2011*. In this article Veronica Belling, a frequent contributor to *Jewish Affairs*, describes how she went about researching and writing the book and summarizes its themes and contents. To order the book, e-mail Jean Mausenbaum: Mausenbaum@oranjia.com; Tel: 021 462 5520.

This new history¹ traces the development of one of the oldest and finest of South African Jewry's charitable institutions, the Cape Jewish Orphanage, from its founding in 1911 through its metamorphosis into the ORANJIA Jewish Child and Youth Centre to its centenary year in 2011 and beyond. Based on the archival records of Oranjia and of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town, as well as personal memoirs and interviews, this new hard cover volume in full colour, showcases new research including a new translation of a Yiddish poem by three of the Ochberg orphans rescued from the Ukraine in 1921, as well as historical posters, plans and images that have never before been featured in any other work of South African Jewish history.

(From the back cover)

In 2010, I was approached by Motti Lewis, then President of the Committee of the Oranjia Jewish Child and Youth Centre, to suggest someone to write a centennial history of Oranjia, the Cape Jewish Orphanage. Working at the Jewish Studies Library at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town, I was in the ideal position to research the history of Oranjia as

Veronica Belling is the author of *Bibliography of South African Jewry* (1997), *Yiddish Theatre in South Africa* (2008), and the translator of *Leibl Feldman's The Jews of Johannesburg* (2007) and *Yakov Azriel Davidson: His Writings in the Yiddish Newspaper, Der Afrikaner, 1911-1913* (2009). She held the position of librarian at the Jewish Studies Library, part of U.C.T. Libraries and the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, for over 30 years, retiring at the end of 2012.

the archival records of the Home are stored in the adjacent Jewish Studies Archive.

This would not be the first book about the Orphanage. A Golden Jubilee volume, written by Eric Rosenthal, had been published in 1961, on the 50th anniversary.² This history is invaluable, but is fairly brief. It is also written in the uncritical rhetorical style of that time, containing statements such as: "All the children at Oranjia are happy." This seemed unlikely, and it was clear that a new history could not merely continue where the Jubilee volume had left off, but would have to start from the beginning again.

Writing the history entailed going through a vast quantity of material. This included minutes - General, Executive and Welfare - in volumes stacked from floor to ceiling, starting in 1911 and continuing until approximately 1985. In addition to these, and annual reports, there were thousands of documents, arranged by subject. Here Oranjia must be congratulated for having the forethought to gather together the papers scattered throughout the Home and, in the late 1980s, present them for safekeeping to the Kaplan Centre Archives. Besides archival records, interviews were conducted with staff, committee members and former residents.

The book is divided into two sections: History and Memory. The History does not aspire to be exhaustive but rather to trace broad developments from 1911 to the present



day. It is divided into six chapters:

Chapter One covers the period from 1911 - with Natalie Friedlander's suggestion that something be done about Jewish orphans and the establishment of the Cape Jewish Orphanage by a Committee chaired by Joseph Kadish - to the outbreak of World War II in 1939. New discoveries include a previously unknown Yiddish-English poster advertising a Cape Town Jewish Orphan Society predating the establishment of the Orphanage, that is published for the first time in this chapter.

The early minutes are like a window into a bygone era: to a Dickensian world with children wearing identical clothes made out of blue serge with a matron who plastered the children's mouths insisting that that was common practice in her native UK! Applications for admissions reflect the circumstances at of that time, a period of immigration and economic hardship. But they also reflect illness, divorce, intermarriage, and occasionally co-habitation across the colour line.

The minutes look back on a time when a committee of 28 members (13 men and 15 women) played an active role in the children's lives inside the Home and even made representations to the Principal on their behalf, undermining the discipline of the Home. However even in the 1980s, when the numbers of the children in the Home had dropped to little over 30, there were virtually as many committee members as there were children. Such was the commitment and interest in the Home in those days.

The period is dominated by Isaac Ochberg's rescue of some 176 orphans of the pogroms in the Ukraine in 1921, the most dramatic episode in the entire history of Oranjia. The number of children peaked during this period. Although after the new wing, built c1920, the capacity of the Home increased to 122, according to numbers recorded in the minutes, actual numbers never exceeded 100.

Chapter Two revisits the Ochberg orphans, not to retell the story, but rather to review new research, writing, a documentary, and reunions, such as the 1971 Jubilee reunion of their arrival, and the Israeli reunion of descendants in 2011. Files about the Ochberg orphans were also passed on to the Kaplan Centre from the old Jewish Museum when it was dismantled and replaced by the new South African Jewish Museum in 2000. It was these files that contain the Ochberg scrapbook, as well as a poster for the Jewish New Year depicting the orphans, dating back to 1922.

Some of this new research was discovered serendipitously only five days before the book was due to go to the printers. This was a Yiddish poem contained in the Ochberg scrapbook that had been published in English translation at the time of the Ochberg orphan reunion in 1971,



where it is described as anonymous. To my surprise, when I compared the original Yiddish to the popular 1971 translation, I realised that the translation did not resemble the original. Moreover it was not anonymous, but signed by three twelve year old boys: Girsh or Hirsh Litwinitski, Shmuel Garbus and Avraham Raichman.³ Whereas the 1971 translation was written in free verse, the original poem was more naïve as befits twelve year olds. It is written in the style of the rhyming liturgical poems recited in the synagogue, known as *piyyutim*, with each of its ten lines starting with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Below is the 1971 translation, followed by my own literal translation alongside the original Yiddish in transliteration.

The poem of the orphan on his way to South Africa, 1971

Merciful Father in Heaven/ Who in His mercy toward children left orphans/ Forced to leave their homes/ Has sent father Ochberg to make us citizens of South Africa/ God blessed us that we found ourselves among good people/ Our worries ended when we received the letter/ Our group, hundreds of children, would not be separated we would live as brothers/ A miracle will happen and when we grow up and stand on our feet/ We will never forget the poor and the needy/ Sins we have known/We will pray and ask blessings from heaven/ We left behind us ruins when we started on our way/ We took leave of our friends/ And hoped that fate would allow/ That we would live as Jews/ To reach Zion is our dream/ Father Ochberg came to rescue

us/ And we will live as Jews/ And to Zion
come...So wrote an anonymous Jewish child
from the Ukraine...

New translation by Veronica Belling, 2014

ALEF makht **Av** ha-rakhamim shokhen meromim
Az okhen vey tsu di kleyne kinder vos hobn
gebliben yesoymin.

BEYS makht **Beys** a shtub a shod avek tsu varfen
Kumt tsu geyn der tate Hokhberg vel unz Afrikaner
makhen

GIMEL. makht **Got** zol unz benshn
Az mir zoln opkumen mit gute menshn

DALET makht **Dayges** on a shir
Az es kumt a brivele ver ikh a gvir

HEY makht **Hunderter** kinder
Veln mir zikh nit tsesheydn azoy vi eygene brider

VAV makht **Vunder** vet zayn ven mir veln vern layt
Veln mir guts ton oreime layt

ZAYIN makht **Zindike** menshn
Zaynen mir geven
Itster vet Got unz benshn

KHET makht a **Khurbn** iz gevezen
Ven mir hobn opgeforn
Fun unzere khaveyrim

TET makht **Tomer** vet unz zayn shlekht
Veln mir zikh tsaplen vi a hekht

YUD makht **Yudn** veln mir zayn
Un mir veln zikher zayn in Tsiyon arayn.

ALEF is for **Av**, Our Merciful Father who dwells
up on high
Woe to the little orphan children for whom we sigh.

BET is for **Beys**, the Home from which we were
expelled
Saved by Daddy Ochberg in South Africa we
shall dwell

GIMEL is for **God**, whose blessings we share
That we should be among people who care

DALET is for **Dayges**, worries without an end
I rejoice when a letter arrives from a friend

HEY is for **Hundreds**, of children on the sea
Together as brothers we shall be

VAV is for **Vunder**, the wonder of growing old
And being generous to the poor we behold

ZAYIN is for **Zindike**, the sinful life we were living
Now God His blessings to us will be giving.

KHET is for **Khurbn**, the destruction we left
Taking leave of our friends we are bereft.

TET is for **Tomer**, if perchance wicked we be
We will be tossed around like fish in the sea

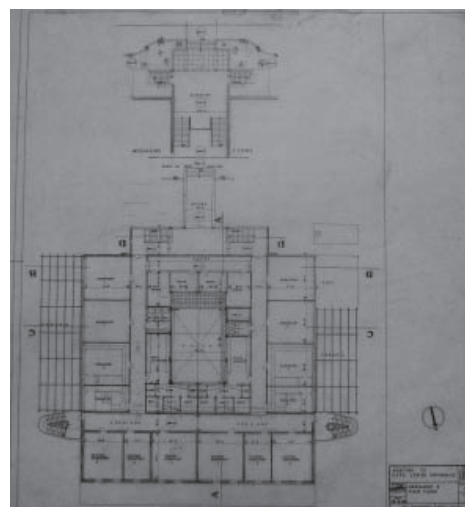
YUD is for **Yudn**, Jews we shall remain
Our dream is that Zion we should regain

Sof kumt di dikhter fun der lid - Lastly come the
composers of the poem:

G. Lidwinski
Sh. Garbus
A. Raichman

Other files in the Oranjia collection contain
questionnaires in Yiddish and Polish that were
drawn up by the Jewish Joint Distribution
Committee in the Rowno District in the Ukraine.
Questions related to the children's names,
ages, names of parents, occupation, education,
languages spoken, relatives, cause of death of
parents. An unexpected question was: "Can the
child *daven*?"- Can the child pray? And I did
not find one form - whether for the boys or
for the girls - in which the answer was not
in the affirmative. Even if the children were
not yet attending school - they all knew how
to pray, i.e. to recite the blessings.

Chapter Three - The War years and its
aftermath, 1939-1950 - is dominated by attempts
to rescue Jewish orphans from war torn Europe
both during and after the war - all of which
came to naught. It also describes the brief
period of about three months in 1940 when
Oranjia provided a haven for some 94 children
evacuated from Britain. This chapter also
includes the original architectural plans of the
Montrose building that - other than the façade
- was completely rebuilt in 1939, designed by
Max Policansky, Oranjia's Honorary architect.
These plans were discovered in the UCT
Libraries' Archives (not the Jewish section)



Oranjia: Second Floor plan

by the architectural historian, Dr Stewart Harris. In this chapter, they are published for the first time.

Chapter Four covers the years 1950 to 1980. This is one of the longest chapters in the book and the one most likely still to be remembered today. There are a plethora of photographs of the children, taken by Photo Hausmann, who was himself a member of the Oranjia committee at that time. During this period Oranjia was central to Jewish Cape Town, with its Pesach *seders* when it opened its doors to the families of the children, former residents, as well as to members of the Jewish community who had nowhere to go. Its table was graced on occasion by the mayors of Cape Town, several of whom were Jewish. It was a time when Oranjia provided a haven for children affected by the Congo crises, the Muizenberg camp was a highlight for the children at the end of the year, Stone Villa in Stephen Street provided a Home for Aftercare young boys who were moving out into the community, and the Sarah Bloch Creche, that still exists (although no longer run by Oranjia) was established in 1975. Oranjia was regarded as a model of institutional childcare by the wider community.

The central question of the book is to explain the change in the operation of the Home, introduced in 1981, when its management by an onsite Principal and Matron was replaced by an offsite Programme director with the assistance of social workers and childcare workers. This change would ultimately lead to the establishment of Group Homes. The book would also have to answer a question that is still echoed in the Cape Town Jewish community even today, and that is: why was the building sold and why was it subsequently demolished?

All these questions are tackled in **Chapter Five** that deals with the last years in Montrose Avenue 1981-1992. This chapter is mainly reliant on the input of former committee member, Frank Kaminer, Welfare Chair at the time of the transformation of the operating system in 1981. Oranjia was following international trends in institutional childcare that in South Africa were being pioneered by Brian Gannon of St John's Home in Vredehoek. However, the willingness of Oranjia's committee to accept the changes and the fact that Oranjia had the financial backing of the Jewish community of Cape Town, meant that Oranjia became the leader in the field of institutional childcare.

Chapter Six, the final chapter in the History section, deals with the period of the Group Homes to the present day with a single Group Home at Frank Avenue in Highlands Estate. It is chiefly based on the input of Belinda Slavin, the present day Programme Director.

The Section on Memories contains twelve memoirs and interviews. The aim here is quality rather than quantity. The interviews are aimed at elucidating issues that are discussed in the History Section. An effort was made to cover all the various periods of the history. The earliest memoirs are of two of the Ochberg orphans, who arrived in 1921, and the latest interview is for the period, 2000-2006. The memoirs are introduced by a chapter contributed by Gwynne Schrire. This chapter, entitled "The children speak", provides a lens through which to view the changing nature of institutional child care that is conveyed in the sometimes very critical memoirs.

The book is designed by Angela Tuck of HANDS ON design, in full colour and hard cover. The printing and design were financed from a bequest from the estate of the late Geoffrey Hirschmann, a Cape Town businessman, arranged by Oranjia Trustee, Barry Lockitch, whose partner, Jeremy Wilder, was the executor of the estate. Barry has a very strong family connection to Oranjia. His mother, Fanny, who was one of the orphans rescued from the Ukraine by Isaac Ochberg, was active on the Oranjia committee for many years and was one of only two women who were awarded the title of Honorary Life Chairlady. In addition both his father and his uncle, who had also spent some time in the Orphanage in their youth, were one time Presidents of the committee.

NOTES

- 1 This book should not be confused with David Solly Sandler's self-published collection, "Memories of Oranjia, 1911-2011". This is not a history of Oranjia, but a collection of memoirs of former Oranjians, to which Sandler has added a selection of Oranjia's annual reports; three issues of an in-house children's publication, *The Flag of Oranjia*; and two chapters from Oranjia's 1961 Golden Jubilee publication - *The Story of the Cape Jewish Orphanage* by Eric Rosenthal.
- 2 Eric Rosenthal, *The Story of the Cape Jewish Orphanage: Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of 'Oranjia', and Incorporating the Formal Reports and Balance Sheets for the Financial Year Ended 31st January 1960*, Cape Jewish Orphanage, Cape Town, 1961.
- 3 Whereas the original Yiddish poem only has boys' initials and surnames, it was possible to identify their first names plus their ages from a full list of the orphans contained in the Oranjia, Cape Jewish Orphanage collection, BC 918 Q1.1, Special Collections, UCT Libraries.

SAMUEL SHER - PHILANTHROPIST EXTRAORDINAIRE

*

David A Sher

The passing in Johannesburg of the renowned philanthropist Samuel Michael (Sam) Sher on 9 December 2013/6 Teveth 5774 elicited much sorrow amongst his friends, family, associates and beneficiaries. "Sam has departed. South Africa has lost its glory", declared Rabbi Boruch Grossnass of Johannesburg's Kollel Yad Shaul. Speaking on his show on Chai FM, Isaac Reznik lamented, "The whole community is in mourning over the loss of a *tzaddik* in our time and one of the most wonderful philanthropists in our city".¹

Born in Anterlypt, Lithuania, on 7 August 1926 Sam, with his parents, immigrated the following year to the Union of South Africa. The family settled in Doornfontein, then the first stop for immigrants "on the Jewish residential ladder".² Sam attended shul first in Bertrams and then in Berea; as a young boy, he also sang in the choir at the (still extant) Lions Shul on Seimert Road, where the nephew of Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski of Vilna, Rabbi Michel Kossowsky was then *Rav*.³ Working during the day, he attended night school, to that end trekking to the CBD of Johannesburg and back each evening. Sometimes, he was accompanied on these walks by Joe Slovo, although he never shared his communist views. Qualifying as a pharmacist, he eventually built up successful business. In 1956, he married Rose Bartkunsy – then a charismatic nurse at Johannesburg's General Hospital – at Johannesburg's Great Synagogue, Wolmarans Street. The officiant was Rabbi A H Lapin z''tl, a nephew of the famed Rav Eliyahu Lopian z''tl. Rose remained his devoted companion for well over half a century, supporting him in all that he did.

Sam helped keep afloat the renowned Etz Chaim Yeshiva, Jerusalem, the oldest in Israel (founded 1858). It was run by his dear friend Rabbi N Tucazinsky z''tl. It is said that once, when Sam had given more money than he could afford to the Yeshiva, Rabbi Tucazinsky gave him a blessing that he "should always have enough money to support all great Torah institutions". In time, innumerable fundraisers seeking support from South African Jewry were

directed to him.

Sam always was communally minded; he was the Senior Warden at the prestigious Oxford Synagogue and chaired its *Chevra Lomdei Torah*, which nourished the spiritual side of what had become the most affluent synagogue following the gradual deterioration of attendance at the Great Synagogue.⁴ He was later, in 1986, appointed Chairman of the United Hebrew Congregations of Johannesburg, serving alongside Chief Rabbi Bernard Casper.⁵ When Rabbi Casper was planning to return to Israel, he was desirous of moving his Kenyan domestic assistant to the Sher household, being no doubt cognisant of the dignity with which the man would be treated. Sam informed the author that after Rabbi Casper's departure, he met him by chance at the Jerusalem Great Synagogue; sadly Rabbi Casper died shortly afterwards. In summing up the common thread between these two colleagues, Dayan Boruch Rappoport of the Johannesburg Beth Din cited their "respect...knowledge and support of Torah and its scholars".⁶



United Hebrew Congregations of Johannesburg, Council and officials, 1986-7. Sam Sher is seated, front, to the right of Chief Rabbi B M Casper.

In his official capacity (which as chairman offered 'interminable' committee meetings, as he remarked to the author) Sam always stood up for the greatness of Torah and tradition. A gala event was staged once at Johannesburg's opulent Sandton Sun Hotel to celebrate the service of Chief Rabbi C.K. Harris. Sam was invited both as a principal benefactor and as a friend of Rabbi Harris. Many rabbis, including the Av

David Sher is a student at Shaarei Torah Yeshiva in Manchester. His family has a long history of involvement in the United Hebrew Congregation. This article is adapted from his book on the history of Johannesburg Jewry, to appear shortly.

Beth Din and Dayanim, were present, along with the crème de la crème of Johannesburg society; even the secular guests, exemplifying South Africa's famed "*kavod rabbonim*" [honouring rabbis], donned yarmulkes out of respect to the Rabbis present. A VIP in attendance was an Israeli politician, who later became Prime Minister of Israel. To the audience's shock, this representative of Israel was observed to be addressing the gathering whilst brazenly bare-headed. Even more astounding was what occurred next: Samuel Sher purposefully ascended the podium, removed his own *Yarmulka* and placed it square on the politician's head! The stunned security quickly escorted him out the room (his wife followed), but many in the audience subsequently telephoned to commend him and many synagogues sponsored *brochas* in his honour in the weeks that followed.

From his formative years in Doornfontein, Bezuidenhout Valley and onwards, Sam assisted his father and mother in running a grocery store, arising before dawn as his father prayed and preparing the store. In their later years, Sam bought his parents their own block of flats, providing them with financial security; he visited them at their flat each evening and would take them on holidays, including to the Kruger National Park. His in-laws were treated in the same fashion. His mother-in-law (a widow), once said to him, "You have been more of a son to me than a son-in-law". Throughout his life, Sam honoured the memory of his parents, and many *Sifrei Torah*, Halachic works, synagogue arks, synagogues and *kollelim* bear their names.

In another area, Sam represented somewhat of an ambassadorial figure for Johannesburg Jewry and the Lithuanian Torah and Yeshiva roots from whence they came. Together with prominent businessman Jack Kaplan, he visited Rabbi Menachem Shach, dean of the famed Ponovezh Yeshiva. The latter had been built in part with funds garnered in Johannesburg⁷ by Rabbi Joseph S. Kahaneman, the "Ponovezher Rabbi", who was assisted by the local Ponovezh *landsmanshaft* of Johannesburg's Ponovezh Synagogue in the 1930's.⁸ Once, on his visits to

foremost sage Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Sam noted that the boys of the Yeshiva Maalot HaTorah were eating cold food; the kitchen was on a different floor and the food was brought up in shifts. Disturbed, he ensured that a new modern kitchen and lift were built for the students. The desperate state of the Rabbi Y.C. Sonnenfeld Orphanage in Jerusalem also caught his eye, and he ensured that the bereft youngsters would receive a daily delivery of fresh bread.

