

JEWISH AFFAIRS

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JEWISH AFFAIRS

MISSION

In publishing JEWISH AFFAIRS, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies aims to produce a cultural forum which caters for a wide variety of interests in the community. The journal will be a vehicle for the publication of articles of significant thought and opinion on contemporary Jewish issues, and will aim to encourage constructive debate, in the form of reasoned and researched essays, on all matters of Jewish and general interest.

JEWISH AFFAIRS aims also to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought. Scholarly research papers that make an original contribution to their chosen field of enquiry will be submitted to the normal processes of academic refereeing before being accepted for publication.

JEWISH AFFAIRS will promote Jewish cultural and creative achievement in South Africa, and consider Jewish traditions and heritage within the modern context. It aims to provide future researchers with a window on the community's reaction to societal challenges. In this way the journal hopes critically to explore, and honestly to confront, problems facing the Jewish community both in South Africa and abroad, by examining national and international affairs and their impact on South Africa.

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Editor: David Saks

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THE END OF AN ERA: BEINKINSTADT, CAPE TOWN'S OLDEST JEWISH BOOKSTORE, CLOSES DOWN.

*

Veronica Belling

Cape Town's oldest Jewish bookstore M. Beinkinstadt, established in 1903 by Moshe Beinkinstadt, remained in the hands of his descendants for 105 years. Situated on the outskirts of District Six, site of the earliest Jewish settlement in Cape Town, it reflects the history of Cape Town's Jewish community. In June 2008, shortly before the shop's closure, I was contacted by the late Joseph Sherman, Korob Fellow of Yiddish Studies at Oxford, and former editor of *Jewish Affairs*, to assist the proprietors, Michael and Fay Padowich, in disposing of their collection of approximately 3500 Hebrew and Yiddish books. They were keen to send the books to the National Yiddish Book Center (NYBC) in Amherst, Massachusetts, United States, but required help sorting them. Joseph had been contacted by the NYBC and had subsequently put them in touch with me.

It was agreed that I would sort through the books in the shop, which would then be transferred to the Jewish Studies Library at the Kaplan Centre at the University of Cape Town for further sorting, listing and packing up. In this way, I would also be able to select any items of particular interest to the Jewish Studies Library. Of the approximately 3000 books in Hebrew and Yiddish that I examined, I selected about 1800 for this purpose. Of these, about 1100 were in Yiddish and 700 in Hebrew. The religious books were left behind, with those in very poor condition being set aside as *sheymes* for burial according to Jewish law.

The shop had a Dickensian quality. The books were packed from floor to ceiling. I was told that in certain sections there were even books packed behind the walls that had been boarded up over the years. Many of the books had never been moved since the 1920s, and were heavy with dust. An old fashioned book press stood on a table near the entrance. All the shop's business was still being recorded manually, and their administrative records were also donated to the Library. These records were kept in a storeroom that was piled from floor to ceiling with leather-

bound letter books and ledgers from as early as 1904. Due to space considerations, we chose to take just the one hundred leather bound letter books (1904-1942). These contain copies of letters that were written with special ink, laid between dampened sheets of tissue paper and placed in the book press in order to make the copies. We also took one ledger (1947-1952), and a miscellany of exemplars of the shop's stationary and letterheads.

The letters are to suppliers, who were generally overseas, in Russia, Latvia, Germany, Palestine, London and the United States. Among the earliest supplier was M. Katzenellenbogen of Vilna, who sold Jewish books, pictures, maps and wool and silk *taleysim* (prayer shawls). The customers are local, living all over South Africa as well as in the former southern Rhodesia. By far the greater proportion of the letters is written in Yiddish, but in the earliest books there is also a fair amount of correspondence in Russian. Beinkinstadt's customer base expanded very rapidly. While in the 1904 letter book customers were in Cape Town, Paarl and Oudtshoorn, by 1905 customers from all over the Western, Eastern and Northern Cape were being supplied: Beaufort West, Colesberg, Graaff-Reinet, Middleburg, Moorreesburg, Piketburg, Port Elizabeth, Riversdale, Simonstown, Stellenbosch, Uniondale, Wellington, and Worcester. They also had customers in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State and Pretoria and Roodepoort in the Transvaal.

Moshe Beinkinstadt arrived in Cape Town from Vilna, Lithuania, in 1903 to escape conscription into the Russian army. In 1905 he was joined by his wife, Olga, and daughter, Bertha. In Vilna, Moshe had been employed as an accountant in the timber and paper industry. A year after he arrived in Cape Town, he established a bookstore.¹ In the 1910s M. Beinkinstadt Bookseller was located at 76 Caledon Street. Sometime in the 1920s, it moved to 38 Canterbury Street, and Moshe and his family moved in above it. Beinkinstadt was not the only bookshop in that area. Book stamps reveal another three Jewish bookshops very close by: A.P. Melmed, Hebrew bookseller and Stationer, located at no. 62, Harrington Street; Smiths Jewish Booksellers in Canterbury Street; and Segal and Witten Hebrew Booksellers & Stationery at the corner of Caledon and Canterbury Street.

Moshe Beinkinstadt imported all the basic Jewish ritual requirements, such as *tsitsis* (fringed undergarment), *taleysim*, *tefilin* (phylacteries) and *mezuzas*, as well as prayer books and rabbinical

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literature. In 1910, Beinkinstadt took over the City Printing Works of 117 Bree Street, and offered services 'for all kinds of Printing, Bookbinding and kindred lines'. Beinkinstadt's signs were well known all over Cape Town.

About this time, Beinkinstadt also started importing kosher foodstuffs, advertised itself as "Beinkinstadt's Cape Town Kosher, Matzos & Grocery Store". Their printed list of Passover foods advertises imported products from all over the world, such as Manischewitz's Matzos from America, cake mix from London, German potato flour, fat-geese [sic], Russian - *shmaltz*, Colonial horse radish, Palestine cognac and wine, Russian cognac, and Colonial wine and spirits. Also listed are all the favorite Jewish foods, including sauerkraut and cucumbers in tins, herrings in barrels, almonds, prunes, pomegranate peel, and poppy seed. They also advertised kosher soap. As late as 1930, Beinkinstadt was importing tinned fish delicacies from Arnold Sorenson in Riga, as well as salt herrings from Yzermans in Holland. It continued to be one of the main suppliers of kosher food and *matzos* for Passover, until the 1970s, when the big supermarket chains took over.

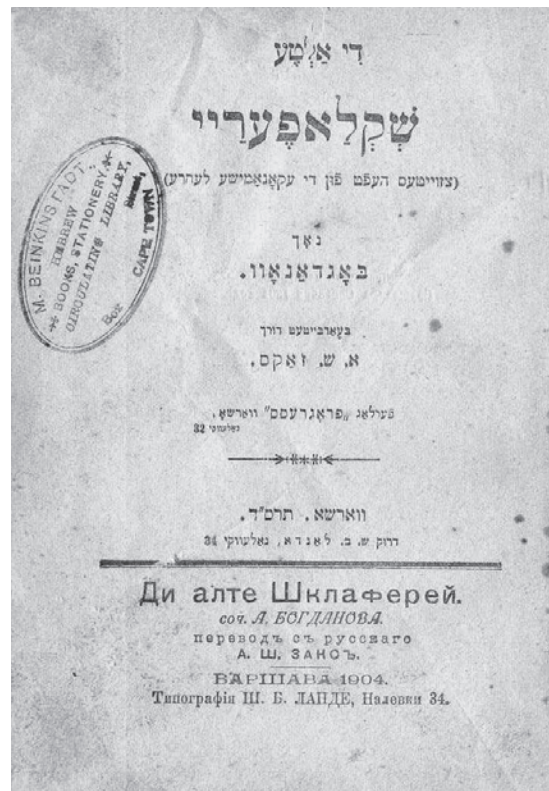
From the outset, Beinkinstadt imported secular as well as religious books. A book list in a letter book from 1904 includes such popular Yiddish titles as *Dorfs Meydl* (Country Girl), *Siberer Ayzenbahn* (The Siberian Railway), the Yiddish translation of David Copperfield *Dovid ben Dovid*, Tolstoy's *Anna Karanina*, *Tsvey Shveger* (Two Sisters-in-Law) by Meir Ahun published in Vilna in 1900, and *Di Alte Shkloferay*² (Ancient Slavery) by Russian revolutionary philosopher and economist Alexander Bogdanov, published in Warsaw in 1904. Inside *Di Alte Shkloferay*, I discovered that Moshe Beinkinstadt had operated a lending library. The property stamp reads: M. Beinkinstadt - Hebrew Books, Stationery - Circulating Library - Box - Cape Town.

Operating six days a week, Beinkinstadt's became an institution, a gathering place for Yiddish speaking intellectuals. Friday nights was 'open house' in the Beinkinstadt's apartment above the shop. It was at one of these that Bertha Beinkinstadt met her future husband, Berl Padowich, who had been sent from Palestine to South Africa as a canvasser for the Jewish National Fund. When Moshe died in 1943, his scholarly son-in-law, with his passion for literature, took over the business. A man of many talents, who spoke thirteen languages, Berl also found time to direct Yiddish plays and chair the Zionist Socialist Party, and later the Yiddish Cultural Federation, as well.³

Bertha was one of the early Jewish women to graduate from a South African university. In 1930, she published an anthology of Hebrew and Yiddish poetry she had translated into English.⁴ She also wrote poems in Yiddish, one of which, *Der Soldat* (The Soldier) is one of only two Yiddish poems by South African Jewish women that were included in Ezra Korman's anthology of Yiddish poems by women, published in Chicago in 1928.⁵ Like Moshe's

apartment above the shop, the Padowich home in Oranjezicht, became a gathering place for Cape Town's Jewish intelligentsia. Bertha and Berl's son Michael took over the business when his father died in 1973. He expanded the stock, concentrating on buying English books rather than Yiddish and Hebrew, and moving more into the gift line.

It is fortunate for the social historian that the owner was too sentimental to get rid of the huge collection of Hebrew and Yiddish books, by then in very poor condition and deteriorating rapidly. The books, the majority of which were sent to the NYBC, provide a unique insight into the changes that were taking place in the intellectual world of the Yiddish speaking immigrants in the first half of the twentieth century.



Fiction was by far the largest category. It included all the well known authors, such as Sholem Aleichem, Mendele Mocher Seforim, Peretz, Asch, Opatoshu and Nadir. However, it also included some very rare early Yiddish fiction by Isaac Meir Dick, Shomer, and Ozer Bloyshteyn, that were written for women in the 1890s and early 1900s, with lurid titles, such as, *Der Ferflektter Yikhus: fun der Khupe tsum Toyt* (The Stained Reputation: from the *Khupe* to the Grave), by Shomer⁶; and *Der Tiran* (The Tyrant), an anonymous novel about the Russian government, that was said to include intrigues, nihilistic activities, Jewish persecution and emigration to America, published in New York.⁷

Poetry was the next largest category with works by the well known authors, Shimon Frug, Zalman Rejzen, Itzik Manger, Yehoash, Peretz Markish, Dovid Edelshtadt and others. There was a volume of sketches by the well known humorist, Der Tunkeler⁸;

and a handful of children's books, some published as late as 1950, proving that there were children in Cape Town in the 1950s who could still understand Yiddish. Certain categories of literature were noticeably absent. For instance there were very few works of South African Yiddish literature. This was no doubt because those books had been sold over the years. Other books, such as Gedaliah Bublick, the American Zionist's description of his journey to Israel⁹, could not have sold that well, as there were 16 copies left in the collection.

A very large component of the collection were translations from world literature, part of the Jewish enlightenment initiative to acquaint Jews with all the great European authors by translating them into Yiddish and Hebrew. Included were the Russians: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Krylov, Andreyev, and Chekhov; Germans: Goethe, Nietzsche, Schiller, Lessing and Schnitzler; English: Dickens, Swift, Robert Louis Stevenson, Longfellow, Jack London and Disraeli; French: Balzac, Zola, Eugene Sue, de Maupassant and Jules Verne; Scandinavian: Ibsen, Strindberg and Knut Hamsen; and Spanish: Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. There was a collection of all the famous operas, translated into Yiddish by William Edlin.¹⁰ Most of these were sent on to the NYBC.

As one would expect, a very large proportion of the books related to Jews and Judaism, including history, biography, religion, Zionism, Jewish nationalism and literary criticism. These included the standard historical works by Graetz and Dubnow, Schipper's economic history, Chaim Zhitlowsky's works on Diaspora nationalism and Lestschinsky's works of Jewish sociology.

Books on socialism and radical politics constituted another significant section of the collection, reflecting the growing trend towards secularization and away from religion. They included the works of the anarchist, Peter Kropotkin, Karl Marx, Alexander Bogdanov and Karl Liebknecht. There was also a set of Darwin's *Descent of Man*,¹¹ a work that demonstrates that man was descended from the ape, challenging the Biblical view of the Creation; and also Jean Meslier, the 17th Century French Catholic priest's treatise promoting atheism and denouncing all religion.¹² Also popular were educational handbooks on topics varying from the natural sciences, geography and geology, to music, Muhammad, ethics, sociology, evolution, child psychology and the aesthetics of women's beauty.¹³ There were several health manuals: on diabetes,¹⁴ small pox, the organs of the human body,¹⁵ and a book about birth control (published Warsaw, 1934).¹⁶ There was a book about what to expect during pregnancy and how to bring up your child (New York, 1912)¹⁷ and the popular book on sexual relationships between men and women, by Ben Zion Liber (New York, 1919).¹⁸

There were virtually no cookbooks in the collection, as they had most probably been sold over the years. An unusual exception was a vegetarian cook book, *Di Vegetarishe Kokhbukh*, by Abraham

76, CALEDON ST. P.O. BOX 1148.

25-2-1916

BEINKINSTADT'S Cape Town Kosher, Matzos & Grocery Store.

PRICE LIST.

Matshewitz's Matzos	Flour	Hour Knead, in this	Herrings, in barrels	Potato Flour, German	Hope	Cherry	White Pepper	Ground Unger	Cinnamon	Onion	Almonds, Jordan, best	Almonds, Ground	Prunes, Imported, 30, 40 in pound	Prunes, 40, 70 in pound	Apricots	Pears, Whole, Out	Apples, Whole, Out	Oil Saled, best	Oil, Jacobs	Vinegar, Hugo Bond's	Horse Radish, Imported	Colonial	Fat-Goose, Russian	Nuts, Walnuts	Potomance Peel	Puppy Head	Kosher Soap
Matshewitz's Matzos	Flour	Hour Knead, in this	Herrings, in barrels	Potato Flour, German	Hope	Cherry	White Pepper	Ground Unger	Cinnamon	Onion	Almonds, Jordan, best	Almonds, Ground	Prunes, Imported, 30, 40 in pound	Prunes, 40, 70 in pound	Apricots	Pears, Whole, Out	Apples, Whole, Out	Oil Saled, best	Oil, Jacobs	Vinegar, Hugo Bond's	Horse Radish, Imported	Colonial	Fat-Goose, Russian	Nuts, Walnuts	Potomance Peel	Puppy Head	Kosher Soap

Orders taken for: Palestine Cognac and Wine, Russian (Lipsky's) Brandy and Colonial Wine and Spirits.

NOTE: Customers are requested to state what Matzos they order. Those who prefer Matshewitz's well-known goods are requested to send in their orders as soon as possible.

Please write if this order is for your private use, or to resale, and specify quantity and price.

and Shifra Mishulow, published in New York in 1926.¹⁹ This interest in vegetarian cooking among Yiddish speaking immigrants was part of a radical movement that arose in the early twentieth century. The Yiddish Vegetarian Society of New York regarded vegetarianism less as an experiment in gastronomy than a moral philosophy. The book, *Gezunt un Shpayz* (Food and Health),²⁰ is replete with helpful dietary hints on how to avoid anemia, rheumatism and constipation, as well as with graphs computing the calories, carbohydrates and fat content of food. The companion cook book contains the recipes that make healthy eating possible.