In time, Sam's support for needy institutions became synonymous in Israel with Johannesburg, as his brother-in-law C. Davidowitz recalled:

About ten years ago my wife, daughter and myself were walking along a crowded pavement in Mea Shaarim [the ultra-religious area of Jerusalem]. As we were strolling along a very tall ultra-Orthodox man accidentally bumped into me. *Var'shkuldig mier* (excuse me) he said. *Dos magt nit ous*; I replied in broken Yiddish (Yiddish is the only language spoken in the area). The Rabbi asked where he came from, and on hearing 'Drom Africa' asked, "*Du kenst efser a Mr. Sam Sher?*" ("Do you perhaps know a Mr. Sam Sher"). I pointed to my wife and said, "*Ot is Mr. Sher's shwetzer*" (This is Mr. Sher's sister). It was as if an angel had come down from Heaven! The rabbi got so excited that he called all his friends in the area to meet her. Sam had donated a large sum of money for the orphanage that the Rabbi supervised.⁹

Since his earliest days, Sam had been a strenuous supporter of Israel. Joining the *Gedud Trumpeldor* of the Zionist Youth movement in the 1940s, he would meet with fellow members after Shabbos at the Doornfontein Talmud Torah premises on Beit Street (although he never supported liberal or anti-religious Zionism). He was soon appointed *Rosh Gedud* and filled that post with distinction. Sam also volunteered to serve in Israel's 1948 War of Independence; he was turned down because his brother Mickey had already been recruited and as a precaution no two brothers were being taken.¹⁰ Sam found other ways of supporting Israel. Amongst other things, in 2005 he donated a synagogue and *kollel*, entitled Hechal Mordechai, in honour of his father and father-in-law in the Modi'in Illit area of Jerusalem. He also donated one of the world's most imposing hand-carved synagogue Arks, made by a Jew who served the carpentry needs of the Kremlin, to the large Karlin community in Beitar. It was one of several *Aronei Hakodesh* he donated in his lifetime. Busloads of tourists come to view this architectural treasure.¹¹ In Har Nof, Jerusalem, Sam built the Vilna Gaon (*Gr'a*) shul. It was opened by Rose several years later (one passes through Sha'ar Shoshana [Rose] Sher in order to enter).



At the home of HaGaon HaRav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, l-r: Rabbi Davidowitz, Rabbi Auerbach, Rabbi Aharon Pfeuffer, S M Sher

Many people have commented on Sam's crucial support for the *ba'al teshuva* movement that swept South Africa during the 1980s. Always a visionary, he once heard Rabbi Shimshon Pinkus speak in South Africa and recognised his greatness long before he became the renowned *mussar* [ethical discourse] giant as the religious world know him today. He encouraged Rabbi Pinkus to come to South Africa again and this time for several months; many unaffiliated Jews were inspired to greater spiritual commitment through this. Every day, Sam had a daily study-session (*chavruta*) with Rabbi Pinkus, often in Sam's own home. He was once learning with the Rabbi in the former *Maharsha* Synagogue on Durham Road when a large portion of the ceiling collapsed yards from where they were sitting! "That was a loud enough message", Sam recalled and promptly led the purchase of magnificent new premises for the *shul*, yeshiva and kindergarten. The *Maharsha kehilla* was headed by Rabbi Aaron Pfeuffer, also of the Lithuanian-rooted Ponovezh Yeshiva.

Samuel hated conflict. Recognising the outstanding abilities of Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, he had sponsored the construction of the new Vilna Gaon Torah Centre building in Yeoville. This was opened by Mayor Harold Rudolph and is the only synagogue still functioning in that area. During the 1980s and 1990s, it became a beacon of Torah, and inspired many families to become *baalei teshuva*.¹² Nonetheless, Rabbi Sternbuch broke with many establishments, including the Johannesburg Beth Din, whose *kashrut* standard he was dissatisfied with. He also spoke out against the lackadaisical attitude with which some aspects of burial were treated.¹³ This caused ripples in the community and the UHC importuned Sam to ask Rabbi Sternbuch to cease this activity forthwith. Many were hostile to what they perceived as the Rabbi's 'fanaticism'; on one occasion Rabbi Sternbuch asked Sam to deliver his response on a *kashrut* issue to a prominent UHC office-holder. This individual, who shall remain nameless, glanced at the letter with disdain and then sat on it. "This is what I think of the letter", he told Sam (who learned several weeks later that the unlucky gentleman had broken both legs in succession in the aftermath of this encounter). Nonetheless, the fact that the chairman of the UHC sided with Rabbi Sternbuch prevented a rift in the close-knit community. "If Mr Sher is with them, they cannot be such fanatics", was the commonly held view. Thus was a damaging confrontation felicitously averted.

To the end of his days, Sam shared the closest of relationships with Rabbi Sternbuch, who on his passing lamented to Sam's children, "I personally have lost a true friend and it is difficult for me to accept this sad news. His death is a bitter loss not only for the family but

for the whole of Jewry, especially the Torah world who admired his sincere love of Torah."¹⁴

In another milestone for Orthodoxy in South Africa, the construction of the *Chofetz Chaim* synagogue in Raedene was completed in August 1999. Their souvenir 'Dedication of the House' pamphlet is an excellent source on the overwhelming feeling of the distress of a distraught and bewildered community, battered by crime. The congregation's Rabbi AY Pfeuffer wrote that when the Chofetz Chaim property was bought, "Many were no doubt wondering if it was the proper time to do so. South Africa is now experiencing a time of 'Twilights'. No one is exempt from hearing stories of atrocities..." Rabbi Pfeuffer then thanked "our best friend Mr Sam Sher and his wife Rose", without whose "great generosity, love, untiring efforts and good heart, this building would not have been purchased and renovated."¹⁵

Other signs of Jewish rebirth due to Samuel's efforts were observed in 1987 when the Torah Centre celebrated the first Torah scroll to be completed in South Africa in over fifty years (Sam paid for many such *Sifrei Torah*). The event was captured by the national paper, *The Citizen* with the headline 'Torah Handed over in Street Celebrations'.¹⁶



Hachnasis Sefer Torah ceremony, 1987. Sam Sher with Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch. In the background is Rabbi Irma Aloy.

Sam was an unfaltering patron of the Kollel Yad Sha'ul. A Torah magnet, it was (and still is) led by the Rosh Kollel, Rabbi Boruch Grosnass and his brother Rabbi Sender, sons of the esteemed Dayan Grossnass of the London Beth Din. Almost every day, Sam arose extremely early, often at 4:30 a.m., to attend *shiurim* there prior to prayers.

Sam was a long-term supporter of such key British institutions as the Gateshead Yeshiva.¹⁷ He also established a warm rapport with Rabbi Gavriel Knopfler, Rosh Yeshiva of Shaarei Torah, Manchester, where scores of South African students have graduated. ZAKA's quick response to the ill also appealed to his

sense of duty to assist the sick of Israel and he donated a rapid-response unit to that most worthy organisation. He had his own unique way of assisting the sick individually. Weeping, a woman remembered, “We had a child so unwell it appeared terminal but we always persevered and came to Sam at the Bramley Pharmacy to order expensive drugs. My husband had lost his job and I did not know how we would pay”. Samuel was his usual self; “take the medicine. We’ll discuss payment some other time”, he said vaguely. Eventually after the last treatment had taken place, by which time a large amount of medicine had been accrued from Mr Sher on credit, the woman returned, somehow having managed to scrape together some of the money. “I will not accept your money. It would take away my *zechusim* (merits)” Sam explained.¹⁸

A long distance phone call once reached Samuel from Great Britain. A group of Mancunian businessmen had secured funds to purchase a large wedding hall for impecunious couples. However they did not have enough funds at that time to acquire the remainder of the land, owned by Keren Hayesod (the South African Zionist organisation) and the land was to be defaulted back to Keren Hayesod, with all the men’s investment lost. Within days Sam had sorted the imbroglio, having persuaded his close friend Mendel Kaplan, the South African Chairman of the Jewish Agency, to intervene and extend the period the businessmen had to accrue the outstanding funds. That was all the businessmen needed. Once, another urgent call from Israel was received. This time it was Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky, wife of leading Lithuanian sage Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky. There was a destitute girl who was not able to marry due to her indigent state – would Sam be able to assist? The answer was not long in coming and the girl became one of several destitute brides to be ushered to the bridal canopy through his generosity.

Samuel never forgot how the family had arrived indigent from Lithuania. One of his siblings, Raphael, had died because his parents had no funds to cover the treatment for diphtheria; this gives us an insight in the difficulties of Johannesburg’s Jewish immigrants in the 1920s-30s. For many years they could not pay for a proper tombstone on the grave in the Brixton Jewish Cemetery. Years later, Sam arranged for one to be put up. “My mother cried as much as she wept the day Ralphie died” he recalled. On one occasion, he was asked by the gentile parents of a boy who had died in a car accident if he would identify the body at the morgue as they were too distraught to do so themselves. This melancholy task he accepted stoically. Rabbi Sender Grossnass, officiating at Sam’s tombstone unveiling ceremony, summed up one of his principal traits: “He was an *Omer v’Oseh* – when he committed to something he

did it” he said, echoing the *Baruch She’amar* prayer in Jewish liturgy. Rabbi Grossnass further quoted O. Koren, a long-standing friend of Sam’s, who recounted, “one *Shabbos* I discussed a very needy family with Sam and asked him to assist. He responded with two words: ‘How much?’ By that Monday, the family had the money in their bank account- such was Sam’s zeal for charity. And this was done in the days before EFT’s.”¹⁹

Unlike some large-scale philanthropists, Sam never disassociated himself from his love of Israel or religion. He would invariably be one of the first in synagogue, long before prayers commenced. When he was asked by a grandchild why he did so the response was, “I like to come early to *shul* so I can clear my mind and prepare myself to speak to the ‘*Ribono shel Olam*’ [Master of the World]”. He could recite vast swathes of the liturgy, as well as its translation by heart and always practiced his belief that one should conduct oneself with decorum and dignity in a synagogue. Not content with merely supporting Torah, he also learnt Torah, attending a *shiur* at the Kollel every morning. He was often the first one present as he arrived long before dawn break. He could quote many passages of Talmud and in particular the commentary of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch on the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy was his forte and he often quoted from the *Re’eh sedra* [portion – aptly, his Barmitzvah *parsha*] on the duty to assist, “thine destitute brother- *achicha haevyon*”.²⁰ Through Rabbi Pfeuffer’s Yeshiva Maharsha, whose capacious grounds were secured by Samuel’s efforts, have passed hundreds of Talmudic students, many of whom return to South Africa to become rabbis, *mashgichim* and Torah studiers. Rabbi Pfeuffer’s well-known works; the Talmudic *Ohr Aharon Beis* (“Light of Aaron” Volume 2)²¹ and a work on the kosher dietary laws (*Kitzur Hilchos Dam Melicha UtZliya*) owed their publication to Sam. Across the world, therefore, people discovered for the first time the existence of a religiously fastidious Johannesburg community known as Maharsha, whose students filled the most important *Yeshivoth* and Talmudic Colleges. The ‘Torah’ transformation that is still taking place in Johannesburg in large part through Rabbi Pfeuffer’s institution owes much of its existence to Sam, whom Rabbi Pfeuffer’s family described as having been “at the forefront and leader of any matter of spirituality.”²² For 27 years Sam attended a Talmud lecture with Dayan Boruch Rappoport of the Johannesburg Beth Din who recalled him traversing the distance to his *shiur* with a *Tehillim* (Book of Psalms) which he memorised. Dayan Rappoport also commented that Sam did not wait for serendipitous solicitations from individuals for assistance, but rather often innovated ways of alleviating penury on his own accord.

Despite all he spearheaded and achieved, Samuel remained humble, unpretentious and self-effacing. Never one to flaunt his wealth, he lived unassumingly. He shared friendship with many of the greatest Rabbis of our time, including the American Rabbi Avigdor Miller and Rabbi Menachem Shach. He once disclosed with a grandchild his sentiments when reciting a verse in *Hallel* (Psalm 113): "He raises the needy from the dust, from the trash heaps...to seat them with the nobles". Explaining to his grandchild, Sam said, "I think of myself, who am I; I am no one eminent, yet G-d has given me an enormous merit, enabling me to meet and forge relationships with the *Gedolei Yisrael*!"

There was hardly a cause in Johannesburg that was left untouched by the benevolent hand of Samuel Sher, and many international causes he supported are only being made known to his children now. His gracious style endeared him to his many employees (some of half a century standing) who revered him for the way he treated them, as he did all he met - with dignity and compassion. He never refused to give to any individual in need. "Giving is better than receiving" was his dictum, and he lived by it throughout his life.

NOTES

- 1 See 'Community mourns passing of philanthropist Sam Sher', *South African Jewish Report*, Johannesburg, 24-31 January 2014, and 'Reb Shmuel Michael Sher z"l', *Hamodia* Newspaper, London, 23 January 2014 and 'Tribute to Mr Shmuel Michael Sher z"l', *Hamodia*, London, 12 February 2015.
- 2 Joe Slovo, and Nelson Mandela (Contributor), *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography of ANC Leader Joe Slovo*, New York, Ocean Press, 1997, p14.
- 3 On Rav Kossowsky at the Doornfontein Hebrew Congregation, known as the Lions Shul, see 'Those were the days, I Remember Doornfontein', *Zionist Record*, Johannesburg, 25 October 1974.
- 4 Information from former Oxford Synagogue congregants (2012).
- 5 Dayan Abramsky had advised Rabbi Casper to leave Israel in order to guide Johannesburg and SA Jewry.
- 6 101.9 ChaiFM Interview with Dayan B. Rappoport, Broadcast on 10 Tevet 5774 at 9AM "Chief Rabbi Casper and Mr Sam Sher Tribute", conducted by Isaac Reznik.
- 7 Details obtained from Z. Greenfeld, *Gorel Ha'Gra 'The Vilna Gaon's Draw'*, Jerusalem, Sefereti Publishing, 2006, p146. Author rendered translation of this Hebrew publication. See also *The Rabbi from Ponovez* (Hebrew) Section I, pp341-344.
- 8 The society was founded in 1899. B Yudelevitz, 'The Ponevez Society of Johannesburg 1899 – 1949', *Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy Society*. 2002. See <http://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/ponevez/index.htm>
- 9 Comment of 20 January 2014, *SA Jewish Report* Website, 'Philanthropist Sam Sher Passes On' 20 January 2014. <http://www.sajr.co.za/religion/featured-item/2014/01/20/philanthropist-sam-sher-passes-on/>
- 10 Mickey Sher was one of the 800 South African volunteers

who fought in Israel's War of Independence.

- 11 See 'An Aron Kodesh in Yerushalayim', *Mishpacha* magazine, Issue 46, 16 March 2005, New York.
- 12 Rabbi Sternbuch himself discusses this phenomenon in his authoritative work; See Introduction to M Sternbuch, Rabbi, *Teshuvot VeHanhagoth* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, published by S Sternbuch, 5752/1991, iv.
- 13 As heard from Rabbi Michael Emanuel, formerly of Yeoville, Manchester, 2013.
- 14 Correspondence received from Rabbi Sternbuch in Israel, 2013.
- 15 Dedication of Synagogue Commemorative Brochure, Rabbi's Message, August 1999.
- 16 'Torah Handed Over in Street Celebrations', *Citizen*, Johannesburg, Mon 21 September 1987.
- 17 Correspondence received from Mr Luftig, fundraiser of that institution, 2013.
- 18 Personal communication, 2013.
- 19 Heard at Sam Sher's Tombstone Unveiling ceremony, 7 December 2014, West Park Jewish Cemetery.
- 20 Deut. 15:7.
- 21 This was published by the Rabbi's family.
- 22 *Rosh V'Rishon l'Chol Davar SheBikdusha*. as titled in a preface to *Ohr Aharon II*. See Aaron Pfeuffer, Rabbi, *Ohr Aharon II* (Hebrew), Bne Berak, published by YA, YM, S, Pfeuffer, 5765/2004, iii.

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AUSCHWITZ - 70 YEARS

*

Ann Harris

On 27 January 2015, I had the responsibility and honour of representing the South African and African Jewish Congress Jewish communities at a ceremony at Auschwitz, Poland, commemorating the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the camp. This was a joint project of the Polish government, the Shoah Foundation and the World Jewish Congress (WJC). I was in the group of WJC community representatives from all over the world. Our representative should have been Mervyn Smith, who sadly passed away a few months earlier, and I found it difficult to take the place of such an outstanding leader of our community.

The delegates were centred in Krakow and the programme was spread over a period of 24 hours. There were three distinct groups of participants: International representatives, WJC delegates and most importantly, over 100 survivors and their escorts. One of the most exciting things was that the majority of the survivors were escorted by their grandchildren. The participation of so many young people added a very special dimension to the gathering. They were also augmented by a small detachment of members of the Israel Air Force.

On the evening before the commemoration itself, there was a large welcoming reception for the survivors and WJC representatives hosted by the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, at which WJC President Ronald Lauder and Dr Piotr Cywinski were the keynote speakers. The renowned Steven Spielberg, founding chairman of the Shoah Foundation, also spoke. His short address included an interesting idea that we should be looking for humanitarian ways to combat inhumanity. It struck me that the idea is a reality in South Africa.

The speeches were interspersed with evocative Shoah music played by a string quartet. It was the first taste of the theme

of all the speeches: that no-one could have imagined the rise of antisemitism which the world is now witnessing. The worst part is that there does not seem to be a solution to the current problem.

On the morning of 27 January, fleets of buses arrived at various hotels to transport the invitees to Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is a drive of under an hour and there was an enormous police presence both escorting the buses and at every junction. Each bus load waited in its vehicle till called and then walked through the screening to which we are so accustomed. It was very difficult for the survivors, despite the kindness and courtesy of the officials, to be marshalled into queues, some to the right, some to the left, to be searched. There were many tears and the shouting of instructions was unnerving.

Then we walked through the snow and slush for about five minutes to the venue itself, where we were quickly shown to the blocks of seats reserved for us. I found it a little difficult to remember the sight of that infamous spot from my last visit because it was so full but as I sat and waited, the position of the railway track and the terrible Gate of Death with the illuminated watchtower above became clear to me.

When the dignitaries entered, they were not identified in any way, so it is not possible to say with certainty which heads of state attended. Certainly Francois Hollande, President of France was there but most major countries seemed to be represented by their Ambassadors.

The programme was about two hours long but was so gripping and varied that the time passed in a flash. The first speaker was the President of Poland who, in a quiet and measured tone, described how the Nazis had "turned his country into a graveyard".

Then followed the three survivors chosen to speak, each of who was accompanied to the podium by a young escort and who spoke from a text. The first was a woman who had been 14 at the time of her internment. She described graphically the horrific physical conditions she had endured. I found her description of the mud and filth of the pathways so clear that I could hear her words as, later that night, I cleaned the same mud off my boots in my hotel room.

Ann Harris is a lawyer, human rights activist and Jewish communal leader. She is currently Acting President of the African Jewish Congress following the sad death of its President Mervyn Smith, A"H. This article is based on her report on her visit to Poland to attend the 70th anniversary commemorative ceremony on the liberation of Auschwitz.

The second was a tall and striking Polish gentleman, arrested very early in the war as a political agitator. His words served to remind the audience of those detained who were not Jewish and he asked us to stand and observe a moment's silence in memory of the dead.

The third survivor was a very elderly gentleman, small in stature but huge in personality and emotion, speaking in English with a heavy Polish accent. His theme was dealing with legacy, and many of his remarks were greeted with loud applause. He noted that those who speak about the Shoah today tend to 'sanitize' their remarks – victims were 'lost' or 'perished'. That is not appropriate – they were actually murdered or slaughtered and we should say so.

We then saw Steven Spielberg's short documentary on the liberation, *Voices of Auschwitz*, which was concise and eloquent and was extensively broadcast that evening on world television. This was followed by the last speaker, Ronald Lauder. He made a strong and vibrant plea to the representatives of the many countries assembled to do all in their power to publicise the rise of the neo - antisemitism and to develop strategies to combat it. Again, I felt a personal wave of helplessness in that there were no easy solutions. to a problem which is the same in essence worldwide but takes different forms in every country.

I would like to be able to tell you that

the proceedings continued to a dignified end, but unfortunately, the final items were disappointing.