Among the piles of books there were also about thirty four issues of the *Groshn Bibliotek*, the biographical pamphlet series published in Warsaw in the 1930s. Beinkinstadt listed 271 titles from the *Groshn Bibliotek*, in the Yiddish section of his Six-Penny Library of English and World Famous Classics, *Sikspens Bibliotek*. The Hebrew books were far fewer than the Yiddish. The largest proportion comprised textbooks, of which the earliest were published in Vilna and Warsaw.

Among the approximately eighty items kept for the Jewish Studies Library were a couple of particularly rare items of *Afrikaner Yiddica*. These are: the very first anthology of Yiddish writing ever published in South Africa: *Di Fraye Baylage* - the Free Supplement to the newspaper *Der Afrikaner*, published in 1919.²¹ I had never come across it before. The other was a copy of the SA Jewish Year Book of 1920, published by Beinkinstadt.²² Although there wasn't a copy of the earliest Yiddish book published in South Africa, Nehemiah Dov Baer Hoffman's *Sefer ha-Zikhrones* (Book of Memoirs), published in 1916,²³ I did find a flyer advertising it, indicating that they were selling it at one time.

Besides the books kept for the Jewish Studies

Library, I was also on the lookout for any rare items that would be of interest to Joseph Sherman. Besides Soviet Yiddish his current research interest, he asked me to look out for anything by Isaac Meir Dick (1914-1893), one of the earliest Yiddish fiction writers. There actually was one item, the adaptation of a play by Schiller, entitled *Der Farmaskirte Frant* (The Masked Fop). Sadly, I never got the opportunity to tell him about it.

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- 6 N. M. Shaykevitch (Shomer), *Der Ferfleker Yikhus: oder fun der Khupe tsum Toyt*, ha-Ahim Blatnitski fun Odessa, Varsha, 1902.
- 7 *Der Tiran: a Roman fun der Hayntiger Tiranisher Regerung*, Y. Sapirshteyn, New York, 1892.
- 8 *Der Tunkeler, Hayim Getsel: der Reformater, mit Zayne Finfun Tsvantsik Reformen*, Humoristische Bibliotek, Varshe, 1922.
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- 10 William Edlin, *Velt-barimhte Operas*, Hebrew Publishing, New York, 1907.
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- 12 Jean Meslier, *Gloyben un Fernunft*, Y. Malimzohn un B. Ruderman, London, 1913.
- 13 Ann Danish, *Der Veg tsu Sheynkeyt*, Nay Velt, Nyu York, 1937.
- 14 M. Gotlieb, *Zayt Gezunt*, II. *Sukhote*, Varshe, 1910 or 1911.
- 15 Max Breslauer, *Vos Yeder Darf Visn Vegn Mentshlekhen Kerper*, M. Goldfarb, Varshe, 1934.
- 16 Dr Manhamer, *Vegn Shvangershaft: Meditsinishe Etses un Millen vi Azoy tsu Ferhiitn fun Shvangershaft un kinder-hobn*, Varshe, 1934.
- 17 Y A Merison, *Muter un Kind: a lehrbuckh far der Muter vi zikh tsu fihren bes'n Shvangeren un Vi Tsu Hodeven dos Kind, ferfast Loyt di Letsten Meditsinishe Kveln*, Mayzel et Komp, New York, [c1912].
- 18 Liber, B, *Geshlekhtslebn fun Man un Froy: a Populer Visnshaftlekhe Bukh*, B. Liber, Nyuyork, 1919.
- 19 Mishulow, A B, *Vegetarische Kokh-bukh: Ratsyonale Nahrung*, Better Health and Correct Eating Institute, New York, 1923.
- 20 Mishulow, A B, *Gezunt un Shpayz*, Better Health and Correct Eating Institute, New York, 1926.
- 21 *Di Fraye Baylage Tsum "Afrikaner"*, 1919-1920, Dzshu'ish Publishing Sindikeyt, 1919.
- 22 *Der Soyth-Afrikanisher Yohr-bukh: a Magazin far Literatur, Beletristik, visnshaft un Kritik*, M. Beinkinstad, Cape Town, 1920.
- 23 Hoffman, N D, *Seyfer ha-Zikhroynes: Erinerungen fun a Litvishn Maskil in Dray Velt Theyln: in Eyrope, Amerike un Afrike*, N. Hoffman, Keyptaun, 1916.

THE GERMAN JEWISH IMMIGRANT CONTRIBUTION TO SOUTH AFRICAN ART

*

Gwynne Schrire

“The contribution of the German immigrants was that they recognised the value of African art at a time when others, especially South Africans, were completely unaware of it.”¹

This remark made by art dealer and collector Egon Guenther, himself a German immigrant, is an example of what Medawar and Pyke have called ‘Hitler’s Gift’ - the contribution made by Jewish refugees whose flight from Hitler’s Germany enriched their host countries.² German Jewish refugees to South Africa were Hitler’s gifts, and these gifts included their contributions to its cultural development.

Brought up in a society that valued scholarship, had exacting standards of apprenticeship and where they were exposed to both traditional and experimental art, German immigrants looked at the South African art world with different eyes to those of white South Africans.

The German artists were familiar with early 20th Century art movements. Its art reflected post-war disillusionment and was often designed to be critical, rebellious and shocking. The avant-garde was welcomed – as was seen in the Dada movement. African art was no novelty to them. When it had been introduced to Europe in the 1920s, its shapes and forms had made a tremendous impact. The hunger for the ‘primitive’ had not only reached a fashionable level, but was supported by the evidence of the levels of destruction by civilised man during the war.³ Pablo Picasso included African masks in some of his greatest work and Henri Matisse, Andre Derain, Jacques Lipchitz and Constantine Brancusi were all influenced by African art (which had also caught the attention of art historians).⁴

With the rise of Hitler, openness to different art movements clanged shut. There was a flood of threatening and defamatory articles attacking artists whose work was out of favour. In 1930, the spokesman for the German Arts Society declared, “A huge attack on pictures will have to take place throughout Germany.”⁵ ‘Un-German’ exhibitions were cancelled or disrupted and “exhibitions of shame” arranged.

This antipathy towards modern art was not a specifically German phenomenon, although it was only in Germany that it took such ruthless forms. In America, too, there was a move to remove avant-garde art from display in galleries and to prevent public monies being spent on their acquisition (“If that is art, I’m a Hottentot”, President Harry Truman once said⁶). Edward Roworth, the highly influential

Director of the SA National Gallery, shared this antipathy.

Soon after the Nazis assumed power, Hitler started ‘cleansing’ the arts. On 22 September 1933, the Reich’s Chamber of Culture Bill made membership of chambers a pre-requisite for the pursuit of a career and professions. Joseph Goebbels explained that “a Jewish contemporary [was] generally not suited to be involved in the administration of German cultural assets”. In 1936, he prohibited art criticism, which was to be replaced by art reports that were to be less judgmental and more descriptive: “Absolute value judgements can only be passed by the State and the Party. Once this has been done, the art writer may use this as a standard”, he declared.⁷

Modern art, the Nazi Party decreed, was bad, as was anything produced by Negroes, Communists or Jews. Jews, being degenerate, needed to be removed from German life, and hence artworks by Jews could be neither exhibited nor sold.

A Cultural Association of German Jews was set up to provide opportunities for the ousted Jewish artists. In a speech at its inaugural meeting on 17 July 1933, writer and theatre critic Julius Bab remarked: “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 whom are inextricably bound to their professions, have no possibility of switching to another occupation. The situation is becoming increasingly desperate.”⁸

In 1937 an exhibition of *Degenerate Art*, one of the original 1933 *Exhibitions of Shame*, toured Germany, attracting huge audiences: “The exhibition has a cultural-political aim, it wants to reveal the systematic attempts by Jews, those of Jewish descent and others sympathetic to Jews, to poison and destroy the German Volk. At the root of these lies the conscious intention of causing the ‘degeneration’ of the Germans to prepare them for chaos and Bolshevism.”⁹

Hitler ordered that “products of the age of decay still present in museums, galleries and collections belonging to the Reich, counties or municipalities”¹⁰ were to be confiscated, and the Gestapo tackled the job of purging offensive art works with its customary enthusiasm. After the latter destroyed the paintings of **Hermann Hirsch** in 1934 and he was no longer allowed to sell his work, he committed suicide. Some of his work was brought to Cape Town by his niece, a refugee from Germany, and is now in the collection

of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Council). Recently photographs of these were made at the request of the Göttingen Städtisches Museum for a commemorative exhibition.

For Jewish artists living in Germany, the only future lay in leaving the country and some found refuge in South Africa until the hastily passed 1937 Alien's Act closed this escape route. Many were assimilated or even baptised - **Hanns Ludwig Katz** was baptised, with a Jewish father; **Katrine Harries** was baptised, with a Jewish mother¹¹ - but Jewish descent was sufficient to exclude them from working in Germany, and, later, to qualify them for inclusion in ghettos and death camps.

South African culture, both in art and music, was to be enhanced by the taste and knowledge brought by these new immigrants. "These settlers were... in background, education, callings and interests... in intellectual and cultural tradition, habits and needs, completely different from any previous settlers in South Africa" wrote an art critic in *Settlers of the 1930's: Ernest Ullmann as an Example*, concluding that their contribution to South Africa's cultural life was their distinctive feature.¹²

Because artists in Germany had been exposed to many different schools and influences, their minds had been opened to different ways of portraying what their eyes saw. To them African art was not inferior but exciting and different. They found, however, that South African attitudes to art were conservative and puritanical. The art of Maggie Laubscher and Irma Stern, South Africans who had studied under German expressionists, was greeted with local hostility and incomprehension - "agonies in oil" and "blatant incompetence" were two of the labels thrown at the latter. Stern's first Cape Town exhibition in 1920 was even marked with a police investigation for alleged immorality.¹³

Furthermore white South Africans, brought up with ideas of racially endowed cultural superiority, placed little value on art produced by indigenous people.¹⁴ Indeed, *The Transvaal Leader* newspaper, 29 March 1910, devoted a major article to an important Johannesburg exhibition of arts, commenting on "the absence of any forms of art by which the native race has revealed itself" (although that exhibition incorporated "Native work for exhibition and sale", including pottery, carvings, drawings, mats, beadwork, baskets, metal work and jewellery).¹⁵ When the refugees arrived in the early 1930s, these attitudes were still entrenched.

'African' themes in the work of local artists, like colourful tribal life, portraits or poverty, did not indicate respect for 'African' art. **FL Alexander**, a German Jewish refugee, who played a major role in developing critical art history in South Africa, explained in his ground breaking analysis, *Art in South Africa since 1900*, that "the strong influence of primitive African art in South African modern artists does not at all derive from their contact with the Bantu. It is the influence of West and Central African sculpture and reaches us via Paris."¹⁶ So even any putative influence on art was due not to South Africa's

indigenous people, but to Paris.

"Hardly anyone in South Africa was interested in African art in the 1940s and 1950s" wrote art historian Sandra Kloppers.¹⁷ But these German Jewish immigrants were. They had brought with them profound scholarship and discipline and they judged the art being produced around them, both by the white and the indigenous people, from a different perspective, less parochial and more cosmopolitan, and saw beauty in what they found.

One of these was **Dr Maria Stein-Lessing**, who had had to abandon her own collection of African art when she left Germany. Her contribution has been recently acknowledged in a fine book edited by Natalie Knight, *l'Afrique: A Tribute to Maria Stein-Lessing and Leopold Spiegel*.¹⁸

In 1933, Stein-Lessing left Germany, where she had studied art in Berlin, Bonn, Cologne and Heidelberg, obtaining a doctorate from the University of Bonn.¹⁹ In 1936, she immigrated to South Africa, obtaining a job as head of Art Appreciation at the Pretoria Technical College. She soon introduced African art appreciation into the curriculum and organised one of the first exhibitions of 'Bantu art'.²⁰ Her additional appointment by the Department of Native Affairs as Director of Bantu Arts and Crafts in Johannesburg enabled her to make trips around the countryside to gain knowledge of indigenous craft, rock engravings and paintings. She became aware that it was being endangered by the encroachment of industrialisation and modernity and that the craftsmen lived in conditions of great poverty.

Stein-Lessing started a fresh collection of carvings and beadwork made by Zulu, Ndebele, Xhosa and Tsonga/ Shangaan artists. Guests to her flat would be confronted by hundreds of pairs of eyes staring from masks on every square metre of the walls, or would bump into woodcarvings, combs, snuffboxes, headrests and baskets.²¹ An attempt to persuade the Department of Native Affairs to help her start a non-profit depot where craftspeople could sell their work was unsuccessful. When she married fellow immigrant Leopold Spiegel in 1942, she lost her job at the Technical College - married women could not be employed as teachers.

Needing an income, she decided to start her own shop. She could sell this unappreciated art, develop an appreciation for it and provide a market to ensure its continuity. Her friend Frieda Feldman helped Maria sell some of her jewellery to raise sufficient money to open a shop, **l'Afrique**, in a small room on the first floor of a building in Loveday or President Streets in Johannesburg.²² Egon Guenther, a non-Jewish jeweller, printer and art dealer, regarded Maria as one of the first people to create an interest in indigenous art as early as the forties, and to bring about consciousness of African art.²³

Maria and Leopold travelled into rural areas going on collecting trips as far as East Africa. Her files record visits to Butterworth, Mazeppa Bay, Kentani, Bashee River Mouth, Elliotdale and Matatiele. They visited agricultural fairs and places where suitable objects would be available and wrote

to the Native Commissioners in Eshowe and Nongoma to obtain the dates of those fairs. A letter has survived from Albert Luthuli suggesting she contact Mshiyeni ka Dinizulu, acting paramount chief of the Zulus. She also met with Chief Bhekeshowe Zulu, King Mpande's great grandson.²⁴ Craftspeople were encouraged to bring work to her shop, which sold African sculpture, beadwork and masks, and by 1951 Guenther recorded that runners were bringing her items from even further afield.

When she was appointed full time lecturer in Arts at the University of Witwatersrand, Stein-Lessing introduced African art into the curriculum and arranged festivals and exhibitions. One of her students was Cecil Skotnes, who played a key role in training black artists in the 1950s through the Polly Street Art Centre in Johannesburg.²⁵ His wife remembered his excitement when he discovered l'Afrique.²⁶ He thought it the only place in Johannesburg where one could see and talk about African art and it was a source of inspiration to him.²⁷ Esme Berman considered l'Afrique to be a valuable resource for collectors and tourists. (The SA National Gallery recently mounted a major exhibition of the works of Mozambique architect Pancho Guedes, one of their customers²⁸).