'Prayers' were announced. A small group of clergymen led by Chief Rabbi Lau together with two other Rabbanim, a Chazan, a Catholic Bishop and a Russian Orthodox priest walked to the stage. Sadly, Rabbi Lau did not speak; Tehilim were read by the three Rabbanim, the Shofar was blown, the Chazan intoned the *K'el Male Rachamim* and Kaddish was recited. The non-Jewish clergy each recited a memorial prayer. It in no way demonstrated to the non-Jewish and secular participants the agony of world Jewry nor how, for many, faith in the Almighty, who understands all, never wavered. Perhaps the programmers wanted to preserve the atmosphere of the 1940s, but I am sure world Jewry could have provided in the same ten minutes a more dignified and meaningful service.

Then groups of dignitaries, survivors and donors were asked to walk outside to the Birkenau Memorial to place memorial candles. The remaining 2000 members of the audience remained in their seats to watch this moving ceremony on the screen. It was now dark and snowing and progress was very slow. While they were returning to the tent, the audience began to move out to the buses and the departure became somewhat chaotic. It is a pity that an occasion of such enormity did not end with a declaration of faith and unity.



Lighting of Memorial Candles, Auschwitz, 27 January 2015

REVEALING INVISIBLE REALMS OF THE SPIRITUAL UNIVERSE: THE ART OF ABIGAIL SARAH BAGRAIM.¹

*

Ute Ben Yosef

Abigail Sarah Bagraim is a mystical painter whose Jewish identity is intrinsic to her art. It is this distinctiveness that makes it impossible to align her work with any other South African contemporary art movement. In Marc Chagall (1887-1985), she found her freedom of expression, the outlet of her psychic energies. This transformation is expressed in Kabbalistic symbols. She can be regarded as an offshoot of the great master whose deepest emotional and spiritual roots were in the world of the Kabbalah and in Hasidism.

Apart from her artistic creativity, Abigail is a serious academic and student of Jewish mysticism. She has two Masters degrees, in Fine Art and in Social Science, and is currently working on her doctoral thesis. Creativity, according to Jung, springs from the collective unconscious and finds expression through archetypal symbols. Abigail's archetypal symbols spring from realms of the Jewish religious experience. Like Chagall, she sometimes crosses boundaries to other religions. Chagall used Christian symbols with which he addressed the western world. Abigail has sought out far-eastern religions in her search for the feminine numinous presence. A compilation of her entire oeuvre and the interpretation of her art and symbolism can be found on her website: www.abigailsarah.co.za.

Abigail was born in London, the second child of Judith and Mark Bagraim. Her two sons were consecutive head boys of Herzlia Highlands and her brother, Michael, is a well-known politician, labour lawyer and community leader. When she was still a child, the family relocated to Cape Town. She studied Fine Art at Rhodes University in Grahamstown under Prof Robert Brooks, who had a deep understanding and admiration of this individualistic student.

In 1986, she completed her M.F.A degree *cum laude*. Her thesis, entitled *The Hasidic Spirit as the foundation of the art of Marc Chagall*, reveals her fine scholarship, profound insight into the background of Jewish mysticism and its all-encompassing influence on Marc Chagall. One of the outstanding features of Abigail's thesis is the comparison between Chagall's real life of poverty, hardship, antisemitism and pogroms in Russia and on the other hand, his radiantly joyful paintings noted for their defiance of gravity and relative time-space dimensions. Chagall reconciled ancient Jewish and especially Hasidic traditions of the belief in the omnipresence of G-d with the different styles of modern art, none of which he followed completely. In his paintings, the archetype of the *Shekhinah* reveals itself.²

Parallel to her studies, Abigail exhibited at prestigious galleries, participating in a group exhibition at the Natalie Knight Gallery, Johannesburg, and exhibiting in Cape Town's Gallery International and Irma Stern Museum Town. In 1999, she exhibited under the theme "Jewish Mysticism" at the Parliament of World Religions in Cape Town, where she presented well-received lectures. Her paintings are reproduced in various prominent magazines and she has appeared on television interviews in which she explained the meaning of her symbols. In June 1999, she presented a paper in Jerusalem at the Sixth International Seminar on Jewish art, entitled, 'The Hasidic Spirit as the foundation of the Art of Marc Chagall'.

Abigail continued her studies in comparative religion at the University of Cape Town where, in 1998, she completed a second master's degree, in religious studies. Her thesis is entitled 'Visions and Imagination in Jewish Mystical Texts'. In this profound research, she presents some of the central mystical texts in the Bible, apocrypha (non-canonical writings) and pseudo epigrapha (incorrectly attributed ancient writings) in which visionary revelations to Jewish mystics are described. She verifies that the visual element in mystical thinking has always been alive and well in Judaism and that it has been suppressed mainly due to the decree of the Second Commandment. Her thesis culminates in an examination of the Kabbalah (the Jewish mystical tradition) which became the essence of her art. The

Dr Ute Ben Yosef, a regular contributor to Jewish Affairs, has a B.A. in Librarianship (University of Pretoria) and a Ph.D (magna cum laude) in History of Art from the Art Historical Institute of the Free University of Berlin. Over the years, she has served as Senior Lecturer in History of Art at Pretoria University, as art critic at the Feuilleton of the Neue Zürcher Zeitung in Switzerland and as Head Librarian of the Jacob Gitlin Library in Cape Town. She has published various papers and monographs on contemporary Jewish artists.

Ten Sefirot are the intangible phenomena, the structural elements of the Source of Being. She demonstrates how the kabbalists were obsessed with *seeing* the invisible and that their mystical sense of sight has held a very high position in their mystical experiences.

Abigail is presently working on her doctoral thesis on aspects of the Kabbalah, which represents the resurgence of a divine mystical tradition within Judaism. She bases her premises on the writings of Gershom Scholem, who found that mysticism has played a revitalizing role in Judaism.³ She explores the *Bahir*, the oldest classical work of Kabbalistic literature which originated in 11th Century Provence, and the *Zohar* - the 'Book of Splendour' - which relates mystical aspects of the Torah and analyses the Nature of G-d. The *Zohar* forms the basis of the Kabbalah. One of the most important aspects of Kabbalah is the introduction of the *Shekhinah*, the divine feminine substance of the G-dhead.⁴

Simultaneously viewed as mother, bride and daughter, *Shekhinah* represents radiance and light created by G-d, yet not as an entity separate from Him. The association of the *Shekhinah* with light sprang from an interpretation of the Biblical verse of Ezekiel 43:2: "and the earth was lit up by His Presence".

Just as a hand held before the eyes conceals
the greatest mountain,
so does petty earthly life conceal from view
the vast lights and
mysteries of which the world is full, and he
who can withdraw
it from his eyes as one withdraws a hand, will
behold the great light
of the innermost world.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslava [Breslov].⁵

As in all the paintings by Abigail, this image (Fig. 1) is a multidimensional meditation piece, based on the understanding of Jewish Hasidism and Kabbalism. In it the *Shekhinah* appears as the Sabbath queen. She ushers in the eve of the holiest day of the week, descending from the evening sky which is rendered in the colour reminiscent of the deep blue dye used in ancient times by Jews, called *tekhelet*. This colour also appears in Chagall's night scenes.

Light is reflected from Her numinous presence. In the same way as the moon reflects the rays of the sun, She has no light of her own.⁶ Accompanied by a host of angels from above, She appears in her splendour, the waves of her hair swirling within the vibrant atmosphere of the sky. She is magnificently attired in her flowing bridal robe, adorned with pearls which symbolize the soul, and with stars which had tumbled down from the universe. She is crowned with the *atara* (diadem) and



Fig. 1. Sabbath Queen. 2007

Acrylic on Canvas. 90x60cm

Sgd. Below right: Abigail Sarah 07

with Her hand sprinkles the jewels of her light whose rays contain all the commandments. She holds a festive bouquet of arum lilies of the South African Cape in one hand and a flowing branch of lilies in the other. She faces the viewer directly, thus involving the outside world with her presence and with the Sabbath ritual which is unfolding.

We see a rabbinical figure in a landscape, dressed in a white garment. From the 16th Century the kabbalists of Safed, dressed in white, went out into the orchards on Friday afternoons to welcome the Sabbath bride and with that to usher the female presence of the G-dhead into their midst. They sang hymns, the most famous being *Lecha Dodi*. Then the men would return home to be received by their wives, the earthly representatives of the *Shekhinah*.⁷ In Abigail's painting the Shabbat ritual takes its course in the lower sphere. The mother, dressed in white, blesses the candles over the *challah*. Rays emanating from the Sabbath bride touch her. Outside, within the dark realms of outer space, the ritual is repeated in the deep blue night sky within the wings of angels. Between the grid of the Hebrew word *baruch* (blessed) the family gathers one by one and soon the husband will be chanting the song of praise to the "woman of valour". The painting exudes a state of complete peace within the radiance of the *Shekhinah* who at that moment encompasses the opportunity of redemption of the world.

The artist has captured this moment of the onset of the Holy Shabbat and its universal

harmony, peace and beauty in which the ritual is elevated to the sphere of the numinous.

THE HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL SERIES

At the end of this year (5775/2015) Abigail is scheduled to hold an exhibition of a series of her works under the auspices of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre which will also be brought to the Johannesburg and Durban Holocaust Centres.

The series is based on visits to Holocaust monuments and memorials in eastern and western Europe by Abigail and her father, and Israel by herself. She has captured her experiences in a highly individualistic manner expressive of her feelings, visions and sensations as they were conveyed by each individual monument. This forms the core of the painting. She surrounds the monuments with pictograms, or hieroglyphs, which have to be decoded by the viewer. Each one generates in the artist a different mood or insight. Many of the pictograms, especially the self-portrait of the artist, repeat themselves in different paintings. Most of Abigail's images are based on symbols of Jewish mysticism and the Kabbalah. Some are based on archetypal symbols of the collective unconscious.

Symbols

The dark side or, in Kabbalistic terms, the *Sitra Achra*, is represented by the evil female or Terrible Mother archetype.⁸ In Abigail's paintings she can also appear as the witch or the sorceress. Symbols of terror and destruction are: fire, the souls of the murdered victims and black for the colour of the abyss.

Other recurring symbols are: the all seeing eye of the G-dhead and His divine feminine substance, the *Shekhinah*. Further symbols are a hierarchy of angels - if two-winged they symbolise the souls of the departed. Others are the four-winged angels and the burning Seraph. Butterflies are symbols of transformation. On the top of many paintings within a mandala appears a single female head or a loving couple, sometimes weeping, sometimes calm human reflections of the G-dhead as witness of the scene. Flowers, especially roses have different meanings, mainly of solace and pity. The peacock in Abigail's work is a symbol of resurrection, whilst the phoenix regenerates in the universal circle of life and death. In Greek mythology the phoenix dies by fire and rises from the ashes of its predecessor. In Abigail's iconography the phoenix is a symbol of reincarnation.

The artist, recording

In most of Abigail's Holocaust series the

emblematic figure of the artist appears at the bottom of the painting, sometimes seated in in the lotus position, or with paintbrushes and canvas. She is recording the scene of memorialisation together with her reflections and visions.

Jan van Erkelens' puppets

Jan van Erkelens (born 1918) is a famous Dutch marionette artist. He began to create puppets as a reaction to a family trauma. As a puppeteer he became famous for his fairy tale performances, often presented in rhymes. The marionette used as motif by Abigail (with his permission) in her painting *Warsaw – Home of Chopin and Endlösung der Judenfrage* (Fig. 3) is "the evil sorceress".⁹

Abigail's highly original angle and content reveals the insight of the younger generation into the Holocaust. A monument, in the concept of Western civilization, is an object of glorification of a specific person or event. It addresses itself to the viewer with the summons to emulate the person or event which is honoured in a positive way. A Holocaust monument represents the exact opposite. It is a memorial to unspeakable suffering, to unimaginable horror, caused by genocide and crimes against humanity.¹⁰ The philosopher Theodor Adorno felt that to aestheticize the Holocaust would be barbaric.¹¹ On the other hand, many have felt that a Holocaust monument relieves a community of its traumatic memory process.¹² Abigail's paintings are visual messages between the monuments and herself as artist representing her generation. Her responses to them are addressed to the contemporary viewer, a generation removed from the direct experience of the event in question, with a different concept and reception to that of the survivors. Her motifs are symbols of an interactive dialogue. For Abigail, these monuments fill in for the absence of graves and tombstones and act as substitutes of remembrance.

Abigail with these paintings represents a generation in search of catharsis. For her, the act of memorialisation is directed towards the future. She describes this Holocaust series as "art about art" because its visual core was conceived by another artist. Based upon this she renders her personal interpretation of the monument and the historical events which it represents. Her images are intentionally naïve, even childlike. Only on this level of guilelessness is she able to grasp and transmit the sheer enormity of the cataclysmic event. Unique to her paintings and perhaps extraordinary to many viewers is her belief in the concept of *gilgul*, the Kabbalistic notion of transformation and reincarnation of the human soul. Abigail simply cannot accept the notion

of finality through mass murder.

Stylistically, these paintings are characterized by a paradox between flat rigidity and a restless vibrancy. Her picture plane is divided by a horizontal line separating sky (or universe) which is the spiritual realm - and a lower realm, that of the earth.

The pictograms are arranged in a particular order across the canvas and are connected by vibrations oscillating through space and time. They form an echo of the universe, which is permeated by spiritual beings, seraphs, butterflies, souls of the departed and those who enter the afterlife in a mystical cycle of life, death and transformation as for Abigail death is not the end. The paintings are suffused with the presence of the *Shekhinah*. She is revealed by rays of light or by its opposite, darkness and mourning, as in the maternal reflection of Rachel weeping for her children (Jeremiah 31).

Germany

An example of a memorial site captured by Abigail is the Holocaust monument in Berlin. In Germany, monuments to the Holocaust are taken very seriously. The on-going debates about Holocaust monuments are memorials in themselves. Germany's Holocaust monuments



2. Alone with the spirits at the Jewish Memorial in Berlin. 2013

Acrylic on Canvas. 90x60cm

Sgd. below right: Abigail Sarah Batsheva '5773

are ambiguous by their very nature because they direct an appeal to the nation to remember the victims of crimes which this nation itself perpetrated.¹³ The Holocaust monuments of Germany demonstrate how the German nation has incorporated the *Shoah* into its national history and consciousness.

In the epicentre of Berlin, very close to Hitler's bunker, Peter Eisenmann, the minimal sculptor of virtual space and time, conceived within an area of nineteen thousand square metres 2711 concrete stelae, arranged in a grid pattern on a sloping field. Varying in height, they are grey, like a huge field of charcoal. Beneath the memorial, which was inaugurated in 2004, an information site holds the names of every known Jewish Holocaust victim. Abigail turned the memorial site into an image of transformation, in which *gilgul*, the transfiguration of the souls of the murdered Jews of Europe, takes place.

Above the charcoal coloured stelae golden angels float. In the middle ground, at a higher level, butterflies, symbols of metamorphosis, rise upwards into the sky. In the realms of the central heavenly sphere hovers the female numinous being. Her abundant hair sheds roses in an eternal swirl of space and time. In the centre of the sky on the top, a phoenix (symbol of resurrection) rises from the ashes. It is flanked by two mirror images of the artist in a long garment holding a light of six flames.

This painting once again is a scene of meditation in which the viewer is drawn in to witness the commemoration of the event and the artist's vision of reincarnation.

Poland

On her visit to Warsaw, Abigail created a complex painting which is not without some wry Jewish humour. She comments, "I was trying to show that in Poland they had this amazing music genius as well as this horrific evil towards the Jews. They were sophisticated and yet savage."¹⁴ The painting records the Warsaw ghetto monument by Nathan Rapoport (1911-1987) floating in the right hand centre of the sky. Abigail reflects on the cultural side of Warsaw prior to the Holocaust. On the top left-hand corner the great composer Frédéric Chopin, who did not like Jews, is surrounded by his glorious music notes. Floating on a golden swing he holds a marionette on a string. This is the image of the "Great Sorceress", a creation by Jan van Erkelens from his series *Toverspiegel* (magic mirror).

Below the puppeteer's sorceress, the mother and child figure representing Abigail and her baby empathises with the Jewish mothers of Warsaw and the looming danger to their children. A delicate arch of white birds in flight protects her. Her right side is embellished by



3. Warsaw – Home of Chopin and Endlösung der Judenfrage (the final solution of the Jewish question). 2014

Acrylic on canvas. 76x51cm

Sgd. Below right: Abigail Sarah Batsheva '5774

an assortment of pink roses, but their leaves are dry and dead. A thin flame rises up beside Nathan Rapoport's monument. Various space-time dimensions are encompassed in this one scene and the viewer is called upon to meditate on the different pictographic images.

Lithuania

The Ninth Fort was part of the great prison of Kovno (Kaunas). After the occupation of Lithuania by Nazi Germany, it was used as a place of execution for Jews, with massacres on an enormous scale being perpetrated. Fig. 4 is a very personal painting for Abigail. Kovno was the birthplace of her grandparents, who luckily left Lithuania in time. They are depicted under the Holocaust memorial by Alfonsos Ambraziunas (1984). The scene is encapsulated by a teardrop which forms the inner core.

Since the memorial by Ambraziunas has been erected on the bare premises of the Ninth Fort, Abigail painted a Jewish cemetery with tomb stones for the nameless thousands who had no grave. Her grandparents stand side by side as a beacon of steadfastness within the cataclysm. Once again the artist, even in the title of this painting, emphasises her conviction

that the souls of the murdered victims of the Ninth Fort of Kovno live on in triumph over their oppressors. The emaciated figures of the dead souls ascend under tears and a weeping female head within a mandala and a white cherub at the top. Large butterflies, symbols of transformation, flit inside and around the inner core. Outside the precincts of the teardrop, beside the quiet gaze of the all-seeing eye of the G-dhead, two figures entwined with cloudy schemata (the souls of the departed) toss down red roses. These come to lie between the image of the artist below, who on the left casts light upon on the scene with her candle. On the right her mirror image is seated at her easel, turning around to face the viewer, whom she draws into the spectacle of death and transformation.

With this painting Abigail invokes the words of Ezekiel (37:11-12): "Then He said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel'. Behold they say, 'Our bones are dried and our hopes are lost' ... Therefore prophesy and say to them thus says the Lord God, 'Behold O my people, I will open your graves and ... bring you into the land of Israel ...'"¹⁵



4. The Ninth Fort of Kovno, 1941 - our souls survive. 2012

Acrylic on Canvas. 92x61cm

Sgd: below right on Abigail's canvas: Abigail Sarah Batsheva '5772

The *Kindertransport*

The *Kindertransport* (German: 'children transport') was a British rescue mission that took place in 1938 during the nine months prior to the outbreak of World War II. As the only country in the world, the UK took in nearly 10 000 Jewish children, ranging from infancy to the age of seventeen. They came from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Free City of Danzig. Their parents were not permitted to accompany them to England. The children of the *Kindertransport* were placed in foster homes, hostels, schools and farms. Often, they were the only members of their families to survive the Holocaust. The transport saved their lives, but it was traumatic for them, and for their parents. The children had to face a different world in which they could not speak the language and had no idea who was going to care for them. Some were brought up in hostels; some were fortunate to be adopted. A small number were not well treated by their foster parents.

'*Kindertransport*' (Fig. 5) is once again a very personal painting by Abigail. The two monuments to the *Kindertransport* by Frank Meisler at its core were erected on the central Berlin railway station at Friedrichstrasse. There they are placed back to back but in Abigail's painting both sculptures face the viewer. Like

the sculptor Abigail's uncle, Rabbi Bernd Koschland, was a *Kindertransport* child, and she dedicates this painting to him.

Bernd Koschland was born in Fürth, Bavaria, in southern Germany.¹⁶ He witnessed the vacillation of his parents as they agonised over whether to let him go or keep him with them. After the final decision, his mother accompanied him to Hamburg, seeing him for the last time when the *SS Manhattan* left the harbour. He was eight years old. His parents also managed to send his older sister to England, where she found work as a domestic. Bernd was placed in a strictly disciplinarian hostel in Margate where, after the declaration of war, he was told that he was not to keep any letters from Germany. The letters his parents wrote to him were destroyed, which distressed him greatly.