Skotnes's openness was an exception. Swiss collector **Udo Horstman** remarked that he thought the racism of the middle class white community, which believed that all Africans were "primitive people with no culture", was shocking. Although hardly anyone else in South Africa was interested in African art in the 1940s and 1950s, Kloppers noted that "it was fairly common for collectors – especially Jewish collectors... who had gone to South Africa as refugees in the 1930s – to purchase works by both South African modernists such as Gerard Sekoto and central African carvers".²⁹

Feldman, Lowens and Staub were examples of such collectors. Peter Staub, who collected masks and beadwork, told Kloppers he left Germany in the 1930s and found there was virtually no interest in South Africa for either this art form or other aspects of the art produced by southern African traditionalist communities.³⁰ Another was German-trained Irma Stern, whose home, now the Irma Stern Museum, is a treasure trove of objects she picked up on her travels round Africa.³¹

But present collections did not makeup for past suffering. Stein-Lessing was haunted by her memories. Bernard Sachs, after interviewing her, wrote: "The nightmare of Nazi Germany is always there in the background... (a)nd the present condition of South Africa wasn't so soothing to this wound."³² A month later she killed herself. In an obituary a former student, Walter Battiss, remembered her art appreciation classes at the Pretoria Technical College: "For all of us, the dry pages of art history suddenly sprang to life". He further recalled the encouragement she gave to Alexis Preller and Bettie Cilliers-Barnard.³³ Judith Mason, another student, recalled that they had been young and blind to the value of African art, which Europeans had the eye to see.³⁴

In a 1980 study of contemporary Black art, Ute Scholz points out that "until quite recently, the art of the Black people in South Africa was regarded purely as an ethnological phenomenon. Art historical research had concentrated on the European cultural heritage and on White South African artists... Traditional art and the cultural heritage of the Black people have largely been overlooked."³⁵ Maria and Leopold did much to change this attitude. Their contribution to the development of an appreciation for African art has recently been recognised by Johannesburg's MuseumAfrica, which has named a section of the museum the Spiegel/Stein-Lessing African Art Wing.³⁶

Another German-trained Jewish immigrant couple whose appreciation of the value of African art had a major impact on art training were the sculptors **Eva and Herbert Vladimir (HV) Meyerowitz**. They were credited with having "guided, promoted and inspired the 'rebirth'... of indigenous West African art activity which had lain virtually dormant for generations."³⁷ The Meyerowitzes had studied art and woodcarving at the Städtische Kunstgewerbeschule und Handwerker Schule in Berlin, developed there a keen interest in African art. They immigrated to Cape Town in 1925, when HV was appointed lecturer at the Michaelis School of Fine Art and Director of the SA School of Fine and Applied Arts. HV designed and carved the Hyman Liberman Memorial Door in the SA National Gallery, whose theme is the migration of the Jews through the centuries until they found refuge in Cape Town; Eva also fulfilled important civic commissions.³⁸

The couple moved to Basutoland (now Lesotho) in 1935, where HV studied local crafts, publishing a report³⁹ and organising an exhibition of African Arts and Crafts for the International Educational Conference in Salisbury, Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe). Like Stein-Lessing, he was not afraid to air his views, comparing the traditional art on show (good, "because it still fulfilled its purpose"), to those from schools and institutions ("trash ... which we, in the name of education, had inflicted on the people of Africa").⁴⁰

The following year, the Meyerowitzes took up teaching posts at the Achimota College in the Gold Coast (now Ghana), hoping to promote and study its arts and crafts and use European experience to create local craft industries. The Achimota College became the primary centre of early arts activity.⁴¹ In 1943, HV was appointed Acting Director of the West African Institute for Crafts, Industries and Social Studies, and was responsible for the inclusion of art in the Ghanaian curriculum,⁴² much as Stein-Lessing had done at Pretoria and Wits. He even persuaded the British Colonial Office to release funds to develop craft industries and a pottery.

The Meyerowitzes further surveyed the indigenous arts and crafts of the Gold Coast, where Eva's attention was first directed to the gold ornaments. She bought art for collectors in South Africa, including Ashanti gold weights for Dr Louis Mirvish, founder of the Cape Town Jewish Museum.

When the college ran out of funding, the couple returned to England, where VV, aged 45, committed suicide on learning of the death of his mother during the Siege of Leningrad. Eva returned to Ghana, where she lived for forty years in the Bono-Tekyiman State and, according to one source, was made Queen Mother in 1950.⁴³ She became a well known anthropologist/ ethnologist, publishing a number of books on the Akan/Ashanti people.⁴⁴

Another German immigrant influenced by African art was **Elza Hermine Dziomba** who studied sculpture at the Berlin Kunstakademie and in Paris. A sculptor of great originality and power, she is represented locally and in overseas collections, receiving a prize from London's Tate Gallery.⁴⁵ Her friend Marie Stein-Lessing thought her yearning for Africa was probably aroused by the exhibitions of African sculpture in the 1920s.⁴⁶ Dziomba was invited to join the influential New Group, which was outspoken in its contempt for South African contemporary art.⁴⁷

Knight wrote that Esme Berman had doubts about Dziomba's Jewish identity, but her emigration to South Africa from Germany in the year 1933 and her participation in the 1949 exhibition of Jewish Art organised by Dr Abt⁴⁸ seem to indicate Jewish descent.

Dziomba's work was influenced by African tribal sculpture, but she in turn had an influence on the work of black artists. Lippy Lipschitz introduced Ernest Mancoba (Ngungunyana), whom he called "a remarkable African artist", to Dziomba during the mid-1930s. Lipschitz believed that Mancoba's style was undoubtedly influenced by Elza and himself.⁴⁹ Mancoba moved to Paris in 1938.⁵⁰

Siegbert Eick, a German Jewish émigré and art enthusiast, was instrumental in persuading Albert Adams, denied entrance to Michaelis School of Fine Art because he was not white, to apply for a scholarship to London's Slade School. Eick, a book dealer and antique-dealer, saw Adams' talent, not his colour. Adams won recognition overseas and for many years lectured in art at London's City University.⁵¹ Eick was friendly with Irma Stern who painted portraits of Eick, and his non-Jewish partner, window-dresser and designer Rudolf von Frielingh – they came to South Africa because neither Jews nor gays were safe in Germany.

It was not only an interest in African art and artists that set the German immigrants apart from their South African contemporaries. The high standards and rigid training their German art schools had demanded provided them with greater knowledge and greater craftsmanship. This made them excellent lecturers, teachers and art critics.

Katrine Harries had an enormous impact on South African art through her role as a teacher. Born in Berlin in 1914, she studied at the Studien-Atelier für Malerei und Plastik on the recommendation of Max Pechstein (Irma Stern's teacher) and at the Vereinigte Staatsschulen für Freie und Angewandte Kunst. In 1939, following other members of their family, she came to South Africa with her mother, Eva Salinger, herself a trained artist who had studied

at the Königliche Kunstgewerbeschule.⁵²

Harries became a lecturer at Michaelis School of Fine Arts, University of Cape Town, where she started its department of graphic art and instituted a course in typography. Prof. Neville Dubow remarked on her dedication and exacting standards, which she refused to compromise and her specialised knowledge and technical ability, as well as on her talents as a freelance artist and illustrator.⁵³ Harries illustrated over 60 books and her drawings, etchings and lithographs "made her a niche of her own in South African art."⁵⁴

Ernest Ullmann, who was born in Munich in 1900 and left for South Africa in 1935 with ten marks in his pocket, also made a niche of his own – "a refugee who became a pioneer", as Dr O. Simon wrote of him.⁵⁵ Ullmann worked as assistant artist to the director of the Munich University Anthropological Institute before studying art at the University of Munich and the Academy of Fine Arts, in Berlin, Italy and France. Before the Nazi laws prevented him from working in his field, he had been a successful art director and designer with a studio in Berlin.⁵⁶

"Johannesburg in the middle Thirties was not the most ideal soil into which a European artist could wish to be transplanted, take roots and blossom out into fulfilment" Ullmann admitted ruefully.⁵⁷ However, he adapted to the new society, making a name for himself in many different fields. He created monumental sculptures, murals (including a mural in Yad Vashem memorial hall in Johannesburg's Etz Chayim Congregation), tapestries, appliqué wall hangings, exhibition designs, caricatures, posters, book designs, illustrations (including for poems by the Zulu poet BW Vilakazi and for Dr Albert Schweitzer at Lambarene), oils, graphics, illustrations for SA Jewish War Appeal, for charity Yom Tov cards and for Zionist events.

A refugee who became a pioneer in the field of art criticism was **FL Alexander**, who wrote the major art historical monograph which became the basic handbook on South African art, *Art in South Africa since 1900 / Kuns in Suid-Afrika sedert 1900* (1962), and the posthumously published *South African Graphic art and its techniques*.⁵⁸ Like Stein-Lessing, the Meyerowitzes, Ullmann, Dziomba and Harries, he had also studied in Berlin, first at the Berlin Kunstakademie and thereafter at the Kunstgewerbeschule, specialising (like the Meyerowitzes and Dziomba) in sculpture. Unable to work because of the Nazi laws, he left Germany for South Africa in 1936, with his wife Malve and young son, each with ten marks, leaving behind his parents, who were to die in Theresienstadt, and his sister, who killed herself.

At first, Alexander worked in the shop called **Ace** run by his sister and brother in law **Marie and Paul Kuhn**, artists and book binders. Ace, like L' Afrique, sold ethnic art as well as ceramics and antiques and served as an outlet for their work, like book boxes and jewellery. In France and Germany in the 1920s, the craft of book-binding had undergone a renaissance, as part of the Art Deco movement, but

in Cape Town it was an unappreciated art form. Alexander and his wife took over the shop but, as their son was to say, "Business and my father were incompatible". Alexander would tell the customers "You don't have to buy, only enjoy yourselves." Not surprisingly, the shop soon folded.

Alexander taught art at the Continental School of Art, established by Maurice Van Essche in 1948, and at the school of Alfred Krenz. He became art critic for *Die Burger*, which described him as a friendly person but a rigorous critic who set the same high standard for artists that he did for himself. He detested pretentiousness and inauthenticity and demanded a very high level of workmanship.

In 1951, on the request of the Jewish Board of Deputies, Alexander chaired the selection committee for a Jewish Art exhibition, for which he wrote an erudite introduction.⁵⁹ A journalist from the *Jewish Times* visited him in his home and reported finding him busy printing a woodcut he had carved the previous day. Like Stein-Lessing, Alexander had an eye for the beautiful: "About him was as exciting a collection of objects d'art as one could wish for – most of it acquired in Cape Town". There was an Ashanti urn for gold dust, Ituri arrows, a ceremonial harpoon from the Gilbert Islands, an Egyptian medicine flask with hieroglyphics, a Manchu-Chinese bowl, an eighteenth century Kakemono scroll, Mediaeval German woodcuts, Japanese sword hilts and many paintings, including several by Irma Stern.

In 1958, Dr Louis Mirvish appointed Alexander as the first curator of the Jewish Museum in Cape Town, into the development of which he brought his expert knowledge and fine taste. Alexander could offer expert judgement on subjects as diverse as architecture, interior decoration or postage stamp design. His expertise gained him exposure as an art critic. He became an authenticator of 17th and 18th Century Dutch art and the adviser to the Rembrandt Art Foundation and Sanlam, helping them assemble their fine collections of South African art. He joined the committee of the SA National Art Gallery and became chairman of the Western Province section of the SA Society of Art.

Alexander was a major force in the formation of taste. In his books, his unerring eye for artistic excellence distilled the essence of contemporary art in painting, sculpture and graphic work. Mayor A E Honikman, chairman of the SA National Gallery Board of Trustees, said that through his articles, thousands of people who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to come into contact with creative talents and exciting achievements in the art world gained an insight and appreciation of art.⁶⁰ Although artists complained at times that his judgement was too harsh, he contributed immeasurably to raising the standards of local art and the standards of successive generations of art critics.

For some of these immigrants, the gaps in the South African art world provided them with niches to fill, and they achieved great success. Maria Stein-Lessing has been honoured in the Spiegel/Stein-Lessing African Art Wing of Johannesburg's

Museum Africa. Harries's contribution to book production in South Africa was acknowledged by four major awards, one of which became known as the Katrine Harries prize.⁶¹ Alexander was awarded the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns's medal for Art Criticism – an entirely new category for this institution – which was presented to him five days before his death in 1971. Ullmann was awarded the Queen's Coronation Medal in 1953⁶² and admitted that "(t)he opportunities offered to me were unique. What I have made of them was limited by my own limitations."⁶³

However, for many German Jewish artists, the change was traumatic and they were unable to transplant themselves successfully. Some could never shake off the psychic scars left by their experiences in Europe, compounded after the war by survivor guilt. Maria Stein-Lessing, Malva Alexander and HV Meyerowitz committed suicide. Others had difficulty in adapting to the standards of taste and the conservatism of the buying public.

Hanns Ludwig Katz never felt at home in Johannesburg. He had been labelled a "degenerate artist", with one of his paintings on show at that notorious exhibition, his work removed from the collections in German art galleries. Although a leading German expressionist painter who had exhibited frequently before the rise of Hitler, his reputation had preceded him and he had difficulty in exhibiting his work in South Africa. A press review at a posthumous exhibition admitted that "South African society... showed no interest in Katz's paintings. It did not appreciate either his expressionist use of colour or his subjects. The South African Academy refused to grant him membership and prevented the acceptance of his pictures at exhibitions."⁶⁴ Even offers by his widow and his friend Hans Wongschowski to donate some of his works to museum collections on permanent loan or as donations were turned down. Yet this was an artist whose work had been acquired by major European galleries before the rise of Hitler! It did not help that the conservatism of the South African art scene led to a certain degree of sympathy towards Nazi concepts of art. In 1940, the Director of the SA National Gallery, Edward Roworth, stated approvingly that "In our time, German art has acquired some of the lowest forms known to the modern movement in general; however, recently Mr. Hitler has been putting a stop to this flood of 'degenerate' art, leaving the exponents of modernism to choose between the lunatic asylum and the concentration camp".⁶⁵

Born in Karlsruhe in 1892, Katz studied at Atelier Matisse, Paris, the Technical University, Karlsruhe, and the Grand Ducal Academy of Art, Karlsruhe, Rupprecht-Karls University, Heidelberg, Humboldt University, Berlin and Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich, after which he opened a studio. Although his mother was not Jewish, Nazi regulations identified a Jew as any one with one non-Aryan grandparent.⁶⁶

The *Judische Rundschau* of 28 April 1933 summed up the new situation: "The question with

which Jews have toyed for hundreds of years – namely whether or not one is a Jew – now no longer exists. It has been decided into the third generation. No one is now at liberty to answer the question of whether or not one wants to be a Jew”.⁶⁷

At first Katz immersed himself in the activities of the Kulturbund Deutscher Juden, but with the bankruptcy of his painting and decoration business, it was impossible for him to support himself. He arrived in South Africa on the *Stuttgart* in 1936, with his new wife – his previous wife, a musician, having died two years previously.

In South Africa, a friend wrote, he lacked both material means and that cultural stimulus which was the breath of life to him, nor could he accept its standards of art.⁶⁸ Nor could South Africa accept his standards of art, and his qualities as a painter were little recognised.⁶⁹ He supported himself as a house painter and decorator and was invited to contribute a few articles on colour for the *South African Architectural Record*.

In Johannesburg, Katz’s artistic output did not decrease but his themes changed. Formerly, he painted figures in expensive oils; now, he no longer felt able to paint people, but turned to landscapes in water colours, some of which he was able to sell.

“Even with no personal commentary from the artist himself, one must interpret this as a reaction to the shock of being uprooted and to the insecurity of living in a strange environment. And he, for whom music was so important, never touched his violin again.”⁷⁰

Four years after he arrived, Katz died of cancer. Only after his death were some of his paintings shown at local Jewish art exhibitions, organised by the Board of Deputies and the Johannesburg Women’s Zionist League and reviewed by Ernest Ullmann and Dr. Joseph Sachs.

It took half a century for Katz to become recognised in South Africa, and that was only because the attention of the SA National Gallery in Cape Town was drawn to the fact that Germany had held a retrospective of his work. Arrangements were made through the German Consulate-General and his friend Hans Wongschowski to bring some of his paintings to Cape Town for a major exhibition in 1994. Thus it happened that nearly 55 years after his death, the value of his work was at last appreciated. At that time, not a single South African gallery owned a painting by him and when one, *The Eye Operation*, was offered to Wits University as a donation, the gift was turned down. The painting found a home in Embden, Germany.

“At last”, said Marilyn Martin, director of the SA National Gallery, “the public has been made aware of the extent and the depth of the work and the contribution of Hanns Ludwig Katz; his place in history has been affirmed and reinstated.”⁷¹

But by then, it was too late. This article in a small way is also trying to affirm the extent and depth of the contribution made to South Africa by these German Jewish refugees. Although not an exhaustive list of the artists or their contributions, it is hoped that the

information will be sufficient to awaken in our generation an awareness of what we owe to the influence of these émigré talents and intellects, an influence both forgotten and insufficiently acknowledged.

NOTES

- 1 N.Knight, (ed); *l’Afrique : A Tribute to Maria Stein-Lessing and Leopold Spiegel*, David Krut, 2010, p22. Many thanks to Philip Todres for drawing this and other books to my attention. I would also like to thank Dr Ute Ben Yosef and the Jacob Gitlin Library for making material available for me.
- 2 J. Medawar & D. Pyke, *Hitler’s Gift: The True Story of the Scientists Expelled by the Nazi Regime*, New York, Arcade Publishers, 2000. They only analysed the scientific contribution, but this ‘gift’ extended to many other areas, including art.
- 3 N Dubow, *Irma Stern*, Struik, 1974, p8.
- 4 L. Van Robbroeck, *Writing White on Black: Modernism as Discursive Paradigm in South African Writing on Modern Black Art*, PhD Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2006. She mentions Einstein’s *Negerplastik*, (1915), Vatter’s *Plastik der Naturvolker* (1926) and Von Sydow’s *Die Kunst der Naturvolker und der Vorzeit* (1923), p95.
- 5 B. Feistel-Rohmeder, quoted in H Proud and W. Snyman, in *Hanns Ludwig Katz, South African National Gallery*, 1993, p38
- 6 Alice Marqis, *Art Czar: The Rise and Fall of Clement Greenberg*, Lund Humphries 2006, pp107ff
- 7 H. Proud and W. Snyman, 1993, pp40, 47
- 8 *Ibid.*, p41
- 9 *Ibid.*, p47
- 10 *Ibid.*, p49
- 11 Katrine Harries Collection, University of Cape Town contains the marriage certificate of her maternal grandfather, Gottlieb Salinger, from the Gesamtarchiv der Deutschen Juden.
- 12 H O Simon, ‘Settlers of the 1930s: Ernest Ullmann as an Example’, in *Jewish Affairs*, March 1956, p21
- 13 N. Dubow, 1974, pp9-10
- 14 J. Carmen, *Uplifting the Colonial Philistine: Florence Phillips and the Making of the Johannesburg Art Gallery*, Wits University Press, 2006, p216
- 15 Johannesburg exhibition programme (28 March - 24 April 1910), South African National Union Schedule and Lectures, in J. Carmen, 2006. Quoted chapter note 49, p325. The note also refers to an article in South Africa, 16 July 1910, which does acknowledge Bushman art which, “if primitive... are far in advance of anything else done by so uncivilised a race” – this is attributed to the fact that the Bushmen had so much leisure before the advent of the European and Bantu races.
- 16 F.L. Alexander, *Art in South Africa since 1900*, Balkema, 1962, vii
- 17 S. Kloppers, ‘South Africa’s Culture of Collecting. The Unofficial History’, *African Arts*, Vol 37 no. 4 Winter 2004, pp20-21
- 18 Knight, 2010, p22.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp9-10
- 20 P. Girsheik, ‘Maria Stein-Lessing: Setting the stage for African Art’ in Knight, 2010, p37
- 21 L. Jacobson, ‘l’Afrique: A Tribute to Maria Stein-Lessing and Leopold Spiegel’, *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 64, no. 1, 2009, p52

- 22 P. Girsheik in N.Knight, 2010, p38
- 23 Knight, pp22, 41
- 24 N Leibhammer, 'A fragmented picture The collections of Maria Stein-Lessing and Leopold Spiegel', in Knight, 2010, p47. Luthuli's letter was dated 7 June 1946.
- 25 E. Berman, *Art and Artists in South Africa*, Balkema, 1970, p17
- 26 N. Knight, 'Hidden Treasures', in Knight, 2010, p19
- 27 Leibhammer, in Knight, 2010, p53
- 28 Knight, 2010, p15
- 29 S Kloppers, 2004, p19-20
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Nobody realised the extent, diversity and value of her collections until the catalogue was compiled. *Catalogue of the Collections of the Irma Stern Museum*, UCT, 1971.
- 32 Quoted in L. Jacobson, 2009, p52.
- 33 F.Sichel, *From Refugee to Citizen*, Balkema, Cape Town, 1966, p65.
- 34 Quoted in L. Jacobson., 2009, p52.
- 35 U. Scholz, *Phafa –Nyika: Contemporary Black Art in South Africa with special reference to the Transvaal*, Art Archives, University of Pretoria, No 4, 1980, p3
- 36 Knight, p31
- 37 A.H.Honikman, in *HV Meyerowitz, (1900-1945) The Hyman Liberman Memorial Door*, SA National Gallery, Cape Town, 1970, p5.
- 38 Eva also carved a relief in wood of Lady Anne Barnard in the foyer of the Claremont Civic Centre while for the University of Cape Town Vladimir carved stone urns with images of professors and teak fanlights.
- 39 H.V.Meyerowitz, *A Report on the Possibilities of the Development of Village Crafts in Basutoland* (Moriya Printing Works, 1936), Wikipedia.
- 40 Herbert Vladimir Meyerowitz, Wikipedia
- 41 C. Coe, 'Educating an African Leadership: Achimota and the Teaching of African Culture in the Gold Coast', *Africa Today* - Volume 49, Number 3, Fall Indiana University Press 2002, pp23-44 muse.jhu.edu/journals/africa_today/v049/49.3coe.html
- 42 K. Antubam, 'The story of modern development in Ghanaian arts', pp.197-215, in: *Ghana's Heritage of Culture*. Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1963. DT510.4.A6X 1963. OCLC 01326505. www.sil.si.edu/silpublications/.../maadetail.cfm?subCategory
- 43 A. P. Long, *Female Aspects Of Deity: Searching For Lady Wisdom*. University College, Lampeter, Wales, 1995.
- 44 E.Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan*, (1951); *Traditions of Origin*. (1952); *The Akan of Ghana, Their Ancient Beliefs* (1958); *The Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt* (1960); *And yet Women Once Ruled Supreme* (1986).
- 45 F.L.Alexander, 1962, p162; G. Ogilvie, *The Dictionary or South African Painters and Sculptors*, 1988,198.
- 46 Knight, p101
- 47 E.Berman, 1970, p209
- 48 N.Knight, 'South African Jewish Sculptors', In *Zionist Record and SA Jewish Chronicle*, New Year Annual, 25.9.1970, p89.
- 49 Quoted in van Robbroeck, 2006, p225.
- 50 www.artnet.de/library/05/0536/t053693
- 51 With thanks to Philip Todres for the information and Christopher Peter, Director, Irma Stern Museum (personal communication, 13.11.2009). Von Frieling was the Dubow dress shop's window dresser and designed its swing tags; Marilyn Martin, 'Albert Adams, Obituary', in *Guardian*, 5.1.2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/mews/2007/jan/05/guardianobituaries.southafrica>.
- 52 *Katrine Harries 1914-1978, Catalogue*, South African National Gallery, undated 1978?
- 53 N. Dubow, 'Katrine Harries' in Toerien, Heine and George Duby, *Our Art 3*, Foundation for Education, Science and technology, Lantern, n.d., pp93-4.
- 54 F.L.Alexander, 1962, pp163, 146
- 55 Sichel, p65
- 56 E.Ullmann, *Designs on Life*, Howard Timmins, Cape Town, 1970, pp60, 69.
- 57 Ibid., p249
- 58 This section owes a great deal to U. Ben Yosef and G Schrire, "FL Alexander: His Life and Contributions", *Jewish Affairs*, 2005, pp 60, 20
- 59 Jewish Art Exhibition, Cape Town 1951, 29th October - 14th November. I must thank Larna Bronstein for bringing the catalogue to my attention. Her father, Ben Jaffe, loaned many of the works on display.
- 60 He held strong views on the value of what he called Africana art and dismissed unenlightened collectors who regarded themselves as connoisseurs as possessing "the barbarism of fundamental ignorance". When the South African Government commissioned him to value the Africana collection of Dr William Fehr, he placed such low values on the work that the owner was said to have been most annoyed and RF Kennedy, the Director of the Africana Museum, Johannesburg, was requested to revalue them. Frank Bradlow, 'Tribute to FL Alexander', *Jewish Affairs*, vol 29, no 8, 1974, p141.
- 61 including the Cape Tercentenary Award for lithography and the SA Library Association's Hoogenhout Award for the best-illustrated children's book.
- 62 Alexander, 1962, p169
- 63 Ullmann, 1970, p257
- 64 Information in the press at the exhibition of his work 1961, H. Proud and W. Snyman, 1993, p66
- 65 H. Proud and W. Snyman, 1993, p61
- 66 Ibid., pp14-15
- 67 Ibid., p42
- 68 Dr Joseph Sachs, 'Hans Katz', in *Jewish Affairs*, September 1947, p24.
- 69 H. Jeppe, *South African Artists 1900-1962*, Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel, Johannesburg, 1963, p46.
- 70 H.Wongtchowski, in H. Proud and W. Snyman, 1993, p64.
- 71 Marilyn Martin, Foreword, H. Proud and W. Snyman, 1993, p7.
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AZILA TALIT REISENBERGER'S WRITINGS AS POETIC BIOGRAPHY OF SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY

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Naomi Dison Kaplan

When one asks writers why they write, their answers vary slightly, but on the whole all stress that it is not about choice - they write because they have to. It is an urge, and it is part of their personality; it gives meaning to their lives.

Being the ones that hold the pen gives writers power and control over the written text. They are in control of the machination process, which explains also the abundance of written material after major traumas. The ability to describe and share difficult circumstances serves as an emotional outlet, which is recognized as psychologically beneficial. In addition, the authors' control over the events narrated alleviates the feeling of helplessness accompanying the loss of control experienced, usually by victims of unhappy circumstance.

One of the most common circumstances where modern people lose control and as a result feel frustrated and helpless is when they are uprooted and find themselves in a new environment, with new people, foreign customs and ways of life to contend with.^[1]

The alienation associated with immigration is aggravated when the move involves also a change of language, that is, the abandonment of one's mother tongue and having to learn to communicate in a new one.

The inability to express oneself at a level acceptable to 'people of the pen' is a major problem to immigrant writers. Through the loss of the author's best tool, the mother tongue, the verbal expression that could have alleviated the trauma of their being uprooted is muted at the very time when the need to express themselves is so great.

To make things even more difficult, the writing of literature, which goes beyond journalism or reporting facts, draws heavily on the prevailing cultural milieu, and every language carries within it layers of cultural reference.

Thus, "immigrant authors" face a choice: if they write in the newly acquired language, when much of its cultural layers are as yet not known to them, they then produce poor literature. However, if they stay in their mother tongue, which in most cases is not the

local language, then they face poor readership. This notwithstanding, some do choose to write in their mother tongue as they are fully aware that their ability to express themselves in the new tongue is not on a sufficiently high level. Neither prospect is a good one for people whose essence depends on their ability to write.

Where do immigrant writers, and those who belong to minority groups, place themselves? What language do they use and what cultural reference do they allude to? Who is their imagined reader? This subject is of great importance for all who consider Jewish culture close to their hearts, given that Jews are a minority throughout the Diaspora.

Who do Jewish writers write for? Their religious connections, who may understand subtle cultural references? Or do they write for their geographical neighbors, who share other codes of reference?

This paper deals with the issue through examination of current Hebrew writers in South Africa, and with particular attention to the prestigious Cape Town writer, Azila Talit Reisenberger. Currently, she is regarded as the most eminent Hebrew writer in South Africa, and one of the most acknowledged and esteemed Hebrew writers in the Diaspora.

Azila epitomizes writers who move from country to country and from language to language, finding themselves "on the seam" between past and present, known and foreign, physical reality and mental affiliation, and how they are hindered by or utilize the fact that they are the 'Suture as the Seam between Literatures' (as she entitles her 2006 paper, *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 19 (2). 2006. 125-137). These issues, whether decided instinctively or after cognitive deliberation, determine the creative process. Writing literature is a co-operative process, as even when the authors write in order to organize their thoughts and ideas, they have an imaginary reader in mind. And though it is an imaginary reader, she or he is a participant in the creative process. This comes through very strongly in the following extract from an interview of the playwright Athol Fugard by Brent Meersman (*Mail & Guardian*, 26/2/2010):

So you miss the South African audience?

Yes, for one simple reason: it's the audience that occurs to me when I'm writing a play. Harold Pinter said, "You write a play first for an audience of one - yourself at the desk. Then you think

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about it after that first encounter, if it has any quality". I think about a South African audience that will know, capture, and enjoy the nuances that one brings into one's writing. I write for my fellow South Africans. White and black, we are dealing with the same issues; they haven't gone away....

Do you view your work in recent years, in particular, *Victory and Coming Home*, as part political activism?

If you're going to tell a real South African story, you don't have to worry about its political resonances; they come with those built into them. Just get the story straight, tell the story truthfully and it will be like a pebble in the pond. There will be ripples and you don't have to worry about those ripples. No one goes into a pond without ripples. And you know, South African stories are like that. Why are people desperate? They are going to be very basic issues.

This paper, through a close reading of Reisenberger's writing, examines two main issues pertaining to Minority Literature, especially Hebrew writing, in South Africa: Who is the imaginary or 'implied' reader whom the authors have in mind when they tell a story? And what are the narrated themes: stories from the past or present, the home land or geographical reality?

Reisenberger, who is known to many by her nickname, Tzili, was born in Israel in 1952. After matriculating, she served in the Israeli Defense Force and Studied Industrial and Environmental Design at Bezalel in Jerusalem. In 1975, she traveled in Europe and the Americas with a back pack. She lived with Eskimos, was robbed in Jamaica, was a guest of Pierre Trudeau in Quebec and served as an au pair in New York. During her one-day visit to Barbados, she met Peter Reisenberger, who joined her in Israel. After their marriage, they came for a belated honeymoon to Cape Town, and never left. They have lived in Sea Point and Camps Bay and raised their three children as proud South Africans, yet have always emphasized strongly their ties to their roots, in faraway lands.

Azila went back to academic studies, acquiring every degree (BA, Honors and MA) while her children were being born. When she went to the delivery room for the first time in 1979, she came out with her first-born son, Robin, and a poem: "*Ima'ot Ha'Olam tevorachna*" (Blessed be the mothers of the world).^[2] During her sitting for her PhD, she was asked to lecture in the Hebrew and Jewish Studies department at UCT. Currently, she heads the Hebrew department at UCT's School of Languages and Literature and is a sought-after lecturer throughout the world. Since 1990, she has assisted on ad hoc basis as Spiritual Leader for Temple Hillel, the Progressive congregation in East London.

Apart from her academic publications, Azila has

published many poems and short stories in literary journals around the world, and five books of her own. Two of her plays have been performed at the Grahamstown Festival of the Arts by the UCT Drama School, namely *Adam's Apple* (in 1991) and *The Loving Father* (1996).

Azila's books are: *Nekuda U'mabat* (poetry), Eked, Tel Aviv, 1986 (Hebrew); *Kisses Through a Veil*, (poetry), Green Sea Publishers, Cape Town, 1994 (English); *Mahzor A'hava*, (poetry) Gevanim, Tel Aviv, 2002, (Hebrew); *Mipo ad Cape Ha'Tikva Ha'Tova*" (short stories) Gevanim, Tel Aviv, 2004 (Hebrew) and *Life in Translation*, (poetry) Modjaji, Cape Town, 2008, (English, with four poems in English and Hebrew).

In 2002 and in 2005, Azila further wrote and edited two academic books dealing with minority groups, an issue at the forefront of her academic interest, viz. *Women's Spirituality in the Transformation of South Africa*, (Ed) Waxmann Munster: New York/Munchen/Berlin, 2002 (English) and *Pride in Tradition through Acceptance – Jewish Identity in SA, as reflected in Lison's Stories*, Green Sea Publishers, Cape Town, 2005, (English and Hebrew). After an international conference on Minority Literature that she organized in Cape Town in 2005, she edited the following year a full journal volume designated to 'The Echoes of Religion in Minority Literature' (*Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol.19.2).

As seen from the above, it is clear that the language in which Azila has written has shifted with her years of living and working in South Africa. Initially, her writings were all in Hebrew. Some were then published in English, thanks to translations by others and in recent years, she has written in both languages. Evidently, her daily use of English as a language of communication has impacted on her will and skill to write in it.

One can argue that proficiency in English has helped her to make the transition, yet this has not always been the case with Minority writers. This is the view of Jennifer Cohen, who studied the writing of Israel Ben-Yosef, the Hebrew academic and author who lived in South Africa yet published all his poetry in Hebrew. She maintained that some authors express themselves well only in their mother-tongue and therefore, despite having often gained genuine proficiency in the local language, consciously decide to stay with what she called *Girsa d'Yankuta* (the mother tongue - *mama lashen* as the Yiddish equivalent would have it).^[3]

Earlier in her writing career, it seems that Azila Reisenberger was not conscious of the issue of language and of its importance. However, with the passage of time, more and more poems have dealt with the theme of language. In her 2008 *Life in Translation*, the local publishing house included four poems in Hebrew, side by side with their English translation. Given that the publishing house in question had nothing to do with Hebrew or Jewish culture, the inclusion of the Hebrew poems side by side with the English version "makes a statement".