In Margate, Bernd forged a friendship with a fellow *Kindertransport* child, Joe Fertig. With the bombing intensifying, the children were evacuated to the rural village of Hammerwich, where they were accommodated by a kindly English couple. There, Bernd and Joe attended a day school, before they were abruptly separated. Bernd moved to Tylers Green, an Orthodox Jewish hostel near rural Wycombe, where he received his religious upbringing under the fatherly directorship of Rabbi Munk, for which he is very grateful. He has remained close to his schoolmates and teachers. After the hostel disbanded in 1947, he studied for the Rabbinate and later became a high school teacher, also becoming involved in educational activities within the community and in interfaith work. He and his beloved wife Ruth, of blessed memory, had a son and a daughter and he is blessed with grandchildren and a great-granddaughter. Rabbi Koschland believes that the children of the *Kindertransport* can best repay their survival by trying to make the world a better place. After his retirement he assumed a hospital and a local police chaplaincy. He has remained in close contact with the *Kindertransport* community and is the editor of their newsletter. Abigail in her painting commemorates with deep feeling the fate of her uncle Bernd and all the *Kindertransport* children who have so bravely carried on with their lives.

In the painting, against an eerie blue background, angels descend from above, some holding a red rose as a gesture of *rachamim* (compassion) towards the children in the monument by Meisler, setting out on their journey to an unknown future. They are accompanied by their toys, their only reminder of their homes and their parents. Abigail is seated in the posture of eastern meditation, inviting the viewer to identify with these children who in this monument meet their destiny with obedient fatalism.



5. „*Kindertransport*“, including my uncle Bernd Koschland. 2014

Acrylic on Canvas. 61x46cm

Sgd. below centre: Abigail Sarah Batsheva '5774

Babi Yar

"Here in this gorge of hell the history of a great Jewish world has ended – the world of the Ukrainian Jews, from whose midst the first dreamers of Zion came forth, the best Jewish poets and writers, the great pioneers and trailblazers of Zionism" (Yitzchak Rabin).

On the former outskirts of Kiev, there is a ravine where, in the course of two days beginning on Yom Kippur, 1941, 33 771 Jewish men, women and children were shot dead by members of the German *Wehrmacht*. This terrible massacre then sunk into historical oblivion. During the Soviet Union's initial commemorations of the Second World War, Jews were not mentioned at all. Only after the death of Stalin (1953), was the great Russian poet Yevgeni Yevtushenko able to arouse a national awareness about what had befallen the Jewish people with his 1961 poem *Babi Yar*: *"No monument stands over Babi Yar/A steep cliff only, like the rudest headstone/ I am afraid/Today, I am as old/As the entire Jewish race itself."*

Yevtushenko's universal outcry against antisemitism through the ages up until the massacre of Babi Yar was transposed into choral music in 1962 by the great Russian composer Dimitri Shostakovich in his 13th Symphony, entitled *"Babi Yar"*. It ends with these words: *"There is no Jewish blood in my blood/But I feel the loathsome hatred of all antisemites as though I were a Jew –/And that is why I am a true Russian."*¹⁷

And still for decades any plans for Holocaust memorials in the Soviet Union were smothered by surges of post-war Russian antisemitism. Only after 1991, when the Ukraine became independent, did the genocide of the Jews during World War II begin to be commemorated. One of the memorials, created by Valeriy Medvedev in 2006, was devoted to the children who had perished at Babi Yar. As the shooting of children was too terrible to visualise, the artist substituted broken children's dolls in bronze.

With her painting of Valeriy Medvedev's memorial (fig.6), Abigail chose the motif of the children in their different ages in frontal portraits, festively arrayed in the beauty and purity of their childhood, prior to their brutal murder. The artist depicts the memorial with the souls of *gilgul* (reincarnation) fluttering in a white semi-circle from the hands of the main figure. She is seated below turning her back to her easel and facing the viewer, thereby involving the world in her reflections of this cataclysmic event. In the painting on the left easel she depicts the numinous presence of the *Shekhinah* within the web of the universe. On the canvas to her right a four-winged angel floats between the universe and two monuments in honour of Janusz Korczak in

Warsaw, rendered in the form of hieroglyphs. These evoke the spirit of the Egyptian Book of the Dead. The horrific memory is frozen in time confronting us with a ghostly rigidity, as an intense reminder of *zachor*: 'remember'.



6. Babi Yar Memorial. 2014

Acrylic on canvas. 90x60cm

Sgd below off centre: '5774 Abigail Sarah Batsheva

Redemption

According to Saul Friedländer, there is a mythic link between the Holocaust and the birth of Israel.¹⁸ Yet immediately after the Holocaust, when the traumatised survivors arrived in the Jewish state, they experienced rejection because they did not fit in with the image of the *sabra*, the name conveying the strong and hardy image of the typical Israeli pioneer as symbolised by the desert plant of that name. To the regret of the present generation, they were criticized for having allowed themselves to be led "like sheep to the slaughter".¹⁹ By contrast, Israel had become the place of redemption, the end of Jewish life in the diaspora that, according to David Ben Gurion, deserved to be forgotten. Gradually, however, the Shoah became central to the self-image of the Israeli state.²⁰

Abigail regards the State of Israel as the country of rebirth of the Jewish people.

Fig.7 bears witness to this view. The central part of the painting is the monument to Mordechai Aniliewicz (1919-1943), the



7. Mordechai, hero of the Warsaw Ghetto, at the eponymous Kibbutz Yad Mordechai. 2014

Acrylic on Canvas. 90x60cm

Sgd. Below left: Abigail Sarah Batsheva. Right: '5776

commander of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising (which took place from 19 April-16 May 1943). It was created by Nathan Rapaport and erected at Kibbutz Yad Mordechai in Israel. However, it does not resemble the real hero of the uprising. Aniliewicz was a small, emaciated, bespectacled intellectual, but here is portrayed as an idealised, muscular, robust youth standing erect in the style of Michelangelo's David, dressed like a *kibbutznik* with a grenade in his hand. With this monument the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto insurrection was transferred to Israel's soil, to the southernmost part, where a small number of kibbutzniks fought the Egyptian army during the Israeli War of Independence of 1948 and became part of a memory of resistance and heroism.²¹

The central meaning of this painting is the redemption of the Jewish people. At the foot of the monument a tombstone rises from the earth. On its left a weeping mother and child form the counterpart to Abigail, who is painting her vision of the deliverance. Butterflies, symbols of metamorphosis and transformation rise up, past Rapoport's monument, into a sky of souls of the deceased of the Holocaust and of Kibbutz Yad Mordechai. A figure signifying resurrection is ascending. The ultimate destination, the city of Jerusalem, floats in the right hand top corner. The message of the painting is that of

redemption through the establishment of the Jewish State.

SUMMARY

The Holocaust/Shoah is not a popular topic among today's younger generation. Yet Abigail, even though she finds it a painful subject, believes that to forget would be an act of historical extinction of the Jewish people. She has chosen to approach the topic vicariously as 'art on art' through monuments created by other artists. She has thus collected together a large body of work by a variety of other artists who have already portrayed the harsh realities of the subject, and presents their interpretations to the viewer. She then adds her own further, personal interpretation which recognises the fact that she is from a subsequent generation who, although they did not directly experience the horrific realities that were collectively perpetrated upon the Jewish people, live in its shadow and are the candle-bearers of its horrors. This series of work represents Abigail's mystical message from a longer term cosmic viewpoint sometime after the terrible events. Her portrayal is less immediate; it memorialises the victims and points to their ultimate triumph over their oppressors in the events that followed almost simultaneously after the Shoah, namely the demise and destruction of the Nazi Third Reich and the birth of the State of Israel as the home of the Jewish people. It celebrates the memory of the victims, whose souls live on in peace in her work despite their earthly extinction, and it honours the lives of the survivors who somehow managed to continue despite their immense suffering and losses.

Three chief characteristics can be crystallised from these paintings by Abigail:

- **The embrace of the presence of the Shekhinah, the female entity of the G-dhead.**

Abigail's art is rooted in that of Chagall, the essence of whose painting is love, through which the world can be redeemed. His loving couples are reflections of the G-dhead's union with his female numinous presence. For Chagall, the *Shekhinah* assumed her presence in a world steeped in patriarchy. Abigail is more directly outspoken about the *Shekhinah* than was Chagall. Perhaps she was inspired by the explosive re-awakening of the female consciousness within the contemporary world.

- **The belief in the reincarnation of the soul which in the Jewish Kabbalah is known as *gilgul neshamot*.**

This is the cyclical revolving of souls. The

message of Abigail's Holocaust series is that the catastrophe has transmitted its darkness upon the following generations in a process that could be described as collective osmosis. Some deal with it through repression, seeking a life free from the burden of memory. Others deal with it through catharsis. Prominent post-Holocaust artists, such as Mark Rothko, have expressed themselves in the style of abstract art; others, such as Samuel Bak, through metaphor and symbols of death and transformation.

Abigail turned to the mystical sources of the Jewish religion, the Kabbalah. The Kabbalists, especially Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (1534-1572), believed that the doctrine of reincarnation is firmly rooted in the Hebrew Bible. For example: Daniel 12:13 "But you, go on to the end; you shall rest, and arise to your destiny at the end of days". In the Midrash it is stated that every Jew who ever lived and who will ever live, stood at Mount Sinai when the Jews received the covenant from G-d. The Hassidic pan-en-theism (G-d is everywhere) to which Chagall adhered, and which has influenced Abigail Bagraim's thinking, devotes itself to the attachment of the divine omnipresence. Thus for Abigail the mass death that occurred in the Shoah cannot exist as a finality.

The notion of reincarnation of the soul, is not, however, an essential principle of present Orthodox Judaism.

- Abigail Bagraim's paintings are to be understood as visual connecting points between past, present and future.

The artist relates with the viewer from a realm in which the prophets of old have conveyed their visions. Her paintings are extremely personal and she addresses herself to the viewer with a bewildering directness.

Judaism is central to the creativity of this mystical artist. Stylistically she is part of the contemporary art movements, to which, however, she has remained unaffiliated due to her extraordinary individualism. Abigail Bagraim's style and message have an astonishing freshness, and she has boldly pursued her totally new direction. Her work has meanwhile asserted itself within the sphere of contemporary painting.

NOTES

- 1 The author is indebted to Gwynne Schrire for editing this article and for her scholarly advice and support.
- 2 Neumann, Erich, *Art and the Creative Unconscious*. Princeton, Princeton U.P. Bollingen Series 61, 1959.
- 3 See Scholem, Gershom, *On the Kabbalah and its symbolism* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965) and *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead. Basic concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York, Schocken, 1976).

- 4 Abigail Bagraim, excerpt from unfinished thesis.
- 5 Quoted by Erich Neumann, 1959:106.
- 6 Gershom Scholem, 1965:151.
- 7 Related by Abigail in her tractate: Sabbath Queen. www.abigailsarah.co.za
- 8 Erich Neumann, 1985: 147ff
- 9 The author is indebted to Herbert von Erkelens, Jan's son for all the information on father's puppets.
- 10 Andreas Huyssens, 'Monument and Memory in a postmodern age', in James E. Young (ed), *The Art of Memory: Holocaust memorials in History*, 1994, p13.
- 11 "Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. 'An Essay on Cultural Criticism and Society', *Prisms* 1949:34.
- 12 Young, p20.
- 13 James E. Young, 1993:21 ff.
- 14 www.abigailsarah.co.za
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Koschland, Bernd, in Bertha and Shmuel Lowensohn, *I came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports*, Sussex, The Book Guild, 1990, 173ff. e-mail to Abigail Bagraim 13.1.2015.
- 17 Andrew Huth translation. Insert: Dmitri Shostakovich. Symphony No. 13 in B flat minor op 113 'Babi Yar'. Concertgebouw. Bernard Haitink. DECCA 1993:19.
- 18 Saul Friedländer in collaboration with Adam Seligman, *Memory of the Shoah in Israel: Symbols, Rituals and Ideological Polarisation*, Young, 1994, p152.
- 19 Hoffman, Eva, *After Such Knowledge*, London, Secker and Warburg, 2004, p250.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Andreas Huyssens op.cit in Young (ed.), 1994, p15.

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RETROSPECTIVE RECOGNITION OF GERMAN JEWISH ARTISTS - LOCAL CONNECTIONS

*

Gwynne Schrire

Fame comes to some artists only after death. Van Gogh is a famous example. He only sold one painting in his lifetime. Now his works sell for millions of dollars. But what about those artists who were deprived of the opportunity to become better known, denied the opportunity to create art and, even worse, persecuted and killed because they were Jewish?

On 9 November 2010 - the anniversary of *Kristallnacht* - an exhibition entitled *Degenerate Art in the Rubble* opened in Berlin's *Neues Museum*. It consisted of eleven statues unearthed a few months previously during excavations for an underground station.¹ Two of the sculptors were Jewish - Naum Slutzky, who fled to London, and Otto Freundlich, who was murdered at Majdanek. How the sculptures got there, no one knows. What is known is that they were among 16000 pieces deemed 'un-German' and 'degenerate' by Joseph Goebbels when he served as *Reichsminister* for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda and confiscated from public collections. Exhibitions of this "degenerate art", known as *Exhibitions of Shame*, toured Germany, attracting huge audiences. It had "a cultural-political aim... to reveal the systematic attempts by Jews, those of Jewish descent and others sympathetic to Jews, to poison and destroy the German Volk... by the conscious intention of causing the 'degeneration' of the Germans to prepare them for chaos and Bolshevism."²

Historians trying to identify the provenance of the eleven pieces have found documents showing that some were returned to the Nazi Propaganda Ministry in 1941. After that, the paper trail goes cold. The artworks were dug up under a building destroyed in an air raid. Several rooms on the fourth floor had been rented by Erhard Oewerdieck, a German tax lawyer, and his wife Charlotte, both of whom were, in September 1978, awarded the title "Righteous among the Nations" by Yad Vashem for hiding Jews and helping them escape.³ Did the Oewerdiecks buy the pieces to save them from destruction? ⁴

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Seventy years later, these eleven sculptures were again on exhibition - but the aim of *Degenerate Art in the Rubble* was different. As a reviewer commented, "its real value is as a posthumous recognition of artists silenced in their lifetimes because they didn't fit Hitler's vision of art derived from classical forms."⁵

Posthumous recognition is of no comfort to the dead, but it can serve as a lesson to the living regarding the enormous damage racism and antisemitism can pose to a society. Nelson Mandela believed that reconciliation meant working together to correct the legacy of past injustice and this is the intention of such forms of posthumous recognition.⁶ There have been a number of exhibitions in modern Germany designed to correct its legacy of past injustice by providing retrospective recognition to the gagged artists whose work had helped glorify Germany and who were so brutally repaid for their talent.

In 1933, the Nazi regime removed its Jewish citizens from all areas of cultural life. Jews, claimed Goebbels, were "not suited to be involved in the administration of German cultural assets". The Reich's Chamber of Culture Bill made membership of chambers necessary for following a career or profession. Jews were disqualified from membership, and thus could no longer exhibit or sell their work. Jewish art was removed from the walls of museums and galleries and valuable collections were confiscated. Jewish portraits by non-Jewish artists had the sitter's name erased.⁷ Some art was confiscated for Hitler's planned Fuhrermuseum; some were seized by high-ranking officials such as Hermann Göring while others were traded to fund Nazi activities. In 1940, Göring's Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) was ordered to seize 'Jewish' art collections and other objects. "It used to be called plundering", Göring told the Nazi Party, "It was up to the party in question to carry off what had been conquered. But today things have become more humane. In spite of that, I intend to plunder and to do it thoroughly."⁸

Under the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, German Jews lost their citizenship rights and the policy of aryanisation - the expropriation into 'Aryan' hands of Jewish property in order to "de-Jew the economy" - was instituted. Jewish-owned assets were looted, confiscated, forcibly sold

below fair market value or sold to pay for the *Reichsfluchtsteuer* ('Reich Flight Tax'), the departure taxes that stripped Jews of their property before they were allowed to leave. By September 1939, this amounted to 96% of their assets, payable in cash or gold.⁹

Peter Moser, Austrian Ambassador to the United States, described the process with reference to looted art belonging to a Jewish family: "The property they had to leave behind or sell. The rest were confiscated. It was sheer looting and robbing. The Nazis took the paintings out of the home. They made use of the objects; they auctioned them off, whatever."¹⁰

The extent of the robbery is beyond belief. In Poland alone it has been estimated that the Nazis looted over 516 000 individual art pieces, including 2800 paintings by European painters, 11000 by Polish painters, 1400 sculptures, 75 000 manuscripts, 25 000 maps, 90 000 books (including over 20 000 printed before 1800) and hundreds of thousands of other items of artistic and historical value.¹¹

Most countries have made little progress toward returning stolen cultural items to their rightful owners. A survey of 50 countries by the Conference for Material Claims Against Germany and the World Jewish Restitution Organization revealed that two-thirds of the nations that had endorsed agreements regarding research, publicity and claims for Nazi-era looted art had done little to implement those pacts - 44 were signatories of the 1998 Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art, 47 endorsed the 2009 Terezin Declaration and all 50 were signatories to the Code of Ethics for Museums of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which requires museums to establish the full provenance of items in their collections. Few have implemented this Code.¹²

Modern Germany has rejected its Nazi past and embarked on acts of commemoration and memorialisation, not only focussing on the killing fields and extermination camps, but also on the lives of individual victims.

In a book published in Germany thirty years after the Holocaust, Bernt Engelmann detailed how, once cleansed of Jewish influence by Nazi antisemitism, German culture was shattered. "Instead, an indefinable loss has set in... how could such a loss ever be measured?"

As regards Jewish artists, he writes that "the attempt to measure the loss the world - or even Germany alone - has suffered... is bound to fail. It is even more impossible to evaluate accurately the loss from works that were never produced or to capture it in percentages or pin it down to particular countries... The loss is immeasurable and what has been lost can never be replaced."¹³

Recognising its cultural losses caused

through the loss of its Jewish artists, Germany has taken steps to honour some posthumously by holding retrospective exhibitions or by dedicating museums to their works.

This article will look at some South African connections to posthumous recognition and to ill-gotten possession.

Herman Hirsch

Some time ago, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Council) received a request from the Göttingen Städtisches Museum for copies of paintings it owned. The Museum was planning a commemorative exhibition of the work of Hermann Hirsch (1861-1934). Its website explained that this would be "the first such event to be held in Germany in appreciation of this versatile and unjustly forgotten artist and it might at the same time be seen as an attempt to make good in some small way for the injustices he and his work were subjected to in Germany."¹⁴

After paying a wealth tax, German Jewish immigrants to South Africa were allowed to leave with ten Reichmarks each, and some personal possessions. Some arrived with paintings that had been in the family for generations and some of these, years later, were donated to the Jewish Museum in Cape Town. When it was superseded by the South African Jewish Museum, these paintings passed into the possession of the Board as trustees of the former Museum. Among them were three paintings by Hermann Hirsch belonging to his niece Hilda Jeidel.¹⁵ A painter and sculptor, Hirsch had studied at the Academies of Fine Art in Berlin and Düsseldorf. He was a member of the Society of Berlin Artists and lived in the Rhineland, Italy and Greece before settling, in 1918, in Bremke, ten kilometres from Göttingen and joining the university-affiliated Association of Göttingen Friends of the Arts, which held regular exhibitions. One contemporary review stated that his work stood out among others, gaining the highest praise and that Göttingen could be proud to have such an outstanding artist.¹⁶

From 1933, the situation for Jews deteriorated dramatically. Although Hirsch had been prominent, people did not dare visit him and he could not sell his work. His niece, Sabine, recalled that he was threatened at home; young Nazi thugs roved around his house, throwing stones and calling him 'Jew'.¹⁷ He moved to Göttingen, becoming a boarder. The Jeidels told the Jewish Museum that their uncle committed suicide after the Gestapo entered his studio and destroyed his work.

The Göttingen newspapers printed long obituaries attributing his death to Hirsch having "broken under the hardship of fate."¹⁸ *Göttinger Zeitung* editor Dr Wilhelm Lange

wrote, "His work lives on and with it the memory of a great artist, a good German and a genuine *Mentsch*."¹⁹

Although the intention of the museum was "to announce the re-discovery of the regionally significant painter", a certain amount of whitewashing seems to have taken place. The exhibition catalogue merely states that "up until today it is not verified whether Hirsch died as a result of national socialist maltreatment, suicide or illness". Certainly the sum of 10 RM that the Göttingen Städtisches Museum outlaid did not represent a fair payment for the sixty Hirsch items it bought at the October 1941 auction of the "Jewish relocation assets" to pay the *Reichsfluchtsteuer*. It was a willing participation in the looting of Jewish possessions. Their purchase must have been pre-arranged as the sale was registered before the auction date. Nor has the museum retained any correspondence about this purchase recorded as numbers 12076-12083 in the Entry (Accessions) book 1922-1950.

Hirsch's house was sold for 5265 RM; once the Jewish wealth tax was deducted, his main heir, niece Marie Günther, was left with 39.53 RM.²⁰ Although the British Military decreed that the Nazi aryanisation policy amounted to robbery, as Marie did not claim restitution for the auction,²¹ the Museum has retained ownership and was able to mount this posthumous exhibition. As required by the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, it has established the full provenance of the Hirsch items in its collection and publicised its findings in its illustrated catalogue. However, no claims process has been instituted to compensate his family adequately for his suffering or for the depressed prices at which the Museum obtained his work – ten items per Reichsmark.

The Cape SAJBD²² arranged for the works to be photographed professionally and they subsequently appeared in colour in the excellent Göttingen Städtisches Museum catalogue, *Hermann Hirsch: A Jewish Artist in Göttingen (1861-1934)*.²³

The museum website mentioned that the focus of the exhibition was not solely on Hermann Hirsch the artist. It also documented his life as a Jew in the Germany of the 1920s and 30s until his death on 1 March 1934 and the subsequent fate of his works, "a history in which loss, emigration and 'Aryanisation' are prominent elements...His death after one year of National Socialist rule, coupled with the fortunate emigration of almost all his Jewish relatives, caused the painter to be almost completely forgotten in Göttingen and over the whole of Germany."

The word 'fortunate' is insensitive in this context. Emigration in this case involved the confiscation of Hirsch's relatives' assets - the only fortunate part was that leaving saved

their lives. Also, the implication that Hirsch would not have been forgotten had his death occurred after several years of Nazi rule is ludicrous. The catalogue introduction presents an additional explanation why he was forgotten - "the majority of his works is in the ownership of members of his family" - ignoring the sixty works bought by the Museum at the auction. The Museum retains ownership and the exhibition enhances their value.

Nit-picking aside, the fact remains that eighty years after Hirsch's death, the town where he lived and died has given him posthumous recognition. The Bremke Historical Society has erected a plaque at his house stating that the Jewish artist Hermann Hirsch lived there from 1918 – 1933.²⁴

Max Liebermann

Last year, the Cape SAJBD received a request for assistance in lodging a claim for compensation for a house in Berlin belonging to the claimant's grandfather. Susan Liebermann had been invited to visit Berlin, where a memorial was to be erected at the site of the house, subsequently bombed. Unfortunately, as the property was in West Berlin, it was no longer possible to obtain compensation.²⁵

The house belonged to Georg Liebermann, brother to the artist Max (1847 –1935). His house at 4 Tiergartenstrasse was inherited by his son Hans, a Professor of Chemistry. When the Nazis came to power Susan's father, his son Heinrich, managed to immigrate to South Africa. Hans committed suicide shortly before Kristallnacht, hoping his death would save his non-Jewish wife and two younger sons.²⁶ His widow had to relinquish the house, which was rented to the *Gemeinnützige Stiftung für Heil- und Anstaltspflege* (literally, "Charitable Foundation for Curative and Institutional Care") as its headquarters and she had the humiliation of having to go to collect the minimal rent when they were willing to pay.²⁷

This "charitable foundation" was dedicated to killing those Hitler deemed "unworthy of life". It was run by Hitler's personal doctor, Dr. Karl Brandt, and Reichsleiter Philipp Bouhler, head of Hitler's private chancellery. This meant that from Susan Liebermann's grandfather's former house, the T4 euthanasia program - named from the address of the Liebermann house - was run. Working in the house, a team of doctors, who presumably had all sworn to fulfill the Hippocratic Oath, arranged for six gassing installations to be set up at psychiatric hospitals in Germany and Austria to kill the elderly, the incurably ill and the physically and mentally disabled. The program - which gassed 70 273 people, with others killed by injection and starvation - ran officially from September 1939 to August 1941.

It is estimated that in all its stages probably 200 000 people were killed. The technology gained by this undertaking was later used in mobile death vans and extermination camps.²⁸ Few of the people involved in executing the program were punished afterwards.²⁹

Susan Liebermann and her sister, Gillian Copley from Canada, attended the ceremony on the site of their family's house - now the Berlin Philharmonic - where a 79-foot blue glass wall memorial was erected dedicated to those killed through the T4 program. The memorial includes audio and video information on the Nazi euthanasia program and its victims. A plaque commemorating the victims has been placed in the pavement where the Liebermann House had stood to mark the location and historical significance of the site.³⁰ However, no recognition was given at the ceremony to the fact that the T4 house had been taken from the Liebermanns - an indication to Susan that further aryanisation was still being perpetrated.

Max Liebermann had lived from 1892 in another house, inherited from their father, on Pariser Platz near Berlin's Brandenburg Gate. He also built a summer cottage in Wannsee on the outskirts of Berlin in 1910, painting 200 pictures of his garden there.

Liebermann was one of the foremost German impressionists. He was the leader of the Berlin Secession, an avant-garde movement advocating for separation of art and politics. In 1897, he was appointed Professor at the Royal Academy of Arts at Berlin. In 1898 he was appointed President of the Berlin Secession.³¹ He was elected President of the Prussian Academy of Arts in 1920 and, on his 80th birthday in 1927, was celebrated with a large exhibition, declared an honorary citizen of Berlin and hailed in cover stories in Berlin's leading art magazines.

With Hitler's accession to power, Jews were prohibited from holding any cultural posts, and Liebermann resigned as President of the Prussian Academy to avoid the humiliation of being forced to do so. He died in 1935, isolated and embittered. Unlike Hirsch, who received a long obituary in the *Göttinger Zeitung* in 1934, his death was not reported in the Nazi-controlled media and no one from the Academy of Fine Arts, or the city of Berlin, was allowed to attend his funeral. Despite official Gestapo restrictions on attendance, Heinrich Liebermann told Susan that he had gone together with his family.

Max's widow, Martha, inherited his estate but because of aryanisation, was forced to sell the houses and relinquish her assets. Impoverished by these demands, she sold artworks to pay the rent and buy food and medicine. On 5 March 1943, the Gestapo arrived to take her to Terezin. Aged 85 and bedridden after a stroke, she took poison

like her nephew Hans.³² The Gestapo seized the remaining art works in her apartment.

Outside their house, there is now a *stolperstein* (stumbling block),³³ but the couple's great-granddaughters are still struggling to obtain two confiscated drawings from his collection now in the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett.³⁴ Another *stolperstein* honouring Prof Hans Heinrich Liebermann is situated outside his house in Wilmersdorf.

As for the summer house with its beautiful garden on Lake Wannsee, the Max Liebermann Society has restored it and the Liebermann Villa is now a museum housing his work. The history of the Liebermann family and the house are documented with a multimedia installation, including documents, photographs, sound recordings and films, recording such details as how Martha was forced to sell the villa at a highly undervalued price which she did not even receive.³⁵ Susan and Gillian donated a painting of Max and Georg Liebermann's father, Louis, done in 1870, to the Villa.³⁶

Hanns Ludwig Katz

Hanns Ludwig Katz (1892-1940) studied art in Paris, Karlsruhe, Heidelberg, Berlin and Munich, becoming known as a painter of portraits, cityscapes, and still lifes that revealed the influence of Max Beckmann and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement. Although his mother was not Jewish, Nazis identified anyone with one non-Aryan grandparent as a Jew.³⁷ No longer able to sell his works, Katz involved himself in the Cultural Association of German Jews, which had been set up to provide opportunities for the expelled Jewish artists. In a speech at its inaugural meeting in 1933, writer and theatre critic Julius Bab stated, "Hundreds of German artists, actors, musicians and intellectuals in various fields... have been deprived of their fields of activity because they are of Jewish descent. These people, most of who are inextricably bound to their professions, have no possibility of switching to another occupation. The situation is becoming increasingly desperate."³⁸

Katz, an expressionist painter, started a house painting and decoration business, which went bankrupt. He immigrated to South Africa in 1936, on the *Stuttgart*, sharing a house in Johannesburg with fellow refugee Hans Wongschowsky. In 1938, one of his portraits was denounced in Germany's *Degenerate Art* exhibition. Sadly, in the ultra-conservative South African society, his work was also too avant-garde to be popular.³⁹ His family offered one of his paintings, *The Eye Operation*, to the Witwatersrand University as a gift. It was declined. He tried to support himself as a house painter and decorator before his death from cancer in 1940. Posthumously, some of

his paintings were shown for the first time at local Jewish art exhibition organised by the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Johannesburg Women's Zionist League.⁴⁰

Hans Wongschowsky sent slides of Katz's paintings to a relative in Germany, who showed them to Henri Nannen, whose foundation had endowed a new Kunsthalle in Emden. Nannen contacted the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt, which owned a few charcoal drawings by Katz. Intensive research into the work and life of the forgotten artist culminated in a major 1992 retrospective exhibition, *Hanns Ludwig Katz 1892-1940* in the Frankfurt Jewish Museum and then in the Emden Kunsthalle under the auspices of the Henri Nannen Foundation.⁴¹ Two years later, the exhibition was brought to the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, where it was shown from November 1993 to the end of February 1994. The catalogue contains full details of the impact of antisemitism and the restrictions on Jewish artists in Germany, in addition to Katz's life story. Thus, after forty years, Hanns Ludwig Katz received the posthumous recognition his genius deserved, both in Germany and Cape Town.

As for *The Eye Operation*, it is now in Emden, Germany

Terezin children's art (1942-1944)

One of the first travelling exhibitions to visit the Cape Town Holocaust Centre was an exhibition under the auspices of the Czech Embassy displaying art drawn by children interned in Terezin. Called *The Children's Story: drawings from Terezin 1942-1944*, it featured reproductions sent from the Prague Jewish Museum. Here again is an exhibition giving posthumous recognition to the child artists, most of who did not survive.

Terezin was an unusual camp because it included many scholars, artists and writers who organised intensive cultural activities - orchestras, opera, theatre, light entertainment and satire, lectures, study groups and a library. Among these activities was a clandestine education programme for children, including art classes which functioned as therapy. These were taught by former Bauhaus lecturer Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, whose goal was "to rouse the desire towards creative work". Drawing on scraps of paper and the backs of official forms, the children drew the camp life they saw around them as well as happier memories of home.

Before she was deported to Auschwitz and her death in Birkenau, Dicker-Brandeis filled two suitcases with about 4500 children's drawings and hid them. Immediately after the war, they were recovered and handed over to the Jewish Museum in Prague, where they are on permanent display in the Pinkas Synagogue.

Opening the exhibition, Education Minister Naledi Pandor said, "We must ensure that as many South Africans as possible, especially children, get to see the drawings ... We must ensure that every child who passes through our education system has an understanding, not only of our apartheid past, but also of the Holocaust and its universal message."

Copies of 100 drawings have been donated to the Holocaust Centre which has loaned them to other centres including Worcester, Johannesburg, Durban and Margate.

Of the 15 000 children held in Terezin only 100 survived and, in most cases, these pictures are all that is left to commemorate their lives. Without them their names would remain forgotten. These exhibitions and books on their art act as a posthumous memorial.

Felix Nussbaum (1904-1944).

In 2005, Cape Town's Jacob Gitlin Library was given a large lavishly illustrated book called *Felix Nussbaum: Art defamed, Art in exile, Art in resistance*. On the title page was the following inscription:

Dear Reader

A friendship between a German, who grew up in Osnabrück (Nussbaum's birthplace) and a Jewish Capetonian has resulted in my wife and I visiting the (Gitlin) in Cape Town and our friends visiting the Nussbaum Museum in Osnabrück. This book is a gift by my wife and myself and we trust that the book will contribute to the building of bridges between not only our towns, but also people of different languages, cultures and religions.

Bernd and Gudrun Oevermann, Osnabrück,
30 June, 2005

Bernd Oevermann had been transferred for three years by his Osnabrück company to its Cape Town branch. There he met and befriended Terence Matzdorff, an attorney whose father had come to South Africa as a refugee from Germany. Visiting Europe some years later, Terence made a detour to Osnabrück to visit Bernd, who took him to see the Felix Nussbaum Haus.

"I had never heard of Nussbaum, but the impact of his art hit me in the gut", Terence told this author. He was determined to bring attention to this artist who, knowing his likely fate, had said, "If I go down, do not let my paintings die."⁴²

Oevermann visited Terence in Cape Town, taking with him the above-mentioned book about Nussbaum. Together, they tried to arrange an exhibition of Nussbaum's work in Cape Town, but there were too many difficulties.

Oevermann inscribed a copy to Terence: "We are the living examples that Germans and South Africans, Christians and Jews, can build up and maintain friendship over many years and thousands of kilometers with trust, humor (sic) and in harmony." He has since given the Gitlin Library a number of other books on Felix Nussbaum and the Cape Town Holocaust Centre printed a lecture on Nussbaum by its director, Dr Ute Ben Yosef.

Born in Osnabrück, Felix Nussbaum studied art in Berlin and won a prize to study in Italy. In 1935, after the passing of the Nuremberg Laws, he and his wife moved to Belgium where, as an act of resistance, he painted pictures reflecting the Nazi persecution. These works reflect the vulnerability of exiles, of homelessness, isolation and an ensuing pessimism which slowly developed into a certainty of death. Arrested as a foreigner, he was sent him to the Saint-Cyprien camp in 1940. He managed to escape and return to Brussels, where he and his wife went into hiding.

The only art review of his time in hiding writes of his plight with understanding. "There is an art that remains unknown. ... It does not sell, it is pushed off the streets and dwells in attics, shivering with cold and hunger. It is the art of the exiles, the homeless, and the German and Austrian refugees who earn their daily bread, God knows how or where."⁴³

Denounced in 1944, Nussbaum and his wife were forced to board the last transport to Auschwitz and death.

In 1970 two elderly Israelis clutching an old suitcase containing a number of moldy damaged paintings visited the curator of the Osnabrück Cultural History Museum.. They told him they had just come from Belgium where, with great difficulty, they had reclaimed the paintings of a relative who had been murdered in Auschwitz. His dentist, Dr Grosfils, had stored them in his basement and refused to hand them over until, after years of court proceedings, the Belgium court ordered him to do so.

One look at the paintings convinced the curator of their value and he had them restored. However, he was unable to find any reference to Nussbaum in his birthplace, so successfully had evidence of Jewish contributions to German culture been eradicated. Nor were there references to Nussbaum in books of modern art or works on 20th Century Jewish art published after World War II. As Felix Nussbaum had vanished from the records, the curator advertised in the Osnabrück newspapers and gradually information, and other paintings, came to light.

Today, Osnabrück has a magnificent art gallery, the Felix Nussbaum House (the "Museum without exit") devoted to Nussbaum's memory.⁴⁴ It was designed by Daniel Libeskind,

architect of the Berlin Jewish Museum.

At its first major retrospective of Nussbaum's art as long ago as 1971, Mayor Willy Kelch called the exhibition a "contribution towards reparation of the injustice which Jewish citizens in Osnabrück and all over Germany suffered in the name of an inhuman ideology."⁴⁵ The decision for the small city to build an expensive museum to hold Nussbaum's oeuvre was taken by the city in order "to show that Osnabrück, which had refused to house the Jewish painter after 1933, was taking responsibility for its past. What had been done was to be made known and the tragic paintings of Nussbaum are suffering and death placed in the historical context of the persecution and murder of the Jews in Nazi Germany."⁴⁶

Today, Nussbaum's paintings portraying the life of these exiles are on permanent display in Osnabrück's Felix Nussbaum Haus. Osnabrück has thus taken responsibility for the horrific treatment of its Jewish citizens, carried out with the connivance, active or passive, of the German people, and lets the power of the paintings serve as a reminder of what had happened.

Looted art

What about the morality of the forced sales during the Nazi eras where paintings were stolen or sold on auction for a fraction of their value? The Göttingen Museum and the Liebermann works and homes are examples. What about the museums and galleries who benefitted from the acquisition of these artworks? Most are reluctant to return their ill-gotten treasures to the families of the original owners.

Rabbi van de Kamp, Belgian chair of the Jewish Inheritance Commission, claimed to know of hundreds of cases like that of Felix Nussbaum, whereby Jews about to be deported (fearing the worst but hoping to survive) left their works for safekeeping with friends or neighbors who, like Dr Grosfils, subsequently refused to return them to their heirs. For moral reasons, Rabbi van de Kamp felt that auctioneers should refuse to sell the works.

In August 2014 the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia, agreed to return a Van Gogh painting it had acquired in 1940, *Head of a Man*, to two elderly sisters in Johannesburg. The Gallery agreed that the sisters were the sole heirs of the owner, German-Jewish industrialist Richard Semmel, whose auctioning of his painting in 1933 should be regarded as involuntary. As signatories to the Washington conference referred to above, it believed it was "appropriate to reconstitute the painting" to them.⁴⁷

How innocent is South Africa in this? Looted items found their way into the country Africa through being brought in by their Nazi

owners, who were shielded by the apartheid government with its many Nazi supporters. (Dr DF Malan once said, 'We are not race-haters, but anti-Semites. We shall follow the same course as Germany, Austria and Italy, and we shall deal with the Jews in South Africa as the above-mentioned countries.'⁴⁸)

South Africa possesses objects of dubious provenance. Pretoria University owns an extremely valuable collection of art given to them by Jacob van Tilburg, sentenced in Holland for collaborating with the Nazis. The Dutch Resistance claimed that his collection had been improperly received for safe keeping from Jews fleeing Nazi persecution and he admitted keeping pieces for Jews who never returned. It is alleged that van Tilburg was connected to a collaborator who promised to transport Jews to Vichy France in return for money, but handed them over to the Gestapo instead. The University accepted the gift, claiming it had cleared van Tilburg. It refused to reveal the evidence it found to do so. Since 1977, the Dutch Jewish community has been asking for its return. Pretoria University was only prepared to return individual pieces in the (unlikely) circumstances that the heirs could produce documentary proof of ownership. Considering how few Dutch Jews survived, the Dutch community's Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp regarded this as unacceptable.

"But more importantly," said Rabbi Soetendorp, "There is a body of evidence to show that Van Tilburg had stolen much of this collection, and bought the rest with money stolen from Jewish refugees." Rabbi Soetendorp believed that on moral grounds the university should not display the collection.

The Ronald Lauder Commission for Art Recovery and the SA Jewish Board of Deputies tried to negotiate, but the best that could be achieved was that the university promised to circulate a pamphlet explaining the dubious origins of the collection.⁴⁹ However, although the University of Pretoria website contains extensive information on the Van Tilburg collection, nowhere does this information appear.⁵⁰

The University of Johannesburg owns a collection of 8000 books willed to them by a convicted war criminal, UNISA Professor HJ De Vleeschauwer, who brought the books with him from Switzerland, to where he had fled to avoid arrest after the war. In 1940, he was appointed to Göring's ERR book selection commission with a "special responsibility for philosophy books." He had also stolen books from the University in Belgium while on its staff.⁵¹ A striking feature of his collection is the mysterious removal, by cutting or erasure, of ownership markings and names in many of the books.

The American Alliance of Museums

stipulates that "Acting ethically is different from acting lawfully" and that museums and custodians should "take affirmative steps to maintain their integrity so as to warrant public confidence. They must act not only legally but also ethically."⁵² Unlike the German cities dealt with above, or the National Gallery of Victoria, neither South African university has taken steps to restore these looted possessions or acknowledge that there is anything amoral or unethical in holding treasures stolen from murdered Jews.

Germany is confronting its past. It is this recognition of past guilt that enables true reconciliation to take place. "If there is to be reconciliation, first there must be truth."⁵³ This should apply as much to our academic institutions.