Themes

The fact that Azila's first poem was born in the delivery room together with her first born son suggests that her poetry is very personal and records her own life in an artistic, biographical way. Indeed in her first book of poetry (*Nekuda U'Mabat* – 'A Point and a View', 1986), Azila, who was 34, wrote poetry of love to her husband, children, parents, between two women who happen to be her friends, ethereal love to 'the mothers of the world', sadness about the difficulties and suffering of women around the world and about maturing and self acceptance. All seem to be a close reflection of her thoughts and those of many other women in their mid-thirties like her.

It is a common phenomenon that the first book of many writers is their most autobiographical, and therefore I was surprised to find a poem about sitting in a wheel-chair. In a personal interview with Azila in March 2010, I learned that in her late teens, she had been confined to a wheel chair and had had to relearn how to walk. This, together with the fact that her first poem was born with her first born son, and is a praise song to all mothers in the world, makes me state quite clearly that her first book is, as with many first time writers, a "poetic biography".

Kisses through a Veil, her second book (1994), is in English. From the preface, one learns that the poems were translated or edited by others (Rachelle Mann, Hannah Blacher and Deborah Rhind, and edited by Barry Lotz). The themes in the book are more varied. We still find great admiration for mothers and motherhood, for the close knit relationships in a family, and many poems about love. However, this time love is depicted as much more sensuous and erotic, with some poems about divorce, and second families, which may not have been born out of personal experience but is fairly common these days.

Some of the themes of the poems in *Kisses through a Veil* are similar to those in the first book, yet they are now much richer and more sophisticated. A women's longing is describe as 'Eve's Melody' (p35), which opens with:

Come play me my love,
Silenced Grand Piano.
Come play me my love
The Ivory soft
With the black secret notes...

In 'The Emissary' (p38), with strong allusion to the Bible, she likened the modern *Shlichim* from Israel to Abraham's messenger, Eliezer. Through this allusion, she dishes us a subtle criticism, all with a smile, and only to people who know their Bible:

He drank eagerly
From the pitcher
Of her lust.
And soon forgot
His camels
And his master
Who sent him.

When she refused
To follow him
Into the Promised Land –
He stayed at Nahor,
Where they multiplied
Like the sand of the sea.

Befitting a poet who reaches her forties, there are contemplative poems about the meaning of life, Liberation, God, "accepting things as they are" and "Path to your dreams", on one hand, while there are poems of revulsion at 'stupidity' on the other.

One of the moving poems in *Kisses through a Veil* is that entitled 'Legend', dedicated to the academic and fellow poet Israel Ben-Yosef. The then head of the Hebrew department when she began lecturing at UCT, he was her mentor, who recognized her talent and encouraged her to write poetry.

It is in this book that we read for the first time about living "in Exile" away from one's own homeland and close family. As it was published in 1994, eight years after her arrival in South Africa and her leaving her extended family back in Israel, one sees here the beginning of the theme of longing for the "old home".

In 2002, Azila published her third book of poetry, in Hebrew, *Mahazor Ahava* (A Cycle of Love). These poems are varied and multi-faceted, reflecting a sensitive observant eye and deeply contemplative soul. The subject of love, marriage and family depict many sentiments associated with it. On one hand, there are many allusions to the ultimate love as seen in the Song of Songs by King Solomon; on the other, it acknowledges and records love, as mating of the Black widow, or poems about 'abortion'. An example is *Aza Ka'Mavet Ahava* (Strong as Death is Love, p8, here in English translation):

Strong as death is Love
Divine Flame, when
Consummated
Out of Man's constraint.
Many waters are not able
To quench love,
Nor can rivers flood it away.
No Dew drops of reason,
No torrents of laws
Can extinguish it...

There are poems of 'the rules of the game' or divorce on one hand and celebration of the 'feminine' on the other. Now, at 50, Azila has moved away from the personal and records the richness of life around with its varied experiences. Life and family is less than half of the book; in the other parts she describes life as a long journey, she contemplates about 'what is the benefit' of it all, she writes about the 'Hidden light' (*Ha'Or Ha'Ganuz*) in the 'Kabalah' and a few other poems with a strong Jewish aspect, such as 'Kadish' and 'Kabalat shabbat'. In spite of their very Jewish names, and terminology, these poems can be described as spiritual, rather than religious, and the most striking feature about them is the rich

allusion to Biblical texts, to the Prayer Book, and to Jewish customs. It is clear that Azila's teaching and research at UCT and her role as a spiritual leader of the Progressive community in East London has added to the depth of her writings. One has to read these poems carefully in order to enjoy the multi-layered reference, and see its richness. In this book the section of 'longing for home' is growing. There is a lot of pain in poems which describe the longing for the mother-tongue, to mother's love, to the old home. There is a sharp sense of alienation in "being" an outsider.

This theme of being *in between* is the core of Azila's book of short stories *Mipo ad Cape Ha'Tikva Ha'Tova* ('From here to the Cape of Good Hope', 2004). This is an interesting title, as while she was writing it, she was living in South Africa, yet the word '*mipo*' denotes 'from here' – which in the book can be understood as Tel-Aviv. So the fact that she physically was in Cape Town, the point of view is from Tel-Aviv as the starting point all the way to the Cape of Good Hope. Indeed, some of the stories in the book describe life in Israel, while others describe life in Cape Town.

The geographical locations of some of the stories are vague. It can be due to the fact that most deal with the 'human condition', which is universal, but for stories which are so colorful and 'grand' the lack of exact time and place is puzzling. This can be attributed to the fact that in the late 1990s, when some of the stories were written, emigrants out of Israel were being criticized and regarded as 'weaklings'. As Reisenberger knew that the book would be published in Israel, consciously or unconsciously she may have concealed the fact that she now lived permanently in Cape Town. It is, however, rather hard not to guess this from the themes and characters in some of the stories themselves, such as from 'The Bergis'. This describes a young family who move to an old house on the slope of the mountain and mentions the Bergis, Van-Riebeeck, Apartheid, and even Sea Point promenade (without specifying Sea Point). Thus, South Africans recognize immediately Sea Point, while for readers in Israel, the location is slightly vague.

Another typically South African story is 'All is Well', about the relationship between a Jewish family and their Xhosa maid. There is the story *Basar Va'dam* (Flesh and Blood) about a butcher from Salt River and stories about Cape Town harbor and the South Easter, East London and even about a family, without a location, that Capetonians may recognize as a depiction of an eminent family in town.

This collection of stories won a prestigious literary prize in Israel, and the book was met with great compliments, by literary critics as well as readers. It is easy to see the aesthetic and artistic values: one of the stories is narrated by an old Jewish man, and through his "slow thinking" Azila levels criticism against certain conservative traditions. The story is crafted in a unique way, so as to draw the readers to a particular view-point. Therefore it is "not an author" or an all-knowing voice criticizing a situation, lest

the readers develop a strong 'antithetical sentiment'. But as the narrating voice is simple and not so clever a person, the readers distance themselves from his stereotypical opinions, and indeed Reisenberger gets them on her side.

In 2008, Azila published another poetry book 'Life in Translation', which was sold out, and had to be reprinted. This is clearly a South Africa creation. The themes are varied and rich, as befitting her multifaceted and interesting life. As the publisher describes it, "[she] is a Bible scholar, a Rabbi, a mother, a wife, and a poet". Currently, Azila calls South Africa her home and celebrates life in Cape Town, yet deeply misses Israel and 'her' Hebrew language. The poet Antjie Krog and Professor Marcia Leveson, both known literary figures in South Africa, have both addressed the theme which emerges most strongly in the book: living in between cultures, between languages, and between lands.

Wrote Krog, "Not to be heard. Not to be understood. Azila Reisenberger's poetry makes us overwhelmingly aware how often we have to translate ourselves in order to matter".

Leveson comments: "Tenderly and candidly the[se] poems lay bare the experience of a woman who feels herself an outsider, in between two lives, two countries, two languages... these fresh moments of insight and nostalgia make an important contribution to the multi-lingual nature of South African poetry".

The poems in *Life in Translation* reflect the inner world side by side with the physical reality of life in South Africa, by a Jewish woman. In many ways it is a collective poetry of the Jewish community in South Africa, in the same way that it can be seen as a collective poetry of women; or of creative people the world over. It is a clear voice "from the margin". Therefore I would entitle it clearly a representative of 'Minority Literature'.

In a recent review of *Life in Translation*, published in 2010 in the official publication of the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown, Marike Beyers pinpoints the most important issue which I would like to impress upon in this article, that is that in spite of Azila's poetry being so individualistic, it is an important voice of the South African Jewish community. The following are extracts from that review:

The poems in *Life in translation* speak with warmth of the experiences of loving and being loved. They speak of being a mother, a teacher, a woman within a religious community that does not explicitly acknowledge her voice, a Jew living in and with history, a person finding community with and kindness from others, finding herself in a language other than her first thoughts.

In combining small moments in her family life with broader narratives such as classical mythology or Biblical texts, the poet interweaves intimacy and a regenerative sense of

community... The sense of finding a space for women within a broader context, is echoed in poems that recast Jewish stories or texts in a modern and particularly feminine context. One example is 'In the beginning' that presents a pregnant woman's thoughts in terms of the creation story. Breaking off the end-line is particularly powerful: "And it was evening and it was morning/
And it is"

...Many of the poems speak about family events and rites of passage (when a person reaches a new status in life – sisterhood, growing older, watching one's children, friendship, desertion, and funerals. These gain particular poignancy within a homely, but recognized wider narrative.

In 'Heritage' she casts herself into the living tradition of her predecessors. Jewish history is also fore-grounded in 'Whispering', where the holocaust remains with the poet even in small everyday rituals of life. The despair of feeling isolated from life is expressed in linking a fall from a bed to the history of a people – "Hard and cold the diaspora"...

There is a great joy in language. The mother-teacher takes joy in her children's linguistic inventiveness in 'Naches'. There are the beautiful phrases that link concepts or perceptions in startling ways, such as "this is Wordly bliss"; "My mouth was wide open/like a fish frozen scream"; and the lovely image in which she startles the Rabbis and – "makes their beards/sit up and take notice".

There is also an awareness of translation – of being between languages. Some poems are in Hebrew script. Some poems have been translated by other poets. In the poems themselves this is expressed in a poem addressed to 'you who live secure in your mother-tongue' and in the poet looking for meaning in the dictionary – 'is there a word for the wish to/belong?/I am validated only through/being mediated/in the dictionary'.

More than this, there is a sense of experience, of life being a process of translation, with the individual: "... wedged in between,/as if trapped in a wheelchair/with stairs/both ahead and behind".

Life in translation is a collection bringing those stairs right here where we can recognize them as our stairs and wheelchairs too.

The philosophers already asked: if a tree falls in the forest and none sees it, did the tree ever fall? And the answer is that unless something is witnessed and validated it is difficult to answer if it ever existed. History usually keeps records of the past. After major events such as wars and disasters, historians

sieve through all documents and engage in interviews to find a pattern and a record for posterity as to what happened. But usually, very little attention is paid for flowing life during peaceful times. Yet if one does not record the flowing reality "on the ground", who in the future will know if we ever existed?

As the Jewish communities in the Diaspora are amongst other Minority groups and little of their rich lives is ever recorded in the chronicles of the host countries and main-stream histories, it is incumbent upon us to keep the community experience for posterity. "I suggest that the richness of the community should *not only* be evident from how many communal meetings took place, how many donations were given or of how many great gala events were celebrated. These may be important, but the life of the 'people', the mainstream members of the community, can be gleaned from telling the stories of members of the community, as they who "sit on the seam" between life experience of all citizens in South Africa and the Jewish community. They are the ones whose work will bear witness to our community existence. In the same way that Zalman Aaron Lison's short stories from the 1950s reflect the existence of the Jewish community in South Africa at that time, as well as (if not better) than any historical document, I suggest that Azila Talit Reisenberger's writing will be read as "living history", or what she herself calls: 'poetic biography', of the Jewish community in South Africa at the turn of the 21st Century.

Amos Oz, describes people as Russian dolls, who are replicas of their ancestors whom they carry within (in *Oto hayam*). I suggest that Reisenberger is like one such *babushkas* Oz describes. She carries within her not only her ancestors, but also the community within which she now lives. Her writings are not just 'one woman's poetry', but rather a reflection of the collective.

As a part of the South Africa literary *corpus*, Reisenberger's writing is essential, as a voice which writes "from the margin", representing a minority group, as it not only

enriches main-stream literature and prevents "cultural reductionism" (Reisenberger, 2006:125-137), it allows minority groups to reflect on and celebrate their culture. It may reflect one-woman's life experience, but depicts it with the richness of the Jewish culture. It celebrates not only the religious tradition, but also national loyalty and the love of the Hebrew language, and should be kept as a witness for our collective cultural experience.

NOTES

- [1] I agree here with Joseph Sherman, who maintains that the hardship experienced by immigrants gives rise to the creative process (*From a Land Far Off*, Jewish Publication Society, Cape Town, 1987: 1-15)
- [2] According to the speech at the launch of *Life in Translation*, 30 January 2008, Cape Town.
- [3] In "Minority Literature conference" at UCT, 28-31 August 2005.

YIDDISH CIVILIZATION: THE STORY OF YIDDISH AND THE PEOPLE WHO SPOKE IT

*

Bernard Katz

Max Weinreich, the greatest Yiddish scholar of his generation, was in Finland delivering a lecture when World War II broke out. This lecture saved his life. Unable to return to his home in Vilna, he made his way to New York, where he taught Yiddish. Although he had only a few students and many thought his work was hopeless, he persisted. When a student asked him why, he answered: "Because Yiddish has magic, it will outwit history".¹ Weinreich had been a founder of YIVO (Yiddish Scientific Institute) in Vilna in 1925. After his move, he transferred its offices to New York, where it became the centre of Yiddish scholarly research. He went on to author the authoritative four volume history of the Yiddish language.

Shmarya Levin, the Zionist leader and Hebrew and Yiddish author, wrote that "...the Jewish people ... represent the only instance of a people that has created two languages of its own".² He contrasted the two Jewish languages as follows: "...if Hebrew was nobler and more dignified – the exterior of the coat – Yiddish was warmer and more comfortable – the lining of the coat".³

Yiddish is, in fact, only one of more than a dozen languages invented by Jews. These include: Bukharic (aka Judeo-Tadjik), Dzudezhmo (Ladino, Judeo-Spanish), Haketiya (Judeo-Spanish), Judeo-Arabic (Yahudic), Judeo-Aragonese, Judeo-Aramaic (Kurdi, Hulaula, Targum, Kurdishic), Judeo-Berber, Judeo-Corfiote (from Corfu), Judeo-Georgian (Gurjuc, Gruzinic), Judeo-Greek (Yevanic), Judeo-Italian, Judeo-Moroccan, Judeo-Persian (Dzidzi, Jidi, Parsic), Judeo-Yemenite (Temanic), Judeo-Iranian (Juhuri, Judeo-Tat, Tatic), Judeo-Czech (Knaanic), Neo-Aramaic (Lishanit, Targum), Judeo-Provençal (Shuadit) and, of course, Hebrew.⁴

Four thousand years ago, Abraham's tribe in Ur, Babylon, spoke Aramaic. When his people migrated to Canaan, they created the first major Jewish language – Hebrew. It was a fusion of the local Canaanite dialects (which over time became the majority component) and the language they brought with them – Aramaic (the minority component).⁵

Two and a half thousand years ago, in the year 586 BCE, the First Temple was destroyed. The Jews were exiled to Babylon and Hebrew ceased to be the everyday spoken language. Here, by the "Rivers of Babylon", the Jewish exiles created the second major

Jewish language – Judeo-Aramaic. This was a fusion of the local Babylonian Aramaic (which over time became the majority component) and Hebrew (the minority component). The Talmud was written in Judeo-Aramaic because that was the language the Jews spoke in Babylon. In the Jewish context, Judeo-Aramaic is mostly referred to simply as Aramaic.

Around a thousand years ago, Jews from France and Italy migrated to the German towns along the Rhine (Cologne, Mainz, Worms, Speyer and Metz) and Danube (Regensburg). These spoke Laaz – a Jewish version of Old French (western Laaz) and a Jewish version of Old Italian (southern Laaz). The Torah was studied in Hebrew and the Talmud in Judeo-Aramaic. The settlers became the first Ashkenazim (German Jews). They created the third major Jewish language – Yiddish, a fusion of the local Germanic dialect (the majority component over time) and the languages they brought with them – Laaz, Hebrew and Judeo-Aramaic (the minority component). The earlier creation of Hebrew and Judeo-Aramaic has been referred to as little bangs whereas in Germany, the creation of Yiddish by a fusion between a Semitic language and a very different Germanic language has been referred to as a big bang.⁶

Around the year 1000, the rabbinic and Talmudic authority of Babylon was approaching its end and was being passed to Ashkenaz.⁷ The symbolic "founder of Ashkenaz" was Rabbeinu Gershom (960 – 1028), whose yeshiva became the pre-eminent yeshiva in the Jewish world. Rabbeinu Gershom is well known for a number of new laws enforced under a *cherem* – known as the "*Cherem* of Rabbeinu Gershom" – which included the famous prohibition against polygamy. Weinreich termed this "*Cherem* of Rabbeinu Gershom" as the "declaration of independence of Ashkenaz". He writes that the profound significance of this act can be gauged from the fact that Rabbeinu Gershom entered history under the proud name of "Luminary of the Exile".⁸ Rabbeinu Gershom was followed by Rashi (1040 – 1105), the greatest of the Biblical and Talmudic scholars, who studied in the former's yeshiva before returning to France. Rashi spoke Laaz, and repeatedly refers to it in his commentaries whenever he required an Old French word for purposes of explanation.

These cataclysmic events – the creation of Yiddish and the establishment of Ashkenaz as the centre of rabbinic and Talmudic authority – came about through a small number of Jews. Around the year 300 CE, approximately one million Jews lived in the Western

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Roman Empire, but of these only 5 to 10 000 survived as Jews by the year 800 CE. All Yiddish speakers, all Ashkenazi Jews, are descendents of this small group.⁹

The Yiddish language is only a thousand or so years old. But many of its elements – words, phrases, idioms, etc – are much older. When, for example, a place hasn't been spruced up for a long time, you can say in Yiddish that it hasn't been renovated since “*sheyshes yemey breyshis*” (the “six days of creation”), which is as old as one can get for embedded living history in a currently spoken language. But some Yiddish words are even older. About 5000 years of history lie behind the Yiddish word *mazal*,¹⁰ sourced from biblical Hebrew, which in turn sourced it from ancient Akkadian.

Laaz, Hebrew and Judeo-Aramaic fused with the medieval German dialects in a very Jewish way. The Germanic elements incorporated into Yiddish were so radically ‘Judaized’ that Germans who heard their neighbours speak were immediately aware that the Jews had their “own language”. Perhaps the best example of how far Yiddish has departed from German is that Yiddish is arguably the most humorous language in the world. It would be hard to imagine such a claim being made with reference to German!

Dovid Katz is of the view that the Germanic elements of Yiddish are most closely related to the German dialects of Regensburg and Bavaria and that Regensburg and the Danube region is the closest Yiddish has to a home town.¹¹ Weinreich writes that there is no document of birth for Yiddish and that the language would have developed slowly without the speakers initially being aware that they were in fact speaking a new language. Hence, it is impossible to point exactly to the beginning of a language; “the beginnings” is more correct.¹² The oldest evidence of Yiddish is a sentence written in a Passover *machzor* from Worms, presumably by the owner, and dated 1272. It was discovered in 1963 and reads “A good day will happen to the person who brings this *machzor* to the synagogue”.¹³

No sooner had Yiddish established itself as a separate language than its people began to move. Jewish catastrophes starting with the Crusades resulted in the eastward expansion of Ashkenaz to Poland, Lithuania and elsewhere across Europe. Poland and Lithuania were tolerant societies. Abraham Menes wrote that “Since the golden age of Jewish life in Babylonia, Jews had not felt as much at home in a country as they now did in Poland”.¹⁴ In Lithuania, King Vytautas granted extensive rights and privileges to its Jewish citizens, which were preserved for many centuries by the country's enlightened rulers.¹⁵

The year 1500 is taken as the symbolic shift in rabbinic and Talmudic authority from Germany to Poland.¹⁶ Later Lithuania, and Vilna in particular, established itself as the preeminent yeshiva system in the Jewish world. For a period of almost 250 years from around 1500, while the Councils of Poland and Lithuania were in place, Jewish self-government existed. It was a golden age for Polish and Lithuanian Jewry.

By the 16th Century, the spread of Yiddish across Europe was at its maximum, from Alsace and Italy in the southwest to Holland in the northwest to Ukraine in the southeast and Belorussia in the northeast. It became one of the most extensive contiguous linguistic empires in the history of Europe.¹⁷ Ashkenaz lost its strict geographic definition as signifying a territory of German speaking lands and came to designate the culture of the Jews who had originated from there. So extensive did this geographic territory become that in 1750 a Christian grammarian, who published a book on the Yiddish language, wrote that Jews used to brag that “With Yiddish you can travel the world”.¹⁸

The eastward migration of Jews brought them into contact with Slavic languages – Polish, Ukrainian and Belorussian, and these made a massive contribution to Yiddish. The oldest contacts with Czech, and the more recent ones, with Russian, have left far less numerous traces. The impact of non-Slavic languages – Hungarian, Rumanian, Lithuanian and Latvian – has on the whole been of a strictly regional nature and has not penetrated the common literary language.¹⁹

The way in which the different languages fused in the process to create Yiddish makes it difficult to calculate the proportions of vocabulary contributed by various stocks.²⁰ Attempts have nevertheless been made. In 1904, Leo Wiener estimated 70% German, 20% Hebrew and 10% Slavic.²¹ Most experts, however, advise treating such statistics with caution.

What follows are the origin of some well-known Yiddish words:²² From Old French, comes *layen* (read) and from Old Italian, *bentch* and *yenta*. German words include *alter kocker*, *bagel*, *dreck*, *flayshig*, *fress*, *frum*, *haimish*, *kibbitz*, *kichel*, *klap*, *knaydl*, *kochleffl*, *kopdraynish*, *kugel*, *kvetch*, *macher*, *milchik*, *mish-mash*, *nuchshlepper*, *shlep*, *shmaltz*, *shnorrer*, *shnoz*, *shetl*, *shetik*, *tsimmes*, *tummel* and *zetz*. *Mentsch* derives from German, but in German it means man, while in Yiddish it refers to a decent, ethical human being. Words derived from Hebrew include *baleboss*, *chacham*, *chaver*, *chutzpah*, *gonif*, *koved*, *maven*, *mishpocheh*, *momzer*, *naches*, *rachmones*, *shikker*, *shikse*, *shmooz*, and *tsoris*. Slavic words include *blintzes*, *borsht*, *bubkes*, *dreml*, *kishka*, *latke*, *nudnik*, *shmatte*, *tsatske*, *yarmulke* and *zeide*. The experts tell us that the Slavic influence extends far beyond the vocabulary contribution and that Slavic had a profound impact on syntax – the way in which words are put together to produce phrases and sentences. Some sources claim that the Yiddish word *daven* is derived from Latin's most reverent reference to God, i.e. divine.²³ Leo Rosten declares the source of the word *daven* to be unknown,²⁴ as does Weinreich.²⁵

Yiddish is a living chronicle of Yiddish civilization. Take, for example, the following sentence: *Di bobe est tsholent af Shabes* – The grandmother eats *cholent* on the Sabbath. *Bobe* is Slavic, *Est* is German, *Tsholent* is Old French and *Shabes* is Hebrew.

Many foreign customs were incorporated into

Judaism. *Yahrzeit* is German for “time of the year”. The lighting of a *Yahrzeit* candle was a Catholic German custom. The tradition that Jewish men cover their heads is possibly of oriental influence and this practice puzzled the rabbis. A distinguished 16th Century Polish rabbi (Rabbi Solomon ben Yehiel Luria, known as the Maharshah) claimed to know no reason why Jews prayed with covered heads.²⁶ The dress code of Chassidic men, including the wheel shaped brown fur hat, was the fashion of 17th Century Polish noblemen.²⁷

The historical study of Yiddish is hampered by a shortage of texts from the earliest periods. It is safe to say that no event was more decisive in the development of Yiddish than its movement into Slavic lands and away from German influence. It was under Slavic influence that the grammatical system was restructured and the genetic relation of Yiddish to German was weakened.²⁸

Over time Yiddish split into dialects, first into two large groupings, Western Yiddish (in Central Europe) and Eastern Yiddish (in the Slavic and Baltic lands), and then into individual dialects within each group.²⁹ Western Yiddish in turn split into North-western (Dutch), Mid-western (German) and South-western (Swiss–Alsatian). Eastern Yiddish split into North-eastern (Lithuanian), Mid-eastern (Polish) and South-eastern (Ukrainian).³⁰

The historical development of Yiddish has been segmented into four periods, namely³¹ Earliest Yiddish (? - 1250), Old Yiddish (1250 - 1500), Middle Yiddish (1500 - 1750) and Modern Yiddish (post-1750). During the Earliest Yiddish period Jews from France and Italy, speaking the language they called Laaz, established themselves in German speaking territory. It is plausible that their speech remained rife for many generations with imports from Laaz, even though the number of surviving vestiges has constantly been reduced. No surviving continuous texts from this period have been found.

During the second period Yiddish speakers first make contact with Slavic speakers – first in south eastern Germany and Bohemia and then in Poland. This period was marked by the expansion of Eastern Ashkenaz, and consequently by the withdrawal of Yiddish speakers from German influence. A shortage of texts hides the Slavization which must have gone on at the time.³²

The third period witnessed the slow but fatal decline of Yiddish in the West. Czernowitz (today in Ukraine) was the venue for a Yiddish Conference in 1908. This marked the high point of Yiddish self consciousness and provided an impetus for the meteoric rise of 20th Century Yiddish literature.³³ The subsequent introduction of Yiddish as a medium of school instruction, scholarly research and regional administration contributed to the expansion and stabilization of the language.³⁴

In the 18th Century, two important social movements impacted on the Jewish world and Yiddish. The Haskalah (Enlightenment) started in Germany and later spread eastwards. Its central figure was the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn

(1729–86), who rose in Berlin society due to his intellect and charm. Mendelssohn was a deeply religious Jew and made it his mission to Germanize the Jews. This, he believed, would speed up their emancipation and make them full citizens. To accomplish this, he came to the conclusion that eradicating Yiddish and replacing it with German was a priority.

Mendelssohn was a driven individual. The story is told that he spent his honeymoon working on a philosophical essay, pitching for a prize offered by the Berlin Academy of Sciences. It is recorded that this effort beat Immanuel Kant into first place. What his new wife thought of this behaviour is unrecorded.³⁵

The Haskalah led to conversions to Christianity on an epidemic scale. In Berlin, no less than 50% of the Jews converted, including four of Mendelssohn’s six children.³⁶ The German Jewish writer Heinrich Heine also converted, albeit for purely pragmatic reasons. He nevertheless retained some affection for Judaism and wrote that his conversion could not be honest, because no Jew could believe any other Jew was Divine.³⁷

A counter impulse to the Haskalah was the Chassidic movement, founded by Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1700 – 1760), whose adherents wanted to become more Jewish. The movement emphasized joy and merrymaking and introduced exaggerated movements, headstands and somersaulting during prayers. Drinking, dancing and smoking were encouraged. In its early stages, the study of Torah was downgraded in favour of over-enthusiastic prayer.³⁸

The Chassidic movement spread rapidly and, at its peak, it is estimated that half the Jews in Eastern Europe were Chassidim. When the movement began to make inroads in Lithuania, it met with serious resistance, particularly from the Vilna Gaon. Despite this opposition, Chassidism survived in Lithuania, albeit in a different form. It reformed itself by purging its extremist tendencies and emphasizing the importance of learning. This is reflected by the choice of name for the movement in Lithuania – Chabad. An acronym of the Hebrew words for Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge (*Chochma, Bina, Da’at*), it was a clear statement that traditional Judaism had nothing to fear. When the dynasty later moved to the town of Lubavitch, the movement became known as Chabad-Lubavitch.

Historically, Jews were forbidden to live in Russia, and the subsequent significant presence of Jews there resulted from the Partitions of Poland. In 1795 a large part of Poland, what is today Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine, came under Russian control, as did the one million Jews who lived there. High Jewish birth rates resulted in significant increases in Russia’s Jewish population from one million in 1800 to five and a half million by 1900.³⁹

The year 1881 was important, not only in Jewish but in Russian, American and world history. When Tsar Alexander II was assassinated, the Jews were blamed and this set off a wave of pogroms in Russia followed by the introduction of harsh laws referred

to as the May Laws. This resulted in the mass emigration of Russian Jews. Between 1881–1914, two-and-a-half million Jews emigrated from Russia and of these, two million went to America.⁴⁰

Professor John Klier has pointed out, contrary to the popular myth, that it was not just antisemitism that motivated the emigrants – they had no guarantee that tolerance would be greater elsewhere. The claustrophobia of shtetl existence, its class and clan divisions, its ruthless dominance by reactionary Tsaddikim or ultra conservative rabbinic oligarchies and its self imposed limitations on living a full, rich and successful life were also significant contributors.⁴¹

Life was hard for the new immigrants. In New York's Lower East Side, almost one million Jews lived squashed into one square kilometre in unsanitary, filthy tenements. It is no surprise that many immigrants failed to make a success of their move. Around a quarter of those who left Eastern Europe for America returned there. Perhaps as many would have done so had they been able to afford the fare.

In 1906 South Africa placed Yiddish on the list of languages that immigrants could use to fulfil literacy requirements. America did likewise in 1917.

The printing of Yiddish books began around 1475, about a quarter of a century after Gutenberg 'invented' the printing press at Mainz.⁴² The first known page in Yiddish in a Jewish book can be found in the Prague Haggadah of 1526. The printing of books in Yiddish was slow to gain traction as Jewish printers were unsure whether it was acceptable to produce books in the language of women and men who did not participate in the study of Torah and Talmud.⁴³

Yiddish literature began in the 16th Century, but in its initial period consisted mainly of stories based on the Bible, Talmudic fables and popular folktales.⁴⁴ The little literature that did exist was mainly for women and perhaps uneducated men. Educated men studied in Hebrew and Aramaic. Although they spoke Yiddish, they believed that it was beneath them to read or write in it.⁴⁵

Yiddish literature was in many cases adaptations for Jewish audiences of the same stories enjoyed by their Christian neighbours. Christian references would be changed to something neutral or Jewish. The Yiddish versions added a humour that was absent in the original.⁴⁶

One of the most popular Yiddish books was the *Bove bukh* (1541), named after its hero, Bove. This was a Jewish adaptation of a Tuscan Italian epic romance of chivalry and knights in shining armour. Although most people assume that the popular Yiddish expression "*bobe mayse*" comes from the Yiddish word *bobe* (grandmother), some scholars believe it to be a corruption of *bove*, referring to a story so outlandish that it sounds like something straight out of the *Bove bukh*.⁴⁷

The Bible is the ultimate source of Yiddish drama and Yiddish plays based on Bible stories were common. It became acceptable over the centuries for the traditional Jewish Purim play, based on the book

of Esther, to contain more than a bit of "off colour" that would be condemned for the rest of the year.⁴⁸ The *Tsenerene* (Yiddish Woman's Bible) was first published in the 1590s, with the oldest surviving edition being from 1622. It has appeared in over 300 editions and is still used by women in Chassidic communities.