NOTES

- 1 Among the sculptures are Otto Baum's 1930 work "Standing Girl," Otto Freundlich's 1925 "Head," Knappe's "Hagar," Naum Slutzky's "Female Bust," Scharff's "Portrait of the Actress Anni Mewes," Gustav Heinrich Wolff's "Standing Figure," Emy Roeder's terracotta sculpture "Pregnant Woman," and Moll's "Dancer." Several featured in the Nazis' "Degenerate Art" exhibition. Three sculptures have yet to be identified. www.bloomberg.com/.../degenerate-sculptures-unearthed-from-bomb-r...Catherine Hickley. "Degenerate' Art Unearthed From Berlin Bomb Rubble" Nov 8, 2010 Bloomberg
- 2 H. Proud and W. Snyman, in *Hanns Ludwig Katz*, SA National Gallery, Cape Town, 1993, p47.
- 3 Erhard Oewerdieck and his wife Charlotte (née Porath) sheltered a Jewish office employee, Martin Lange, during the war in their home in Berlin-Neukölln. The entire time they shared their food and clothing with him as well. The risk and burden they assumed were all the greater since Oewerdieck, a sworn enemy of the Nazi system, was barred during the entire period from his job as auditor and tax consultant on account of "political unreliability." In 1939, Oewerdieck did not hesitate to spend his own money in order to finance the journey to Shanghai of ... [Show more] Arno Lachmann, his wife, and aged father, thus saving their lives. Oewerdieck was also instrumental in making possible the last-minute emigration to the United States, in March 1941, of the famous Jewish scholars Eugen Taeubler and Selma Taeubler-Stern, for whom he also kept a part of their library and personal papers. Family Details - The Righteous Among The Nations - db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId
- 4 Charles Hawley, 'Buried in a Bombed-Out Cellar: Nazi Degenerate Art Rediscovered in Berlin', *spiegel* on line Buried in a Bombed-Out Cellar: Nazi Degenerate Art ... www.spiegel.de > English Site > Zeitgeist > Art Nov 8, 2010.
- 5 Karen Egebo, The art that was forbidden - EXBERLINER. com Dec 6, 2010, www.exberliner.com/culture/art/the-art-that-was-forbidden
- 6 Mandela, Nelson, 6.12.1995.
- 7 For example, Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* was exhibited in Vienna's Belvedere Gallery as *Portrait of a Lady with Gold Background*; O'Connor, Anne-Marie, *The*

- Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt's Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 2013, p179.
- 8 O'Connor, Anne-Marie, op cit, p175.
- 9 <http://alphahistory.com/holocaust/jewish-property-seizures/#sthash.5fxSizqz.dpuf>.
- 10 Interview 2001, in O'Connor, Anne-Marie, op cit, p242.
- 11 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_plunder
- 12 The Claims Conference/ World Jewish Restitution Organization presented its findings on 11 September at the Museum & Politics Conference hosted by ICOM-Germany, ICOM-Russia, and ICOM-United States, St. Petersburg, Russia, in conjunction with the 250th anniversary of the Hermitage Museum Claims Conference notice, 10 September, 2014.
- 13 Engelmann, Bernt, *Germany Without Jews*, Bantam Books, Toronto, 1984, first printed in Germany in 1979, pp40, 282.
- 14 Hermann Hirsch - Städtisches Museum Göttingen, translated by Dr Ute Ben Yosef, www.museum.goettingen.de/texte/sonderausstellung_hirsch_englisch.htm
- 15 A self-portrait, a portrait of her mother Betty and a portrait of a friend's daughter.
- 16 *Hermann Hirsch (1861-1934), A Jewish Painter in Göttingen*, Civic Museum Göttingen, Exhibition catalogue, 20. 8. 2009 – 10. 1. 2010, p20.
- 17 Driever, Rainer, *Hermann Hirsch (1861-1934), Ein Jüdischer Maler in Göttingen*, p21.
- 18 Schlapeit-Beck Dagmar, Preface: *Hermann Hirsch (1861-1934), Ein Jüdischer Maler in Göttingen*.
- 19 2. 3. 1934
- 20 Schlapeit-Beck Dagmar, p25.
- 21 Marie Günther reported the sale of the house at the Central Registration Office in Bad Nenndorf. On 12 February 1949 the Central Claims Registry/Property Control blocked the planned re-purchase of the property by Frieda Bunnenberg.
- 22 It took some detective work for the Göttingen Museum researcher to track the work to the Jewish Board of Deputies. The self-portrait, which was in storage after the closure of the original Jewish Museum, had been given on request to a niece. She had passed away and willed it to a nephew in Zeekoewlei, Cape Town, who directed the researcher to the Board.
- 23 Driever, Rainer, Hermann Hirsch (1861-1934) : Werkverzeichnis, Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur, Göttingen, 2010, pp20 & 74.
- 24 On 19 August 2010. Driever, Rainer., op cit. p178.
- 25 With thanks to Susan Liebermann for generously sharing information, 23.11.2014.
- 26 Regarded as *Mischlings*, the two sons were conscripted for forced labour but survived the war. All three sons became doctors.
- 27 Gillian Cobley was told this by her cousin. By e-mail, 24.11.2014, Susan Liebermann.
- 28 Action T4 - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_T4; Euthanasia Program - United States Holocaust Memorial ... www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?ModuleId=10005200
- 29 JTA 3.9.2014.
- 30 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_T4#cite_note-10.
- 31 Liebermann-Villa on Lake Wannsee - Max Liebermann. www.liebermann-villa.de/en/biografie-max-liebermann.html, translated by U Ben Yosef
- 32 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Liebermann#cite_note-faz-stolper-16
- 33 These are cobble-stone sized brass plaques in the name of victims who had lived there www.stolpersteine-berlin.de/de/biografie/4854
- 34 Hickley, Catherine, Jewish Artist's Heirs Pressure Museums on Nazi-Era Losses 11.9.2012, www.bloomberg.com/.../jewish-artist-s-heirs-pressure-german-museums-en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liebermann_Villa
- 35 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liebermann_Villa
- 36 The director showed Susan and Gillian the painting wrapped in tissue paper – it is displayed for three months a year as it is too valuable to be placed on permanent display. Susan Liebermann, 23.11.2014.
- 37 H Proud and W. Snyman, pp 14-15.
- 38 Ibid, p41.
- 39 H. Jeppe, *South African Artists 1900-1962*, Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel, Johannesburg, 1963, p46.
- 40 Sachs, Joseph, 'Hans Katz', in *Jewish Affairs*, September 1947.
- 41 Kraftgenie, 24.6.2010 - Weimar: Hanns Ludwig Katz, weimarart.blogspot.com/2010/06/hanns-ludwig-katz.html.
- 42 Terence Matzdorff, interview, 6.7.2014.
- 43 Quoted in Ben Yosef, 'The Life and World of Felix Nussbaum (1904-1944)', Cape Town Holocaust Centre and Jacob Library, 2010, p24.
- 44 Ibid, pp2-3
- 45 Kaster, Karl Georg, op cit, p19.
- 46 Osnabruck Mayor Hans-Jurgen Flip, in Kaster, op cit., p5.
- 47 Govender, S, 'Joburg sisters win battle for looted Nazi artwork', *Sunday Times*, 3.8.2014.
- 48 Berger, N, *In those days, in these times, spotlighting events in Jewry - South African and General*, (Johannesburg, 1979), p53.
- 49 Many parties were involved: the SA Jewish Board of Deputies; Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology Brigitte Mbandla; the board of UP; the SA ambassador to the Netherlands, Carl Niehaus; the Dutch embassy in Pretoria; Dutch Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp; and the former minister of culture in the Netherlands, Aad Nuis. Bart Luijck. 'Jacob van Tilburg loses his head', *Mail & Guardian*, 6 Oct 1998.
- 50 JA van Tilburg (1888-1980) > University of Pretoria web. up.ac.za > ... > Van Tilburg Collection > JA van Tilburg (1888-1980).
- 51 Dick, Archie Scholarship, Identity and Lies: The Political Life of H.J. De Vleeschauer, 1940-1955. Periodical: Kleio. Volume: 342002. pp5-27 ; Archie L. Dick, *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures*, University of KwaZulu Natal, 2013.
- 52 Gideon Taylor Op-Ed: 'U.S. museums must deal fairly with Nazi-looted art claims', JTA, 1.12.2014.
- 53 Tyson, Timothy B, American historian, *Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story*.

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER: MYSTIC – AND SEX MANIAC?

*

Maurice Skikne

In July 2013, I attended the annual fair of Woman's Benevolent Society of Johannesburg. Amongst the many Judaic tomes on sale (and I must admit to being a book hoarder), were numerous paperbacks. One box contained many Isaac Bashevis Singer novels and short stories. I had never read Singer before, but somehow felt compelled to acquire this treasure box. The books sat in a cupboard at home until the December holidays of 2013 when, in a fit of boredom, I selected *The Manor* and began reading. My eyes and mental vistas opened! Not only was the text very readable, but one was drawn rapidly into the tale. Singer paints what I call "word pictures", ones so photographic, that one almost enters the vista he describes. The fact that these novels and tales were originally written in Yiddish and then translated in no way detracts from the author's original intentions. It is small wonder that, in 1978, Singer was elected a Nobel Laureate for Literature. At the prize ceremony in Stockholm, he gave his acceptance speech in Yiddish - what a lovely piece of *chutzpah* before the Swedish Royalty! I have thus become one of I B Singer's loyal fans.

The following extract from Singer's biographical note on the official Nobel Prize website well sums up Singer's career and achievement:

Singer began his writing career as a journalist in Warsaw in the years between the wars. He was influenced by his elder brother, now dead, who was already an author and who contributed to the younger brother's spiritual liberation and contact with the new currents of seething political, social and cultural upheaval. The clash between tradition and renewal, between other-worldliness and faith and mysticism on the one hand, and free thought, secularization doubt and nihilism on the other, is an essential theme in Singer's short stories and novels. The theme is Jewish, made topical by the barbarous conflicts of our age, a painful drama

between contentious loyalties. But it is also of concern to mankind, to us all, Jew and non-Jew, actualized by modern western culture's struggles between preservation and renewal. Among many other themes, it is dealt with in Singer's big family chronicles - the novels, *The Family Moskat* (1950), *The Manor* (1967), and *The Estate* (1969). These extensive epic works been compared with Thomas Mann's novel *Buddenbrooks*. Like Mann, Singer describes how old families are broken up by the new age and its demands, from the middle of the 19th Century up to the Second World War, and how they are split, financially, socially and humanly. But Singer's chronicles are greater in scope than Mann's novel and more richly orchestrated in their characterization. The author's apparently inexhaustible psychological fantasy has created a microcosm, or rather a micro-chaos, out of independent and graphically convincing figures.¹

The beauty of Singer's prose lies in how deftly he relates the 'Middle Ages' in Judaic history to modern times. He interweaves wonders with everyday life so well that the reader accepts such unusual phenomena and feels comfortable with them. Singer is able to spin a narrative that, while often distressing, is consistently stimulating and beguiling.

In addition to being an accurate description of what Jewish life in pre-war Poland was like, Singer's stories succeed in penetrating the inner thoughts of their protagonists. He dabbles deeply in mysticism and witchcraft which, although not generally known about, was practiced by many of our forebears. Beyond that, he deals very openly with the subjects of sexuality and love intrigues taking place among the *shtetl* communities. Having read his works, it has brought to the fore in my mind the notion that perhaps our very august author was himself a bit of a sex maniac. The reader is requested to go along with this idea for the time being. What appears to support this theory it is the fact that in virtually every Singer short story or novel, reference is made to the carnal practices of the main story characters, not once but numerous times. The more one reads into his works, the more one is convinced that many of the trysts described actually reflect aspects of Singer's own psyche.

Maurice Skikne, a frequent contributor to Jewish Affairs, has for many years been a student mentor and consultant at Johannesburg universities. He is chairman of the Jewish Genealogical Society of South Africa, and has an intense passion for the Yiddish language, its etymology and its humor.

It should not for a moment be imagined that sexual intrigues were conducted in the *shtetlach* only; they occurred in the larger towns as well. Nor were confined to Poland; intrigues took place as much in Lithuania. I recall my late mother-in-law often speaking about such 'goings-on' in her own *shtetl* of Salokis, near the Belarus border to the east. As she put it, "*Zey hobbenzech geliept, einer anander*" (they had love affairs - one to another). When she related such events, the tendency was to dismiss them as old wives tales. Now I realize that her descriptions were pretty accurate, and that he and others were well aware of such antics. What else was there to attract people's attention in a restricted community, forever suppressed by the *goyische* district squires and town officials? It was either that or studying religious subjects.

Beside these village intrigues, Singer also describes the abject poverty that most of the Jewish population suffered. It was only a very few who managed to rise above this. In *The Manor*, he describes the trials and tribulations of Calman Jacoby and, by his acquisition of the local Poritz's property, his family's rise to riches in the towns of Jampolski and Marshinov. Jacoby, however, loses his wife to disease while his daughter, in a fit of rebellion, marries the squire's son. Jacoby remarries, to his business rival's (Kaminer) daughter Clara, but she becomes a spendthrift who wantonly tries to ruin him. All the Jews, and even the peasant townfolk, suffer at the hands of the ruling regime. Their earnings are paltry, amounting to a few rubles per month. Even the local rabbi suffers this same affliction and is expected to carry out all his religious functions on whatever he receives. Related to this, another recurring theme in Singer are rituals of death and burial. One is intrigued to read how the corpse would be laid on the floor with two lighted candles at the head, and the feet facing the door of the room, before being taken to the morgue for washing and preparation for burial.

Jacoby is wont to quote many proverbs to emphasize a particular occasion, such as "The more property the more anxiety" (a Talmudic expression), "Money is a temptation and is a Chastisement" (attributed by Jacoby to the Chumash, in the context of what use material things had in the presence of G-d) and "Money will buy anything, even a seat in *Gan Aiden*", in response to a son-in-law who states that money is paramount, even in the next world.

In his book *The Slave* (1962), Singer rails against the wars instigated in the 1640s by the Cossacks led by Bohdan Chmielniki and the Swedish invasion of Poland. As the main character, Jacob, expresses it, "All of Poland is a vast cemetery". In both of these atrocious events, Cossacks and the Swedes swept through

Poland, laying waste to vast areas and villages pillaging, burning, raping and killing men, women, children and the aged. They obviously made targets of the Jews as they guessed that at least they had possessions and money they could take. As well as this the Cossack soldiers especially, kidnapped comely Jewish women and took them to their homes as "war-brides". Many of these eventually escaped and made their way back home to Poland. Jacob's wife and four young children are killed. He himself is ransomed by some Jews from his original home town and returns to live there. However another 'crime' is committed by him, in that he falls in love with a gentile peasant girl, Wanda. She is likewise obsessed with him, and they run away to marry civilly. On their return to the *shtetl*, Jacob passes her off as a Jewess, calling her Sarah. However, later her real heritage is revealed and they are excommunicated. This becomes a sad end to their lives. It is rather strange that Wanda is not allowed to convert, as is so easily achieved in modern times. One wonders at the cruelty imposed on those who so wished to live as Jews. What is strange is that there are numerous allusions in Jewish historical literature of women converting to Judaism. In fact, there are times in Jewish history where non-Jews were encouraged to convert.

Another favorite Singer subject is mysticism, whether Jewish or Polish. He himself was the son of a rabbi, and indeed from a rabbinical lineage. He also claimed to have been something of a Hebrew/Torah scholar, but only rarely does he reveal himself to be in any way religious. By his own admission, he tended more towards agnosticism (as opposed to outright atheism). Of course, he often times quoted characters in his books and short stories who claimed to be atheists, and one guesses that he was somehow alluding to his way of thinking thereby. Perchance he was hiding such thoughts lest it undermine his popularity as an author. The question arises as to whether, in the period his stories are set (i.e. from the 1860s onwards) the extent of the crass superstition amongst the Jews of this and prior eras was enhanced by the paganistic spiritualism and thinking of the local Polish and Russian *foinsiher* (peasants), a phenomenon that was pronounced despite the influence of the Catholic (Polish), and Orthodox (Russian) churches. Indeed, the Jews also had their own 'spooks', like dybbuks, goblins and literal ghosts to contend with, even to the extent that local rabbis alluded to such phenomena when addressing their congregations (whether to keep such congregants in check, or because they actually believed such tales themselves is open to debate). Certainly, in modern times such notions have largely disappeared.

Singer was consistently drawn to mythology

and spiritualism. Of particular interest is the story 'Jachid and Jachida', in the collection *Short Friday* (first published in English in 1961). Herein is an account of what can be termed an *Alter Ego* tale. Essentially, Singer creates a scenario wherein the 'Neshomas' (Souls) are the 'Real' beings that descend to inhabit our physical bodies on Earth, thereby giving them character and life. To quote from the story:

In a prison where souls bound for Sheol – Earth they call it there – await destruction, there hovered the female soul Jechida. Souls forget origin. Purah, the Angel of Forgetfulness, he who dissipates God's light and conceals His face. His face holds dominion everywhere beyond the Godhead. Jechida, unmindful of her descent from the Throne of Glory, had sinned. Her jealousy had caused much trouble in the world where she dwelled. She had suspected all female angels of having affairs with her lover Jachid, had not only blasphemed God but even denied him. Souls, she said, were not created but had evolved out of nothing: they had neither mission nor purpose. Although the authorities were extremely patient and forgiving, Jechida was sentenced to death. The judge fixed the moment of her descent to that cemetery called Earth.

The attorney for Jechida appealed to the Superior Court of Heaven, even presented a petition to Metatron, the Lord of the Face. But Jechida was so filled with sin and so impenitent that power could save her. The attendants seized her, tore her from Jachid, clipped her wings, cut her hair, and clothed her in a long white shroud. She was no longer allowed to hear the music of the spheres, to smell the perfumes of Paradise and to meditate on the secrets of the Torah, which sustain the soul. She no longer bathed in the wells of balsam oil. In the prison cell, the darkness of the nether world already surrounded her. But her greatest torment was her longing for Jachid. She could no longer reach him telepathically. Nor could a message to him, all of her servants had been having been taken away. Only the fear of death was left to Jechida.

A most intriguing Philosophy! An almost Kantian concept of thought pervades Singer's manner of conception in the world that we humans occupy. One could plausibly argue that Singer was something of a pioneer of thought about the World to Come! As he views it, we are merely a transitory phase in the life span of a Soul. To all intents and purpose, we are empty beings until our ordained *Neshomas* occupy the biological collections of bones, tissues, organs and other material components to make us human. However, our concept of

what the "Other World" actually is has always been vague. Why, the reader may ask? The answer is simply because, in all of Man's thinking, philosophy and writings, and our own history, no actual proof or vision has ever been presented about the existence of "*Yenem Veld*" (the Other World). We can only hope that this does exist, and that our efforts in this life, will be rewarded as promised in the Torah. In the tale of Jechida, the death of souls only occurs when these become exhausted or vulgar. But then, it is not known what happens to the dead. She is convinced that the soul becomes extinct, but that spark of life remains. Such a soul rots and becomes semen. Then a grave digger puts it into a womb, and a type of fungus develops, called a child. So far as Jechida knows, they return through Gehenna, mature into adulthood, and thereafter rot, never to return.

Another Singer story relating to the above themes is 'The last Demon', in which the narrator tells that he is a Demon, and opines that Man himself is demonic. Singer asserts that there are both Gentile and Jewish demons, and that the latter even speak Yiddish!

Mysticism is hence one of Singer's main preoccupations. One is struck by how so much of his writing deals with demons, ghosts and spectres and numerous other supernatural powers. These so-called beings and their antics and powers are dealt with in such novels and stories as 'Gimpel the Fool' (1953) to later publications like *A Friend of Kafka* (1970) and *A Crown of Feathers* (1973). In the story 'The Magazine' in the latter collection, he notes that some of his editors criticized his passion for sexuality, and his *meshugassen* (crazes) for spiritualism. Evidently, this writer is not unique in his assessment of Singer's preoccupations.

NOTES

- 1 http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1978/singer-bio.html?print=1#.VNiqKjj9ncc

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CHILD OF ZULULAND

*

Zita Nurok

She trudged wearily up the street slope towards our home. Since I'd met her five years previously when we employed her, she'd become buxom.

"Hello Madam." Her words were flat and unemotional. "Oh hello Nancy." We walked into the house silently. With a sigh she lifted the hand-woven grass basket from her head, and set it down on the kitchen floor. The smell of Zululand grass mingled with a rich smell of mangoes, pawpaws, guava, and granadilla.

"How is your son?" I asked gently. She straightened up and looked at me sadly. Her round face became contorted as tears welled up and spilled out under her black-rimmed glasses. She bit her lips and began sobbing. "I went to see Chaka the witchdoctor near my house yesterday. He threw the bones. He says my dead father is calling to me. He wants me to make him funeral party. I didn't invite anybody for a party after he died. The Zulu people do that. Then we have good luck."

I looked at this middle-aged woman wearing a floral print dress and matching scarf around her head. A brown vinyl bag matched her comfortable flat shoes. Her arms were surprisingly firm, and her fingers still nimble, most likely from her many years of hard work.

"What do you need for a funeral party? I asked. "Perhaps I can help you." "Oh thank you Madam. I must spend a lot of money to kill a goat and roast it. We will make much food and drink too much *skokiaan*! All our relatives and friends will be happy, and my father too."

She sniffed back the tears and wiped her nose with the back of her hand. She laughed

a nasal laugh, which rippled up from inside her. "Then my son he will stop drinking and I will not be sick anymore," she prophesied. "Yes, I will be strong," she reassured herself. "Ai," she sighed shaking her head. She showed me her purchases bought at the market on her way to our home. She'd take them to her family in the evening.

Nancy lived with her husband, son and two daughters in a two-bed roomed brick house in Kwa-Mashu city twenty-five miles away from Durban. She commuted daily to take care of our two sons and to clean our home.

"The prices at the market were good today, Madam."

I helped her repack her produce, and left her to begin the day's work. As I watered the pink bougainvillea on the balcony of our townhouse, my thoughts went back to the five years we'd shared with this woman. Our two boys had grown to love her as a member of our small family. She respected my husband, and she often asked his advice about money matters, and how best to manage her family resources. Uneasily I wondered what the next five years held for us and for her.

Before she went home that evening, I invited her to accompany us on our upcoming vacation in the Drakensberg mountains.

"God bless you," she said clapping her hands and bending her knees. "The party for my son will be after that time, she decided quickly.

The four-hour car drive into the mountains southwest of Zululand was pleasant. We sang nursery rhymes and simple Hebrew songs the boys had learned at the synagogue nursery school. Nancy taught us Zulu folksongs. She told stories of her meagre schooling that she'd received in an old church down in the valley near her father's kraal. She learned, until the age of twelve, to read and write in English. How different her life was from ours.

As we travelled further away from the city her mood became buoyant. Her brown eyes

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were soft and warm, and her laugh bubbled over. She shouted the greeting "*Dumela*," in response to the calls of the scantily clad dancing children along the sides of the bumpy roads. They wore only the brightly coloured beads of their tribes.

Eagerly Nancy put our youngest son Steven on her lap, and she held Mark close, as she pointed out of the window to thatched roofed huts on the hillsides, and horses grazing in green valleys. She threw back her head and laughed at young herdsman prodding stubborn cattle crossing the dirt road.

Giant's Castle resort is four thousand feet above sea level. Our days were spent exploring the secret places of the sun-drenched Drakensberg terrain. At night, we had little difficulty in falling asleep.

On the second night, a sudden knocking at the door of our bedroom woke us out of a deep sleep. My husband opened the door to see Nancy bareheaded and shaken, in her purple overall and no shoes. Her brown face appeared a strange mud grey.

"I cannot sleep in that room anymore," she said. We invited her in. The children stirred but continued to sleep.

"At night I hear them. Someone was killed there years ago. There are spirits creeping around."

I glanced over to our boys, and suggested that we carry them down with us to investigate.

We ventured out into the night. The moon threw its blanket of soft light over the mountains and the servants' quarters in the backyard, separated from the main hotel building. We tramped through the damp grass in our slippers, all of us wide-awake now in the crisp mountain air.

Nancy turned the handle, which was hanging on a single nail in the green door of the room. As she pushed it open paint fell down. How different this is from our cozy room upstairs I thought. Was this fair?

A dim bare light bulb hung on a wire attached to the ceiling and threw our moving shadows onto the whitewashed walls. A sour smell of cooked mielie pap overwhelmed me. In the centre on the floor stood a blackened primus stove with a cheap tin pot on it containing the stodgy mixture, which gave off the odour. She walked over to the small wooden table in one corner, the shuffling of her bare feet on the cement floor, like sandpaper being scraped on a wooden plank.

"This bottle - it falls on the floor when the room is very dark." She picked up the bottle of purple methylated spirits, which she used for the primus. It was closed with rolled up newspaper stuffed into the opening.

"The spirits- they want to kill me. My bed moved when I was sleeping." She pulled her own woollen blanket off the crumpled white

hotel sheets. There was a loud crash. The iron-framed bed, which had been balanced on two bricks under each of the four legs, had collapsed.

My heart was thumping. Wind blew the small curtain. Steven and Mark were awake. We reassured them that everything was going to be all right as they stared into the dim light and held us tightly.

Nancy grabbed her plastic shopping bag, which contained her clothing. "I must have another room."

"See, I put this powder on the floor. Philemon the chef in the hotel gave it to me." She'd sprinkled it all around the walls on the floor, and at the entrance to the room. "To keep the spirits out," she told us.

She slammed the door and the handle fell to the ground. We made our way to the hotel reception desk to ask for a better room, which Nancy was given. She transferred her meagre belongings gratefully, and we returned to our hotel room.

The remaining four days of the holiday passed happily for everyone. Nancy was fascinated with the magic of our camera, and posed enthusiastically beside waterfalls and rivers, on mountain slopes with and without the children.

"You can remember me when you are big boys," she told them as if she knew what was to come.

She held the funeral party in July, and when she returned to work she seemed encouraged by the thought that now her son would be better. I broke our news to her.

"Ou," she exclaimed looking intently at me. "You are going - where to?"

"America, Nancy".

"How far is it?"

"Thousands of miles away - very far."

"Ou - how will you go?"

"By aeroplane."

"But you will come back?" she asked in a monotone.

"Perhaps."

"Who will do your washing and ironing?"

"I will buy a machine."

She laughed that nasal laugh, disbelievingly, for across the soft green hills of Zululand the age of washers and dryers had not yet come.

"Who will shine the Shabbat candlesticks?" she asked pointing to the tall brass candlesticks on the sideboard. "It will be too hard. You will get too tired and you will come back again. I'm going to wait for you." She folded the shirt, which she had just ironed, satisfied with her conclusion.

In the weeks that followed, her mood vacillated. Her irritation with the whole family became her protective shield to hide her sadness and confusion.

September 15th arrived. Packers and other

strangers loaded a monstrous removal truck with our familiar pieces of furniture, and boxes of our possessions. Alien faces were joyous with bargains bought from our home. Nancy chatted and laughed throughout.

The day darkened into its end. The boys were asleep, having hugged her and said their sad goodbyes earlier. My husband and I confronted our loyal friend.

"Nancy, soon it will be time for you to leave." I told her quietly.

"Ou, Madam," her voice quivered. She fell down at my feet beating her worn hands on the wooden parquet floor. A pleading cry came up from her and echoed through the bare rooms of our town house.

"Who will look after me? Oh Madam, who will help me?"

I stared down at her, crouched on the floor. "I will write to you," I almost shouted, to hide my own emotion.

"You have the savings account we set up for you, Nancy," my husband told her gently.

She stood up and smoothed down her apron.

"Ai, thanks," her voice was thick. "Thank you."

Comforted by these hopes, she gave me her address. As she grasped my hands and looked at me, she laughed and said, "You will come back here. I know it. If I tell Chaka the witchdoctor to throw the bones, he will tell me that."

"Perhaps Nancy, perhaps," I turned away from her. My husband accompanied her to the door.

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THE NEW REFORM JUDAISM – CHALLENGES AND REFLECTIONS

*

Beverley May

The concept of reforming Reform Judaism is an intriguing reason to read this book.

Innovation, improvement and the search for the Next Big Thing are at the heart of modern society. Religions, on the other hand, have a reputation for resisting modernity and the changes that it brings. Chaim Potok wrote about these competing forces when, referencing Maimonides, said that his writings reflected “two essentially irreconcilable approaches at the very core of Judaism; one rational, facing outward toward the world and general culture, eager for all worthwhile knowledge, prepared to enter the market place of ideas. The other mystical, facing inward toward its own sources, possessed of its unalloyed vision of Jewish destiny, feeding off its inner strength and rejecting vehemently any small distortion of its vision of reality from civilizations alien to what it sees as the pure essence of Judaism” (*Wandering – History of the Jews*, Fawcett Books, New York, 1978). Alongside the challenges of a Jewish religious stream grappling with the need to change, this book also presents an opportunity to learn more than the fuzzy biosphere of hearsay can provide about what Reform Judaism is truly about.

The first sentence provides a succinct evaluation: “a practical approach to religious observance that acknowledges the need to bring one’s ritual practice into harmony with one’s actual religious beliefs.” Further clarification includes, “The Reform movement accepts that the Torah should be interpreted to meet the needs of contemporary Jews. This is not a new approach. The sages of the classical rabbinic tradition explicitly argued that the Torah was not in heaven and that God had

given the responsibility for the interpretation of that Torah to human beings. Yet the Reform movement took this idea much further than traditionalists could because they were freed from the shackles of *Halacha*. Not having to follow thousands of detailed laws, Reform Jews could completely re-conceptualize what it meant to be a religious Jew and how Judaism could and should be practiced.”

In the Chapter entitled ‘In Search of a Reform Jewish Theology’, there is a section that deals with the problems associated with defining Judaism. This section should resonate across the board, irrespective of Jewish affiliation. The writer discusses the majority of classic definitions, skillfully describing how our culture, religion, history and ancestry all cohere into the definition of Judaism. This section also presents a picture of the diversity inherent in Judaism, “The diversity of Jewish belief systems multiplied by the middle of the Second Temple Period. Part of the fascination with the Dead Sea Scrolls is the alternative belief system or systems they reveal. Jews in the biblical era and particularly the Second Temple period apparently believed in all sorts of different things.”

In this way, the author lays down a foundation for the reader, clarifying the key tenets of this stream of Judaism and then moves on to the challenges that it faces.

The book approaches familiar, traditional challenges with forthrightness, none more so than inclusivity. All streams of Judaism grapple with this issue and Reform Jews have dealt with discrimination applied to some ritual obligations to ensure that no Jew should be limited in their religious practice in any way. This inclusivity has become the hallmark of the modern Reform movement. Women, gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered Jews are all given equal opportunity to practice their religion on equal terms with male, heterosexual, Jews. This being said, the book points out that in spite of this inclusive approach, it

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took until 1972 for the first woman Rabbi (Rabbi Sally Priesand) to be ordained in the Reform movement.

The author has spent time in South Africa and it was interesting to read his views on our particular community. With respect to *kashrut*, he explains that American Reform Jews were radical in their rejection of dietary laws, relative to other diaspora communities: "Progressive Jews in England, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and other English-speaking countries generally live in Jewish communities where the majority of Jews affiliate with Orthodoxy. That does not mean that they themselves are practicing Orthodox Judaism, because most are not. Nevertheless, they support the Orthodox system of synagogue life and its insistence on the centrality of Jewish law, at least in public observances. Reform Jews in these countries are judged on this basis and as a result feel tremendous pressure to confirm as much as possible to communal norms."

This is contrary to the state of affairs in the United States, as American Jews have a long history of accepting religious pluralism. The following statement from the Pittsburgh Platform (1885) codified the American Reform's movement on *kashrut*: "We hold that all such Mosaic and Rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state." These laws "fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days in apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation." With reference to Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the author says, "he and many others in the Reform movement felt that the emphasis needed to be shifted from pointless obsession with what goes into one's mouth, to greater concern over the words that come out of one's mouth."

Rabbi Kaplan points out that many forgot that the laws regulating diet were rejected because they were believed to hinder rather than encourage spirituality. In the spirit of this courageous assessment of Reform Judaism, the author discusses the volte face on a blanket rejection of traditional food restrictions as the movement began to re-evaluate their attitudes towards *kashrut* and to reconsider long-abandoned practices.

In the chapter entitled 'Marriage and Divorce', the author discusses the importance of family life in Judaism and how both Orthodox and Reform streams have adapted to modern society. For example, the marriage ceremony used to include a betrothal period of about one year. Both movements have since dropped this requirement and both stages (betrothal and marriage) are included in the same wedding ceremony. Further innovation of the Reform ceremony, however, has been to move towards

egalitarianism. The *ketubah* is an example. It includes "terms of what the couple promise each other rather than what the man promises the woman. Likewise, there is an exchange of rings during the Reform wedding service." The question of whether it was permissible to exchange rings was discussed as early as 1871 at the Augsburg Synod.

The same chapter discusses the fact that in Reform Judaism, "there is a more open approach that is accepting of different types of alternative lifestyles." These include marriages between gay or lesbian couples. Kaplan explains that "in recent years, most Reform rabbis have come to accept the idea that sexual orientation is something we are born with or develops as a result of the complex interplay between a number of genetic, hormonal, and environmental influences at a young age."

This discussion is followed, inevitably, by one on intermarriage: "All the innovations pioneered and the changes accepted pale in comparison to the subject of intermarriage. According to Jewish law, a Jew is only permitted to marry another Jew." In the 1970s the Reform movement in America found that it had the highest rates of intermarried couples of all American Jewish denominations, partly because it was the least traditional and most tolerant. As a result in 1977, a demographer from Harvard, Elihu Bergman, extrapolated that the Jewish population in the United States would decline precipitously. This resulted in calls within the movement to reach out to unaffiliated and intermarried Jews in order to influence the "religious direction of intermarried couples, potentially influencing many to gravitate toward affiliation within a Reform temple." As a result the movement continued to encourage conversion to Judaism and also welcomed intermarried couples in which the non-Jewish partner had not converted.

Jewish divorce and the application of egalitarian principles is dealt with next in the chapter, where the Reform movement's determination to find fairness in traditional law around divorce is again highlighted. These changes have swept away the difficulties experienced by a woman whose husband refuses to grant her a *get*. Such a woman becomes *agunah* (a chained woman), and is prohibited from remarrying or even having sex with another man, because she is still married. Any children that result from subsequent relationships are considered *mamzerim*. "The Reform movement rejects this idea because the child would suffer from the sins of his or her parents."

Perennial questions around Jewish identity are dealt with in this book through the lens of Progressive Judaism. The author discusses the dilemma in American Jewry, explaining that because American Jews feel accepted

in American society, they no longer feel that they are in exile. They have moved on from the belief that, post-World War II, their primary goal was the survival of the Jewish community. As a result, the primary cause supported by the American community was the State of Israel: "American Jews gave generously to any charity that represented an Israeli institution." Kaplan explains how this has changed: "But what resonated for those old enough to remember the news reports of Nazi atrocities or the miraculous victory of Israel over the Arab armies in June 1967 does not necessarily move those who were born after 1980. This has created a generation gap that threatens to undermine Jewish communal institutions, including those of the Reform movement."

Innovation is a marker of Progressive Jewry, and this book delves into some of the changes that have been implemented in line with the technological advances of the last century. Since 2009, American Reform Jewry has formally endeavoured to use the potential presented by modern technology to reach its members. There is a recognition in this discussion that some fear that it will "lure Jews away from the old ways of connecting that require us to be in the same physical space" and that "the pessimists fear that it will become a substitute for in-the-flesh contact, and that if people start getting their needs met in the virtual world, they will have no need for the real world." In introducing these ideas at the 2009 URJ (Union for Reform Judaism) Biennial conference in Toronto, Rabbi Eric Yoffie assured 3000 delegates that "from the time of Ezra, we Jews have always adapted to our environment and taken advantage of the latest technologies." He used the example set when Jews moved from using stone tablets to parchment to paper, saying that "we will move with equal ease to the electronic word." He also reminded those present that "the web does what Judaism has always aspired to do: it opens up the vast treasury of Jewish knowledge to everyone." In line with this thinking, Rabbi Robert Barr, founder of Congregation

Beth Adam in Cincinnati, developed the first progressive online synagogue. In the first four months they had 6200 visitors from forty-nine states and sixty countries. Some of these visitors are members of Beth Adam who live in Cincinnati but are unable to come to services on a particular week. Others used to live in the region but would like to keep in touch with the congregation in spite of having moved away. There are also elderly users of the online synagogue who find it preferable to the physical difficulty of attending shul in the traditional way.

The scope of the book extends to the politics of the Reform movement with special attention to the American movement. This chapter (2) provides insights into Jewish leadership.

The World Union for Progressive Judaism is the international umbrella organization of the Reform, Liberal, Progressive and Reconstructionist movements, serving 1200 congregations with 1.8 million members in more than 45 countries. In December 2011, the President of the Union at the time, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, is quoted in the book as saying, "we are poised at one of the most critical and dramatic crossroads in all of Jewish history. If we stay put and leave things as they are we will have failed the test of Jewish leadership. But we are not going to stay put. We are the Reform Movement and we're going to get MOVING. We're going to MOVE forward with strength and creativity." He also set three priorities for his presidency; catalysing congregational change, engaging the next generation and extending the circles of responsibility.

In conclusion, the picture presented by this book is of a courageous movement determined to thrive in modern society, maintaining its traditions and, most importantly, the moral values inherited from its forefathers.

The New Reform Judaism – Challenges and Reflections by Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 2013

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JEWISH LIFE IN SOUTH WEST AFRICA NAMIBIA: A HISTORY

*

Naomi Musiker

Although there are in existence a great many books on the history of Namibia, formerly South West Africa, the book under review is the first to comprehensively outline the history of the Jewish community in that country, specifically the Windhoek Hebrew Congregation.

Prior to the appearance of this volume, Nissen and Sam Davis had contributed articles on the subject of South West African Jewry in the *Southern African Times* of 2 January 1959 and September 1973 respectively. Olga Levinson, a prominent resident of South West Africa, was responsible for a well-known article, first published in the *South West Africa Annual* of 1982, which provided a valuable summary of the Jewish pioneers of SWA and their contribution to the development of the territory.

The present volume fills a major gap in the historical records of Jewry in the African Diaspora. It is extremely interesting that the historical material was compiled over a period of time by five separate researchers including Pearle and June Horowitz, Rabbi Richard Newman, Joachim Putz and Perri Caplan before being finally edited and completed by David Saks, an experienced and prolific author of many articles and works of South African Jewish, military and political history. The most important factor in its production was the active support and encouragement of Harold Pupkewitz, Honorary Life President of the Windhoek Congregation and his team of administrative assistants, Candy Müller and Heidi Müller. Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, Country Communities Rabbi of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and CEO and Spiritual Leader to the African Jewish Congress, provided useful information and guidance on the book's content. Tribute is also paid to the book committee of the Windhoek Hebrew Congregation under the chairmanship

of Nahum Gorelick.

The book is arranged into five broad sections: General History of the Jews of Namibia; The Jewish Contribution to the Development of SWA/Namibia; Family Histories; Appendices (of which there are eleven) and Indexes. There is a wealth of valuable and fascinating material in these sections, but the reviewer does not always agree with the arrangement of the contents. For example, there are scattered throughout the various chapters of the General History section separate descriptions of the founding and development of early Jewish communities in towns such as Windhoek. It might have been preferable to edit some of the general background information and consolidate the information on the first Jewish settlements in the territory and the subsequent growth of the various Jewish congregations.

In the section on 'The War Years: Tragedy in Europe (1933-1945)', the statement is rather surprising that there was relatively little experience of Nazi style antisemitism towards Jewish inhabitants of SWA. There was substantial evidence of a Nazi propaganda network established in this former German colony. A South West African Commission set up in 1935 reported evidence of the penetration of the Nazi movement, particularly the so-called 'Grey Shirts'. A Jewish witness in Luderitz complained before the Commission of the persecution of Jews in the territory after the commencement of the Nazi movement, covertly financed and supported by the German Nazi regime. The chapters entitled 'The Road to Independence' and 'Namibian Jewry in the Independence Era' contain much new material and form an excellent summary which rounds off events of the present era.

Section II, on the Jewish contribution to the development of South West Africa-Namibia, is one of the highlights of the volume. Its title is based on the seminal article by Olga Levinson noted above. It covers information on areas including farming and farm product trading, commerce, trade and industry, transport and related services, mining and prospecting, fishing and shipping, medicine and health care, politics and civic administration, education and culture, sports, hospitality services and civil society organizations. These entries are complemented by fascinating anecdotes and summarized in an eight page table.

Naomi Musiker, a veteran contributor to Jewish Affairs and long-serving member of its Editorial Board, has contributed numerous biographical articles for the Dictionary of SA Biography and the Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa and, as an indexer, has worked for some of South Africa's leading publishers and indexed many important reference works. She has held the position of archivist at the SA Jewish Board of Deputies since 1992.

Section III is entitled Family Histories and forms the heart of the entire volume (pp113-364). There is considerable overlap between it and Section II on the Jewish Contribution to the Development of SWA-Namibia.