Yiddish publication primarily for women led to women becoming writers. Perhaps the best known and most significant was the memoirs of Gluckel of Hamel (1646–1724). At the age of 14, Gluckel married Chaim of Hamel, a businessman trading in pearls and gems and engaged in money-lending. In addition to bringing up their 13 children, she ran most of his business affairs, rather more successfully after his death. After Chaim passed away, when Gluckel was 43, she started writing a journal. She stopped writing on remarrying but went back to the journal after the death of her second husband. While composed as a book length memoir, Gluckel's work may be regarded as an ethical will, and indeed is addressed to her children. In 1896, it was published and became a classic.⁴⁹ The memoir, which has achieved classic status following its publication in 1896, is the most significant religious writing by a pre-modern Jewish woman.⁵⁰

The emergence of Yiddish as a modern sophisticated language with a literature of its own did not happen until the second half of the 19th Century and when it did was largely the work of three individuals: Mendele Moycher Seforim (Sholom Jacob Abramowitz, 1836–1917), Sholom Aleichem (Solomon Rabinowitz, 1859–1916) and Y L Peretz (Yitzhak Leib Peretz, 1852–1915). These writers had much in common. All received an orthodox Jewish education and came under the spell of Jewish Enlightenment. It is no accident that two of them hid behind pseudonyms. They were initially embarrassed to be writing in Yiddish - Yiddish books were for women and uneducated men. They would have preferred to write in Hebrew, but a few years before Mendele published his first book, the year's best selling Hebrew book sold 1200 copies whereas in the same year a minor Yiddish novel sold 120 000.⁵¹

Mendele published his first Yiddish story in 1864, which became the symbolic birth-date of modern Yiddish literature. Between 1864 and 1939, nearly 30,000 separate Yiddish titles appeared, constituting one of the most concentrated periods of literary creativity in all of Jewish history.⁵² Yiddish literature found its largest audience in America, but with one or two exceptions, all the significant Yiddish writers were born in Europe. Two-thirds of all Yiddish books were published in New York, with the remainder mostly being published in Warsaw, Vilna and the other cultural centres of Eastern Europe.

Sholom Aleichem's popularity resulted in him being referred to as the Jewish Mark Twain (the latter, on hearing this, wittily referred to himself as the American Sholom Aleichem).⁵³ The following abridged passage is characteristic of his wit:

When a man gives an account of what befell him at a fair, he must always be considerate of the feelings of his neighbours....So, for instance, if I went out to the fair...and did well, sold everything at a good profit, and returned with pocketfuls of money, my heart bursting with joy, I never failed to tell my neighbours that I had lost every kopek and was a ruined man. Thus I was happy, and my neighbours were happy. But if, on the contrary, I had really been cleaned out at the fair, and brought home with me a bitter heart and a bellyful of green gall, I made sure to tell my neighbours that never since God made fairs had there been a better one. You get my point? For thus I was miserable and my neighbors were miserable with me.⁵⁴

On the eve of World War II, there were probably eleven million Yiddish speakers and of these perhaps nine million lived in Europe.⁵⁵ Even without the Holocaust, it is uncertain whether Yiddish would have survived as the dominant Jewish language. Already in interwar Poland, there was a move to Polish amongst the younger generation, the suppression of Judaism in the Soviet Union and English and Hebrew being almost universally spoken in America and Israel respectively.

Zionism set out to create a new type of Jew and Hebrew, not Yiddish, was to be their language. In interwar Palestine, gangs of Hebraist thugs beat up Yiddish writers, Yiddish bookshops were set on fire, riots were incited in Jerusalem and professors roughed up. The various campaigns against Yiddish succeeded. One metaphor for the period was a comment made by Ben Gurion while listening to a talk in Yiddish given by an anti-Nazi resistance fighter: "the language grates on my ears". The second president of the State of Israel attempted to pass a law retroactively Hebraicizing the names of the great founders of Zionism. A Yiddish supporter wrote a satire at the time writing that the Herzl (little heart) in Theodor Herzl would have to be renamed Lev-Hakatan and the Weizmann (wheat man) in Chaim Weizmann would have to be renamed Hachiti.⁵⁶

In our time, the battle for Yiddish seems virtually over. But perhaps not? An astonishing survey conducted in the mid 1990s into the future of American Jewry found the following: that whereas 100 Chassidim and Haredim will have produced 2578 Jews by the fourth generation, the same number of Neo-orthodox Jews will have produced 346, Conservative Jews 24, Reform Jews 13 and secular Jews five.⁵⁷ It is difficult to estimate the number of Yiddish speakers in the world today, but a figure of around one million is probable. In Dovid Katz's view, a world figure of 500,000 Chassidic Yiddish speakers in 2005 is conservative and overcautious. Also by 2005, the number of Yiddish speakers in the secular world making significant use of it in daily life had dropped to around 500 000, and this figure will soon collapse altogether.⁵⁸ If the above projections are correct, it means that Yiddish could once again become the language of the bulk of Diaspora Jewry.

Yiddish has enriched everyday English speech. Webster's International Dictionary reputedly lists over 500 Yiddish-derived terms in use in American English,⁵⁹ many of which have integrated into the language to such an extent that speakers are not even aware of their origin. They include such words as *bagel*, *chutzpah*, *gonif*, *kibitz*, *klutz*, *kvetch*, *maven*, *mish-mash*, *momzer*, *megillah*, *meshugger*, *nudnik*, *oy vey*, and such expressive 'sh' words as *shlimazel*, *shlemiel*, *shlep*, *shmo*, *shikker*, *shikse*, *shlump*, *shnorrer*, *shnapps*, *shmaltz*, *shmooz*, *shmattes*, *shnoz* and *shitik*. Yiddish phrases when translated suffuse American speech, such as "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree", "if you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas" and "if my grandmother had wheels she'd be a trolley" (and other less pulpit-friendly versions). There are also structural borrowings, evident in such expressions as, "Don't ask", "Enough already", "From that he makes a living?", "How's by you?", "Get lost!", "I need it like I need a hole in the head", "I should worry", "That's all I need" and "That's for sure", amongst many others.⁶⁰

Yiddish has made a contribution to other languages as well. The Australian word 'cobber' comes from *chaver*. In German, strangely, *shicksel* means a Jewish girl.

Many Yiddish words, including numbers, are similar to English, the reason being that the Saxon part of Anglo-Saxon is related to the same German dialects from which Yiddish evolved. A few examples are: *vinter* (winter), *zinger* (singer), *zumer* (summer), *hant* (hand), *gut* (good), *epel* (apple), *broyt* (bread), *orem* (arm), *bahken* (bake), *bord* (beard), *hoys* (house) and *putter* (butter).

Amongst Yiddish-speaking Jews, swearing was rare but cursing was common. Physical violence was frowned upon and so verbal hostility tended to be compensatory.⁶¹ Yiddish created an art form out of curses and imbued them with humor. Here is one example:

You should own a thousand houses
With a thousand rooms in each house
and a thousand beds in each room.
And you should sleep each night in a different
bed
in a different room
in a different house
and get up every morning
and go down a different staircase and get into a
different car,
driven by a different chauffeur,
who should drive you to a different doctor – and
he
shouldn't know what's wrong with you, either.⁶²

There has been a massive resurgence of interest in Yiddish, particularly in academic circles. In 1980, Aaron Lansky embarked on a campaign to save the world's Yiddish books, and over one and a half million of these have been collected by himself and his colleagues to date. The National Yiddish Book Centre, which he founded, has a customer list which

includes 4000 individuals and more than 5000 national and university libraries in 26 countries. It would seem that the Jewish immigrants were much more avid Yiddish readers than was previously thought.

To conclude, a few quotations regarding the Yiddish language:

Its chief virtue...lay in its internal subtlety, particularly in its characterization of human types and emotions. It was the language of street wisdom, of the clever underdog; of pathos, resignation, suffering, which it palliated by humour, intense irony and superstition (Paul Johnson).⁶³

The new generation needs to know that forty or fifty years ago (c.1880–1890) not even Mendele, Sholom Aleichem...would have been able to dream that there would come a time when Yiddish would be competing, in education and in literature, in press and in scholarly work, with Hebrew, much less with the ‘exalted’ European languages, that in so little time the “language of the masses” would grow into a language of the nation...It is all being created before our eyes, and this is only a modest beginning!⁶⁴ (Simon Dubnow)

Yiddish lends itself to an extraordinary range of observational nuances and psychological subtleties...I have always marvelled at how fertile this lingua franca is in what may be called the vocabulary of insight.... Jews had to become psychologists and their preoccupation with human, no less than divine, behaviour made Yiddish remarkably rich in names for the delineation of character types (Leo Rosten).⁶⁵

Yiddish, the language that will ever bear witness to the violence and murder inflicted on us, bear the marks of our expulsions from land to land, the language which absorbed the wails of our fathers, the laments of the generations, the poison and bitterness of history, the language whose precious jewels are the undried, uncongealed Jewish tears (Y L Peretz).⁶⁶

The Ashkenazic civilization is one of the most peaceful in human history. It is inherently stateless and weaponless, dedicated to life according to the ancient cumulative Jewish religious tradition and to dying when necessary to sanctify God’s name (Dovid Katz).⁶⁷

[Yiddish] was the language of the Jewish masses; it vibrates with their history....From Yiddish we can build a picture of the life of the Judengasse (Israel Zangwill).⁶⁸

For me, this tale qualifies as a miracle. A language is born in shadow with the lowliest of aims – only for women, only for the untutored, only for ordinary, workaday use. Yet that very dailiness

and lack of expectation allows it to grow.... It links its people to their illustrious past. It has the world’s best sense of humour, unable to resist the virtuoso joke even in the curse.... (Miriam Weinstein).⁶⁹

And finally, an excerpt from Isaac Bashevis Singer’s Nobel Lecture in 1978:

The high honour bestowed on me ... is also a recognition of the Yiddish language – a language of exile, without a land, without frontiers, not supported by any government, a language which possesses no words for weapons, ammunition, military exercises, war tactics; a language that was despised by both gentiles and emancipated Jews. The truth is that what the great religions preached, the Yiddish - speaking people of the ghettos practised day in and day out. They were the people of the book in the truest sense of the word....

There are some who call Yiddish a dead language, but so was Hebrew called for two thousand years...Yiddish has not yet said its last word. It contains treasures that have not been revealed to the eyes of the world.⁷⁰

NOTES

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MUSIC OF THE JEWS IN THE FIRST AND SECOND TEMPLE PERIODS

*

Alan Jacobs

Solomon built the first Temple in Jerusalem in about 950 BCE. During his reign, there is no mention of any innovations in the sphere of music. Rather, he adhered to the established order to the temple service as arranged by his father, King David.

And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of the Lord, which David the king had made to praise the Lord: and the priests sounded

Trumpets before them and all Israel
(II Chronicles, 7, 6)

And he appointed according to the order of David his father, the course of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their charges to praise and minister before the priests, as the duty of everyday required:

(II Chronicles, 8,14)

It was recorded that Solomon was the first to import costly almugwood, for the making of Kinnorot and Nevalim, harps: "And the king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the Lord, and for the king's house harps also (I Kings 10,12).

The Temple services were designed as the expression of the belief in one God. The ritual consisted of regular morning and afternoon sacrifices, together with the festivals of the religious year. At the dedication of Solomon's Temple, 120 priests blew trumpets and 248 Levites sang and sounded their instruments. Cymbals were also used:

Also the Levites which were the singers—having cymbals and harps, —. And with them 120 priests sounding with trumpets:"

(II Chronicles 5,12)

Some of the arrangements of the religious orchestra used in Egypt were accepted into the Temple service. The first Temple orchestra consisted of the *Nevel* (big harp), *Kinnor* (little lyre, harp or cithara), *Shofar* (ram's horn), *Chatzotrot* (trumpets) and *Paamonim* (little bells).

Both the *Nevel* and *Kinnor* were string

instruments; as the Talmud explains, their difference lay in the number of strings and size. We have no definite information as to the number of strings. The tone of the *Kinnor* is described in the Bible as 'sweet', but the tone of the *Nevel* was stronger. According to Josephus, the *Nevel* had twelve and the *Kinnor* ten strings. On the *Nevel*, the musicians used their fingers, whereas for the *Kinnor*, a plectrum (implement for plucking strings) was used.

The *Shofar* cannot produce a melody, but was used for announcements and signals for religious and secular ceremonies. The *Mishna* required one *Shofar* for the New Year and two for the Day of Atonement. The *Chatzotzrot* were made out of silver and were used for signaling, but by only the priests. The *Mishna* required only two trumpets. The *Paamonim* were used for signaling, and were attached to the skirts of the robe of the High Priest: "And the sound thereof shall be heard when he goeth into the holy place before the Lord, and when he cometh out, that he die not" (*Exodus* 28, 35).

The First Temple was destroyed by the Assyrian, king Nebuchadnezzar. Large numbers of Jews were exiled to Babylonia from 586 – 538 BC. After the exile, many Jews returned to Israel, bringing back their household singers, both male and female. However, the participation of women in the Temple choir is not traceable anywhere.

The second Temple was completed in 515 BCE, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Sheshbazaar and Jeshua. Now the *Chalil* - big pipe – was added to the Temple orchestra.

It was used only on twelve festival days during the year, to "increase joy". Playing the *Chalil* on the Sabbath was prohibited, since it was not held to be a sacred instrument. Its tone was sharp and penetrating, like that of an oboe.

The only percussive instrument permanently in the Temple orchestra was the *Metziltayim*, a Cymbal. Made of copper, it had a very strong sound. The chief musician of King David, Asaph, was a Cymbal player: "Asaph made a sound with cymbals" (I Chronicles 16, 5).

The *Mishna* gives the number of the instruments employed in the Second Temple as follows: *Nevel* (minimum two, maximum six), *Kinnor* (minimum nine, maximum limitless), *Metziltayim* (one) and *Chalil* (minimum two, maximum twelve).

According to the Mishnaic source, the chorus had to consist of a minimum of twelve adult male singers, while the maximum had no limit. The singer was admitted to the choir at the age of thirty and

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served up to fifty. Before admittance, he had to have had five years training. Boys of the Levites were permitted to participate in the choir in order to add "Sweetness to the Song". Later, the tendency toward the superiority of the vocal was pronounced by the regulation that Non-Levites were permitted to play the instruments, whereas for singers, only Levites were admitted. It is recorded that a certain virtuoso singer named Agades, by applying some brilliant tricks, would produce tremolos in the oriental manner which would fascinate the people.

There are no descriptions of the tunes, scales and rhythm employed in the Temple services. Scant though the information at hand is, we can nevertheless visualize a musical performance at the Temple Service as is depicted in the *Mishna*. After the priest on duty had recited a benediction, the Ten Commandments, the *Shema*, the priestly benediction (Numbers 5, 22-26) and three other benedictions, the priests proceeded to the Act of the offerings. After this, one of them sounded the *Magrepha*, pipe organ. This was the signal for the priests to enter the Temple to prostrate themselves, whereas for the Levites, it marked the beginning of the musical performance. Two priests proceeded to the altar immediately and started to blow the trumpets, *tekia – terua – tekia*. After this, they stood beside the Levite cymbal player. At a given flag signal, the Levite sounded his cymbal and all the Levites began to sing a part of the daily psalm. Whenever they finished a part they stopped, the priests repeated their blowing of the trumpets and the people prostrated themselves. The texts sung by the Levites were not the Psalms alone, but also portions of the Pentateuch.

Instrumental music was prominent in the Temple service generally, but especially in rendering the Psalms as the following references show: "Praise the Lord with harp; sing unto him . . . on instrument of ten strings. Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise" (Psalm 33, 2, 3); "My heart is fixed, oh God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake, my glory; awake psaltery and harp" (Psalm 57,7,8).

The second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. Shortly after this catastrophe, the entire art of the Levites fell into oblivion. The vocal music and intonations from the Psalms and Pentateuch, as well as the recitation of prayers, was most likely retained and transplanted into the Synagogue, an institution established long before the Second Temple's destruction.

The vocal song of the Temple drew its sap from folksong. Those Temple Songs – folk tunes modified and sanctified – were copied by the 'representative' of the people, the *Anshe Maamad* from all parts of the country who used to be present at the Temple Service.

The forms in which Psalms and Prayers were rendered were explained by sages who lived in the First Century CE. Of these, Rabbi Akiva had witnessed the service in the Temple. From them we learn that three forms of public singing were used, based on responses.