Most of the family histories were compiled by Pearle Horwitz and Richard Newman, with assistance from June Horwitz. A number were compiled by Perri Caplan and a handful by family members themselves. The entries are arranged alphabetically by name of pioneer and contain information on the achievements of the individual, including the names of his or her spouse and descendants. The editor admits that no attempt was made to achieve consistency of content and length and there is inconsistency in the style of writing as the authors included any and all information provided. It is possible that a certain amount of judicious editing would have enhanced this section. There is also a dearth of photographs illustrating these histories and many reproductions are of poor quality. Photo sources are specified if known. All other photos come from Pearle Horwitz's collection.

Numerous families and individuals are not covered in this section because information was too limited to justify a full entry. They are listed in Appendix A.

Despite these drawbacks, the section is invaluable for genealogical research and for providing insight into the lives and achievements of the Jewish pioneers of SWA-Namibia. The compilers are to be congratulated for the amount of dedicated research and work which went into tracing the descendants of families, many of whom are scattered throughout the world.

There are an unusual number of appendices in the book, many of which are in tabular form. Possibly most of these could have been included in the main body of the book in relevant sections. For example, 'Appendix B: Newer members and associates of the Windhoek Hebrew Congregation' could have appeared in the main section on the Windhoek Congregation. Likewise, the cemetery lists could have appeared under the names of individual congregations discussed earlier in the book.

One could also argue about the necessity of reprinting the articles of Nissen Davis, Sam Davis and Olga Levinson in full (Appendices E-G). Most of the information in these articles is embodied in the text of the book. Their contribution could be acknowledged by a few excerpts in the text and suitable entries in the bibliography. Similarly, Harold Pupekewitz's speech to the African Jewish Congress could have appeared in the early part of the book where tribute is paid in a memorial to Harold Pupekewitz and his contribution to the Namibian community.

My main concern is the inclusion of the Bibliography as Appendix J. This is highly

unusual. The Bibliography should be a section on its own, placed just before the Index. There are two indexes at the end of the volume, one of women and one of families. I could not find the topical index mentioned in the table of contents. These two indexes are in tabular form and are of great importance. However, the reviewer does not agree that page numbers are not necessary because the family histories provided in the text are alphabetical. The fact is that family and individual names are scattered throughout the text and do not only appear in the family histories. Reference to these names is lost without a linking page index. It would also have greatly assisted the researcher if a subject and place name index had been included as information to place names is likewise dispersed throughout the text.

These minor quibbles apart, the book remains a milestone in Jewish Southern African history and will be treasured by all who wish to know more about the fast disappearing communities of Southern Africa.

- Copies of the book can be obtained through the African Jewish Congress. Contact: Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft (moshe@beyachad.co.za/ thetravellingrabbi@gmail.com)

Jewish Life in South West Africa/Namibia: A History, Windhoek Hebrew Congregation, 2014.


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I WAS A BOY IN BELSEN

*

Marcia Leveson

What distinguishes this account of a Holocaust survivor from most others is that it is a child's eye view. Tomi Reichental was born on a 120 hectare farm in Slovakia in 1935 and was only nine when he, his mother and brother found themselves on a cattle truck to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

Until recently Reichental has been silent about his experience as a "boy in Belsen". But now he devotes most of his time talking and lecturing on his life and experiences. He spreads the message that we should never, ever forget; but also he concentrates on the importance of combating racial hatred and promoting reconciliation – the principles for which Nelson Mandela is renowned. For his work, Reichental has been awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

With amazing recall and remarkable lack of bitterness, Reichental writes of his carefree early life - not in the Pale about which many readers are now familiar – but in an area of Europe that was relatively secure and prosperous for Jews, and above all was rural. The Reichentals were the only Jewish family in the district (the other two Jewish families had converted), and their lives were hardly distinguishable from that of the Christian neighbors, except for an invisible social barrier. The reader is drawn into the details of the life of the times – the taste of the food, the dress, the family pursuits - tobogganing, riding a motorbike, fishing, eating fruit from the trees. They were very friendly with the local Catholic priest who played cards with Tomi's parents and who was to become instrumental in trying to help them escape the Nazis by teaching them the rudiments of Catholicism and obtaining false papers. He was later to be honored for his part in their story.

Tomi's beloved Oumama and Oupapa ran the only decent shop in the village, and his farmer father loved opera and socializing. His relatives on both sides of the family were numerous and Tomi and his brother Miki enjoyed visits from and to their cousins who lived nearby.

And then came the war. In 1941 his grandfather's shop was taken from him and in 1942 deportations of Jews began. Some few escaped, mainly over the border to Hungary, others managed to secure exemption papers for a while. Gradually antisemitic incidents increased and the Reichental boys were the butt of hatred and bullying. One by one Tomi's uncles disappeared, and their stories are woven into the narrative. Tomi and his mother and brother were hidden for a while during routine searches by peasants who scorned the notorious Hlinka raids and, after vainly trying to flee to Bratislava, Tomi, his brother and mother were sent to Belsen. His father remained behind but was also arrested and disappeared – for a while.

The middle section of the book details how they eked out a life and struggled to exist in the camp. The backdrop is all there - the corpses among which the children played, the extreme cold, the inedible and meagre food, the brutality of the guards, the constant disease and dying, the stench of the crematoria. But as well, we learn of the survival skills of Tomi's intrepid family and the bravery of his aunt Margo who helped ensure their survival. Miraculously, although 35 member of the family were murdered or died from their suffering during this period, Tomi, his brother, mother and aunt were among those liberated by the British and were subsequently reunited with their father. They returned to their village and what was left of their life there.

Reichental then details his later life in Israel, Germany and Ireland where he built a prosperous career, married and produced children and grandchildren. I found this part of the account less enthralling but nevertheless life affirming. What is so unusual is the matter of fact way in which the story unfolds, the sense that life continues even under extreme conditions, and then apparently returns almost to normal. Instead of a tale of sufferings and horror, the focus is much more on how ordinary life goes on. I believe this is a function of the narrative being that of a young boy, who only understood as he grew older the true extent of the history in which he was involved.

Therefore the social history of the time, the life of Jews in Slovakia, the particular perspective of a nine year old being sprung from his life ease into the horror of the Nazi's Final Solution, and of his miraculous survival and complete rehabilitation, is strikingly

Dr Marcia Leveson, a long-serving member of the editorial board of Jewish Affairs, is a former Professor in the English Department and currently an Honorary Research Fellow at Wits University. She has written extensively in the area of South African fiction and edited a number of anthologies of fiction and poetry.

original and readable, without mitigating the reality as we have come to know it.

Reichental has lectured in many countries, including South Africa, and his well-written book, which included photographs, is a

testimony to the indomitable spirit of European Jewry.

I Was a Boy in Belsen by Tomi Reichental, O'Brien Press, Dublin, 2011.

JUSTICE A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

*

Ralph Zulman

Edwin Cameron has been a Justice of South Africa's Constitutional Court since 1 January 2009. He was educated at Pretoria Boys' High School and Stellenbosch and Oxford Universities. A Rhodes Scholar, he won top academic prizes and awards. During the apartheid years, he was a human rights lawyer, and was appointed as a judge by President Mandela in 1994. Before serving in the Constitutional Court, he was a judge of the Supreme Court of Appeal for eight years and of the High Court for six.

Cameron chaired the governing council of the University of the Witwatersrand from 1998- 2008, and remains involved in many charitable and public causes. He has received honors for his human rights work, including a special award by the Bar of England and Wales for his 'contribution to international jurisprudence and the protection of human rights'. He holds honorary doctorates in law from Kings College London (2008), the University of the Witwatersrand (2009), Oxford University (2011) and the University of St Andrews (2012).

Justice: A Personal Account consists of an introduction, seven chapters, notes, abbreviations, acknowledgements, information on the author, an index of persons, and an index of subjects.

In Chapter One, 'Law Under Apartheid', the author's first encounter with the law is movingly described. It was at the funeral of his elder sister, Laura, just before he turned eight. This took place in the Avbob chapel in Rebecca Street, Pretoria, where his father sat stiffly between two uniformed prison guards. "Despite the desperate reaches to which alcoholism often took him, he carried himself with a natural dignity, and sat silently motionless, between his captors." It was not clear to Cameron why he was in prison. (It

later emerged that it was in connection with a conviction of car theft).

Cameron's second encounter with the law related to the trial and appeal of the Dean of the Anglican Cathedral in Johannesburg, the Very Reverend Gonville Aubie French-Beytagh. The latter had been apprehended under the Terrorism Act and locked up, initially in solitary confinement, without being charged. An international campaign pressed the apartheid authorities to charge or release him. In August 1971, he was put on summary trial accused of terrorist activities. The trial was presided over by an "apartheid stalwart", Mr Justice Cillie, Judge President of the Transvaal Provincial Division of the Supreme Court. Rev French-Beytagh was convicted but successfully took the matter on appeal, and was discharged.

Sydney Kentridge (now Sir Sidney Kentridge, QC), who later gained international fame for his "withering cross examination" of a security policeman who 'bludgeoned' Steven Bantu Biko to death in September 1977, appeared for the Dean in both the trial and appeal. His masterly and brilliant 'lawyering' made a profound impression on the young Cameron.

The author then recounts an early judicial ruling involving Nelson Mandela, which he describes as having immediately soared to the top of his list of all-time favorites. The case concerned the Defiance Campaign and the role in it of "a tall, ruggedly built, charismatic and impressively talented 35 year-old attorney, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela." Mandela was convicted, but Judge Rumpff showed unexpected leniency and, instead of a ten year maximum sentence, sentenced Mandela and the other accused to only nine months imprisonment, with the sentences being suspended entirely. The Law Society then applied for Mandela's name to be struck off the role of attorneys. The application came before two English-speaking judges who had been appointed before the Nationalist Government came to power (Judges Ramsbottom and Roper), and the application was dismissed.

Mr Justice Ralph Zulman, a long-serving member of the editorial board of Jewish Affairs and a frequent contributor to its Reviews pages, is a former Judge of the Appeal Court of South Africa.

Judge Ramsbottom, who wrote the judgment, reasoned that that the mere fact that an attorney had deliberately disobeyed the law did not necessarily disqualify him from practicing his profession. The question was not simply that Mandela had disobeyed the law but whether the crime showed that that he was “of such a character that he was not worthy to remain in the ranks of an honorable profession”.

Cameron then describes the preparatory examination in the so called Treason Trial and the trial itself, where the remaining accused were all acquitted. Then follows a discussion of the Rivonia Trial before Judge President De Wet, which resulted in Mandela being convicted but sentenced to life imprisonment (rather than to death, which had been a distinct possibility).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, presided over by Bishop Tutu, and the work of the Legal Resources Centre, founded by Arthur Chaskalson, are considered. Cameron details at some length the proceedings in the Appeal Court, which led ultimately to the removal of colored voters from the common voters’ role (with the sole dissenting judgment of Justice Schreiner) in 1956.

A “notorious case” referred to (1964) was that of a detainee, Albie Sachs, then only an awaiting trial prisoner who had not yet been convicted and who claimed the right to read and write which had been denied to him by the security police. The judge who wrote the ruling denying him books, pens and paper was Justice Ogilvie Thompson who, after becoming Chief Justice, presided in the above-mentioned Dean’s appeal in 1972. Opponents of apartheid in South Africa reacted with furious dismay to the ruling, and condemned the judge for bending over to please the executive at the time.

Chapter Two is entitled ‘AIDS and the Constitutional Transition’. The reader is enlightened as to the shame and illness that Cameron endured as a result of his being diagnosed as having AIDS. The case of Barry McGeary, who complained that his right to dignity and privacy had been violated when a doctor disclosed on the golf course that he had tested positive for HIV, is described. Cameron represented McGeary. The complaint was dismissed by an acting judge (Levy J), whereupon the case was successfully taken on appeal and the judgment of the lower court set aside. Judge Harms wrote the judgment of the court, with all four of his colleagues concurring. He held that doctor-patient confidentiality should be maintained except where compelling reasons existed to justify its breach. He concluded that the doctor had no right to tell his colleagues about McGeary’s HIV and was liable to pay damages to his deceased estate (McGeary having since died) and to cover the appellant’s legal costs.

In Chapter Three, the ‘Judiciary in Transition’ is dealt with, including Cameron’s decision to take judicial office despite his illness. Chapter Four discusses the rule of law, the supremacy of the constitution and AIDS. Chapter Five details what Cameron describes as diversity and constitutionalism.

Cameron describes his early childhood years. After the death of his sister, Laura, he and his sister Jeanie returned to a Children’s Home in Queenstown. Their mother moved back to Bloemfontein, where she had lived as a child, and found a low paying job in the municipal typing pool. Money was tight and the young Edwin often benefited from charity. He recounts how an unknown person left an envelope with a ten-rand note, a gift described by his mother as a godsend. Part of the money was used to buy a cake for Jeanie’s birthday.

The effect of the important Grootboom case, which dealt with the right of access to adequate housing and socio-economic rights, is then considered.

Chapter Seven commences with the following optimistic statement: “We are very nearly twenty years into our constitutional democracy. There is much in our country to feel sad and sober about, but there is some basis for determined optimism. Much has been achieved –perhaps more than those of us who tend to worry realize...”

The book concludes with this summary of the author’s life to date:

For me, it has been a long journey since Queenstown and Laura’s funeral. I have been a judge in a democratic South Africa for nearly twenty years. After I had been an acting (temporary judge) judge for some months, President Mandela appointed me as a High Court judge in 1994. The years since then have been a time of uncertainty, disquiet and occasional dismay. They have years of grueling hard work. But they have, for me, also been years of joy. I have seen a Constitution that started out as a piece of paper, borne aloft by the aspirational hopes of a visionary generation, evolve into a practically functioning charter for regulating power and making progress possible in our country.

We have not stood still since 1994. That is to the good. We have lost our virginal sense of innocence...

He reflects that the law offered him a chance to remedy and repair his life. In turn the Constitution “offers us a chance remedy and repair our country. It is an opportunity that we should seize with eager determination”.

The point is made elsewhere in the book

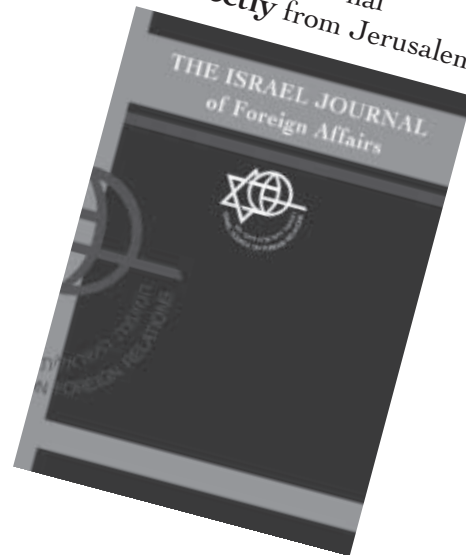
that judges should write judgments which are clear and understandable (“Any literate person people should be able to follow a judgment”). It is believed that the same applies not only to judgments but to all writing. In this book, Cameron has certainly displayed his considerable talent in writing clearly and understandably. The book makes easy and interesting reading.

Sydney Kentridge, in the back fly leaf, describes *Justice: A Personal Account* as “a remarkable integration of fascinating, often moving personal memoir, professional reminiscence and acute historical analysis of South African law, politics and society.” One can but wholly agree with this view.

The book is highly recommended, not only for those interested in the author’s experience of the apartheid years and his subsequent career, but as the story of an extremely talented and courageous individual who deserves the admiration of all who read about him.

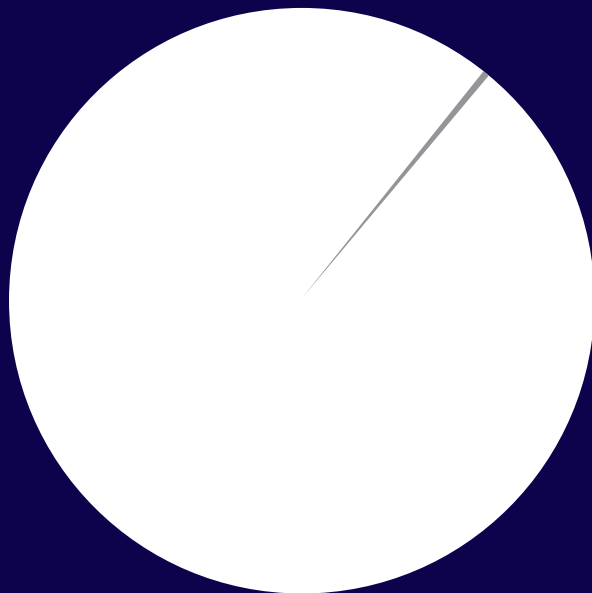
Justice A Personal Account by Edwin Cameron, Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2014, 240pp.

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Nothingness

The world needs an alien invasion
By monstrous creatures from outer space
For us to know that, despite our differences
We're all part of the human race

That whatever our upbringing or religion
Or language or color of skin
Our DNA is snipped from the self-same strip
We are one family. We are all kin ...

"With no respect for life, we'll demolish and kill
We'll strike again and again and again
Till we get our way, till we impose our will
Only then will we rest – only then.

All must heed our injunction
Assassins will lead the way
We'll impel indoctrinated practice
Insane ignorance will have its say

We'll go on destroying and killing
We'll strike over and over again
Till we blow up the planet and everything that's
in it
Only then will we cease ... Only then".

But then - dissipated, annihilated, defunct
It will finally be too late
A once-inhabited planet extinguished
No edifice left to hate

No more man-made hell on earth
Just vacuous, numbing peace
No consciousness, no living thing
No day begins; nor will it cease

And when knocked into nothingness
Our demise won't scratch the sky
When our planet finally perishes
No angel will blink an eye

Will those who by their acceptance
Shroud evil with a religious name
Share the penalty for ending civilization
Evolved to protect and proclaim?

In the timeless stillness of no future or no past
Will these demons hang in shame?
Will these madmen be accountable?
These maniacs who were to blame?

But all spirit is regained and retained
And the aberration of each fanatic weighed
And for those whose delusions destroy life itself
An undreamed-of debt remains to be paid.

Charlotte Cohen

Dos Meidel Mein

Hob Ich gehat a Meidel eider
Varliebt in Ir beemes
Klein is zie geven
Dos meidel mein
Hot mir nischt gefunnen getlech

Hot ich geheiret mein lebenslieb
Und tief geswumen in lebensyam
Vie is dos glick in lebensgang
Oiskleiben zich der ander?
Mishtamen is bashert Got derfun

Maurice Skikne

(The Girl of Mine)

*Did I have a girlfriend once
in Love with her truly
Slim was she this
Girl of mine
But she never found me wanted*

*Did I then wed my life's love
And swam deeply in life's sea
What gladness in the path of life
To select the very other
She must have been a choice of G-d!)*

Babies are not born with hate

Babies are not born with hate,
They crave not death; they seek just love.
We owe to them a better fate -
To teach them love's from God above.

Whence comes the deadly stick and stone
Hurled with venom at some child?
With naked hatred some old crone
Glares through eyes cold-set and wild?

From stick and stone come knife and gun,
Life is short, sold all too cheap.
Long gone the squeals of youthful fun.
A dreadful crop the killers reap.

Vile man o'eturns the Lord's design,
He sows the seeds of Devil's spawn.
And out of Satan's concubine,
A calamity of hate is born.

But, Lo, observe, our Lord's awake,
He sees us His design curtail.
Oh, selfish beings - 'tis time to quake,
His anger seethes at Man's betrayal.

The world deserves a better fate:
Babies are not born with hate.

Rodney Mazinter

READER'S LETTER

I write to supplement an article by Isaac Habib concerning two South African servicemen who were killed, or died, on active service on Rhodes during the Second World War ('A forgotten South African Jewish Soldier who died on Rhodes', Chanukah, 2014). The names on the headstones were "Gunner H. Federmann" (Royal Artillery and Long Range Desert Group) and "Lieut. I. M. Seel" (SAAF). Mr. Habib noted that the given names of these two South African service members were unknown. Gunner Federmann's given name was Herbert, and Lieut. Seel's given names were Isadore Michael. You may wish to pass this information along to Mr. Habib.

I was able to glean Lieut. Seel's given name from South African Jews in World War II, which was published in 1950 by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. For some reason, Gunner Federmann's name is not included in that excellent book, perhaps because he served in the British Army, which was fairly common then, not in the South African forces. Both names, however, appear on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) website. (Lieut. Seel's first given name appears in the book as 'Isidore' and on the CWGC web site as 'Isadore'. I suspect that the CWGC listing is more likely the correct spelling.)

Stephen C. Becker
By email



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