In form A, the leader intoned the first half verse, whereupon the congregation repeated it. Then the leader sang each succeeding half-line, the congregation always repeating the same first half-line, which became a refrain throughout the entire song. This was the form in which adults sang the *Hallel* (Psalms 113 – 118) and, according to Rabbi Akiva, this form was also employed for the "Song of the Sea" (Exodus, chapter 15). In Form B, the leader sang a half-line at a time, and the congregation repeated what he had last sung. This, Rabbi Eleazar said, was the form in which the children used to be instructed at school. Form C was responsive. The leader would sing the whole first-line, whereupon the congregation would respond with the second line of the verse. This was the form, as Rabbi Nehemia explained, in which the *Shema* was recited in public, and it was still used by Babylonian Jews for chanting *Hallel* on Passover.

Besides the responsive form, the Unison and Solo forms were used. To antiphonal singing, i.e. to the alternate singing of balanced groups, we have a few references in the Bible (*Deuteronomy*, 27, 21-26) and it is also described by the *Mishna*. The theory of Hebrew music was not written, however, there is one authentic source preserved, and this is the Oral Tradition.

Long before the destruction of the national sanctuary in Jerusalem, large Jewish settlements were established throughout the ancient world, from Persia to northwest Africa, and from Arabia to Rome, settlements that cultivated spiritual values.

After the complete ruin of the national center in Israel, the remnants of Judah were scattered, but their spiritual values embodied in tradition became their only treasure. From that tradition, we justly draw our information as to the nature of Jewish music and its history.

THE CREATION STORY IN BEREISHIT : A LITERARY STUDY

*

Gloria Sandak-Lewin

The opening chapters of *ברשית* (the *Book of Genesis*) describe the creation of the world, declaring it to be “the work of One Almighty Beneficent God”¹. They are, arguably, the greatest in Western literature, although *Isaiah* and certain of the *Tehillim* (*Psalms*) come close in grandeur.

Speaking of the stories of *Genesis*, especially that of Joseph, Rabbi Dr J H Hertz, late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, refers to their “sublime simplicity, high seriousness and marvelous beauty”.² The same description would apply even more so to the Creation story.

As an Orthodox Jewess with a limited knowledge of Hebrew, I feel humbled to write this article. What I wish to do is make a *literary* study of certain of the *stylistic* features of the *English* translation of three texts describing the Creation story which I have in my possession: the Hertz *Chumash* (2nd ed., 5729/1968), the Artscroll *Chumash* (Stone ed., 11th Edition, 2005), and the Authorized King James Version (hereafter KJV).³ I shall confine myself to the first Creation story, *Genesis* Chapter I, vv.1–31 and Chapter II, vv.1–3.

The opening lines of the Hertz *Chumash* read: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters” (Chapter I, vv.1–2).

These are possibly the most beautiful and perfect lines that have ever been written. There is simplicity and restraint in the opening sentence; the immediacy of the adverb ‘now’ suggests that the author is addressing an audience or readership as a storyteller; the image “the *face* of the deep” [italics, and all that follow, are mine] subconsciously paves the way for the ethereal “the *spirit* of God”, an image which,

combined with the word ‘hovers’, suggests an awesome yet mysterious indefinable Presence. Also, the off-assonance (part-rhyme) in “unformed and void”, *וְהָיָה תִהְיוּ*, suggests chaos, emptiness, disorder (partial definitions given by Alkalay), and the alliteration in ‘darkness’ and ‘deep’ evokes the vastness, remoteness of unfathomable waters. The Hertz rendition is surprisingly similar to the KJV, whose English is equally superb and dignified: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

My preference is for Hertz’s “*unformed* and void” over the KJV’s “without form”, although the latter possibly emphasizes the shapelessness of the universe; and while the verb ‘moved’ (“upon the face of the waters”) is both beautiful and good, Hertz’s ‘hovered’ is more subtle and elusive. I also do not like the capitalization of the word ‘Spirit’ which has, not surprisingly, Christological characteristics which I found foreign to the Hebrew scripture.

In the Artscroll *Chumash*, by contrast, the English translation is clumsy, strange, unfamiliar, at times unidiomatic, at other times outrageous. To quote: “In the beginning of God’s creating the heavens and the earth... When the earth was astonishingly empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep, and the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters... God said, ‘Let there be light’, and there was light”.⁴

The opening phrase is totally unidiomatic – it is not English, in fact; the qualifying adverb “*astonishingly* empty” appears nowhere in the Hebrew original and comes as something of a shock to the reader accustomed to the Hertz *Chumash* and the KJV.⁵ The noun ‘surface’ (repeated), a hard cold clinical word, sits uneasily with the gentle fluttering poetry of the verb ‘hovered’.

While I am not including the text used by the Progressive community in South Africa in this study, it is of interest here to cite its rendition of the opening three lines of *Bereishit*, based on that of the Jewish Publication Society (1962, 1967), viz.: “When God began to create the heaven and the earth – the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water – God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light”.

The Commentary on this, by Rabbi W. Gunter Plaut, reads: “Other translations render this, ‘In the beginning God created.’ Both translations are

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possible, but we cannot be sure that this difference is more than stylistic. Our translation follows Rashi, who said that the text would have been בראשונה, if its *primary* purpose had been to teach the order in which creation took place. Later scholars used the translation 'In the beginning' as proof that God created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), but it is not likely that the biblical author was concerned with this problem".⁶

The Artscroll continues (vv4-5): "God saw that the light was good, and God separated between the light and the darkness. God called to the light 'Day', and to the darkness He called 'Night'. And there was evening and there was morning, one day".

Here, again, the English translation is unidiomatic: in English, one does not separate 'between' (although the Hebrew idiom is להבדיל בין), but rather one thing *from* another, or one thing *and* another. With regard to the rendition "called ('ויקרא') to the light: 'Day' and to the darkness He called night", Alkalay renders 'קרא' as "to call (cry) out; to proclaim, pronounce; to name, call by name". It is therefore absurd to think, as the Artscroll *Chumash* suggests, that God was *speaking* to His creation (the light and darkness). As both Hertz and the KJV signify, He was *naming* them: "And God called the light 'Day', and the darkness he called 'Night'. ..." (Here the Hertz and KJV versions are identical). Likewise, in verses 8-10 Hertz reads: "...God called the firmament Heaven, and God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas ..."

The English of the KJV is, of course, superb and dignified. Its annotations are few but significant – occasionally a brief translation, but more frequently 'Old' and 'New Testament' source comparisons. The Hertz *Chumash* is similar, at times almost identical, to the King James. For example, *Genesis* I v.28: "And God blessed them; and God said unto them: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth over the earth.' The KJV differs in one punctuation mark only, as well as its use of the word 'moveth' instead of 'creepeth', which enhances the dignity and majesty of the translation. (Note the wonderful musical cadences in verse 28: the rising cadence in the first three injunctions "*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth*" leading to a climax in "and *subdue* it", and the falling cadence in "and *have dominion*" over the fish of the sea, ..." etc).⁷

The Hertz text continues (vv29-30): "And God said: 'Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed – to you it shall be for *food*'; and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is a living soul, [I have given] every green herb for *food*'".

The KJV renders this passage as: "And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it

shall be for *meat*. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for *meat*'".

Hertz gives 'food', which is blander, but more accurate (closer to the Hebrew לאכלה); the King James version gives 'meat', a good Old English word (*mête*), loved by the Elizabethans, and used figuratively by Shakespeare in *As You Like It* ("It is meat and drinke to me to see a Clowne", Act V, sc. I). To the modern mind, there is also the strong contrast between 'herb' and 'meat', and between vegetarianism and carnivorousness.

A word about the refrain: In Hertz, it reads: "And there was evening and there was morning, one day. ...and there was evening and there was morning, a second day. ...and there was evening and there was morning, a third day, and so on. Though closer to the original Hebrew, this is not as good and imposing as the KJV, which reads: "And the evening and the morning were the first day. ...And the evening and the morning were the second day. ...And the evening and the morning were the third day".

Also note two other refrains counter-pointed against the narrative text, namely: "And God saw that it was good" (e.g. "And God saw the light, and it was good ...", v1.4), and the phrase "... and it was so", which helps create a sense of wisdom and sagacity on the part of the storyteller.

A few observations regarding the concluding sentences to this initial section of the first Creation Story of *Bereishit* (Chapter II, vv.1–3) now follow. To quote Hertz:

And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it He rested from all his work which God in creating had made.

The closing phrase ("He rested from all his work which God in creating had made") is very neat and circumvents the awkward Hebrew idiom, so offensive to the English ear, in the Artscroll's literal translation: "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it he abstained from all his work which God created to make".

In the above passage, both the KJV and Artscroll use the word 'sanctified', whereas Hertz has it as: "And God blessed the seventh day, and *hallowed* it". Hertz's translation is gentler; the verb '*hallowed*' is close to *holy* (a gentle, aspirated alliteration of the semi-vowel 'h'; 'sanctified' is more formal).

Finally, there is the use of the word 'array', in the Artscroll (as also in Plaut), compared with that of 'host' in the Hertz and King James versions of *Genesis* II, 1. In the Artscroll, the translation reads: "Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array", where in the Hertz it is: "And the heaven and the earth were finished and all the *host* of them".

I dislike the word ‘array’, which suggests luxury and boastfulness, perhaps a stunningly beautiful necklace, with its jewels sparkling in the night, like the constellation of the stars; ‘hosts’ is far more modest, suggestive, elusive and indefinable.

I conclude with a few thoughts on *Bereishit* by two profound rabbinical scholars, commencing with Rabbi Hertz:

When neighboring peoples deified the sun, moon and stars, or worshipped stocks and stones and beasts, the sacred River Nile, the crocodile that swam in its waters, and the very beetles that crawled along its banks, the opening page of Scripture proclaimed in language of majestic simplicity that the universe, and all that therein is, are the products of one supreme directing Intelligence; of an eternal, spiritual being, prior to them and independent of them....

Rashi, the greatest Jewish commentator of all times, taught that the purpose of Scripture was not to give a strict chronology of Creation; while no less an authority than Maimonides declared: ‘The account given in Scripture of the Creation is not, as is generally believed, intended to be in all parts literal’....

...the sublime revelation of the unique worth and dignity of man, contained in *Genesis* I, 27 (“And God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created Him”), may well be called the Magna Charta of humanity. Its purpose is not to explain the biological origins of the human race but *its spiritual kinship with God*.⁸

Finally Rabbi Berel Wein, in his fascinating lecture on *Bereishit*, speaks not only of the God of Creation, but also of the God of Mercy and the God of Justice. Asserting that in Judaism Justice and Mercy are synonymous, he quotes Shakespeare in the *Merchant of Venice*: “The quality of Mercy is not strained.”⁹

NOTES

- 1 Dr. J.H. Hertz, C. H. Late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*. Hebrew text English Translation and Commentary, 2nd Ed., (London: Soncino Press (1968), Introductory note.
- 2 Ibid., p141
- 3 *The Holy Bible* containing the OLD and NEW TESTAMENTS Translated out of the Original Tongues and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised by His Majesty’s Special Command Appointed to be read in Churches. Authorized King James Version London and New York, frontispiece.
- 4 Rabbi Nosson Scherman/Rabbi Meir Zlotovitz General Editors, *The Chumash*, The Stone Edition, Artscroll Series, Eleventh Edition, New York: Mesorah Publications, 2005, vv.1–3, p3

- 5 But Rashi states **תהו ובהו** DESOLATE and VOID – the word **תהו** signifies astonishment and amazement, for a person would have been astonished and amazed at its emptiness. ... **וּבְהוּ** and VOID – the word signifies emptiness and empty space. (PENTATEUCH with TARGUM ONKELOS HAPHTAROTH and prayers for Sabbath and RASHI’S COMMENTARY Translated into English and Annotated by Rev. M. Rosenbaum and Dr A.M. Silbermann in collaboration with A. Blashki and L. Joseph of Sydney, N.S.W. GENESIS (London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co. 1929)), p3, n2
- 6 **תורה** *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Commentaries by W. Gunther Plaut and Bernard J. Bamberger. Essays by William W. Hallo), 1981
- 7 King James Version (*Holy Bible*) *Gen.* I v.28, p8
- 8 Hertz, “Additional Notes to Genesis: The Creation Chapter”, pp193-5. Hertz here assert that “evolution, far from destroying the *religious* teaching of *Genesis* I, is its profound confirmation”
- 9 Rabbi Berel Wein, recorded lecture on *Bereishit*.

THE FUNDAMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN WORSHIP: A RESPONSE TO DAVID BENATAR

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Azila Talit Reisenberger

In his article 'What's God got to do with it? Atheism and Religious Practice', published in the journal *Ratio*, XIX, December 2006, the philosopher Professor David Benatar argues that the conventional wisdom that an atheist individual who follows religious practise is an incoherent notion; and further, that the assumption that the abandonment of God implies the abandonment of religious practice, and vice versa, is an incorrect one. This short response is a special note taking this notion a step further; I further propose that atheists are more ready to recite prayers in contradiction to their true belief, when the prayers are not in their first language.

Benatar proposes that "theistic departure from religious observance and atheistic adherence to religious practice are coherent" (2006: 383). He recognises that "it is commonly thought that belief in God, coupled with a belief in the divine authorship of the Bible...entails orthopraxy - adherence to the full range of normative religious practice" (384). The consequence of this, he notes, is that it is thought that atheism "entails the opposite - namely complete abandonment of all (non-moral) religious practises" (ibid.).

Benatar then goes on to argue that "belief in God...need not entail orthopraxy...[n]or need atheism entail either the abandonment of all religious practice" (385). In examining Judaism as an example, he shows that "theists are not logically committed to orthopraxy" (388). He does this by showing that there is an acceptance that Jewish laws have and can change, i.e. one can "reform a scripture that one believes is authorised by God" (ibid.). Therefore, Jewish theism does not necessarily entail adherence to certain Jewish religious practices, which may change over time.

As a corollary, Benatar argues that "atheists can engage, without contradiction, in orthopraxy" (389). He states that there may be "non-theistic reasons for observing religious practices", for example its sentimental or family value (390). Furthermore, "religious practice can be both an expression of and a means of fostering an (ethnic) identity" (ibid.).

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This last reason is an important one, and Benatar focuses on it (although acknowledges it as an exemplar rather than the only reason).

It is clear that across the religion spectrum, there are many adherents who follow certain religious practices without a belief in their respective Divinity. The degree of adherence to religious practices varies; however, it is clear that many people perform the fundamental prayers of '*al-Akbar*' (Islam) or the *Shema* (Judaism) without holding a sincere belief in God.

I suggest that this seemingly illogical phenomenon that Benatar mentions occurs in religions that employ 'foreign' language for worship.¹ I further propose that atheists are more ready to recite prayers in contradiction to their true belief, when the prayers are not in their first language.

I concur with Benatar that the recitation of prayers is a religious practice that may serve the purpose of ethnic identity, and so are recited by atheists for a reason other than the "prayer-value" of the act. I maintain that the act of the recitation is the meaningful aspect for the atheist, and not the prayer and belief in God it usually implies.

However, when the prayer is translated into English (or any other first language) the focus shifts from the act and form of the recitation, to the substance of the prayer. In instances where atheists who follow certain religious practices, such as that of communal prayer, are asked to recite a particular prayer in their native language, it is more difficult for them to do so, especially when confronted by prayers which are in contradiction with their convictions.

An example of this was evidenced in my own Progressive Jewish Congregation in East London, South Africa. This congregation is comprised primarily of secular Jews who follow the religious practice of communal prayer for the reasons of ethnic identity and community. Prayers by the congregants are usually recited in Hebrew, a language foreign to almost all of the participants. The fact that they recite the Hebrew prayer without questioning its exact meaning can be seen clearly from the fact that even the most gender-sensitive person chants without hesitation the *Amidah*, a prayer with a strong patriarchal slant, as long as it is in Hebrew. When it is read in English, they immediately adjust the wording by turning it into a genderless utterance.

An even more unequivocal example was evident during the Passover ritual dinner, the *Seder*. The Hebrew words: "*shfoch hamatcha al ha' goyim*" was

recited like a chant, but when people were asked to recite the prayers in English, and they faced with a the request from God to... 'pour your wrath upon the gentiles', it was simply too much of an affront to their true beliefs, hence they "passed-over" and circumvented the paragraph.

The desire for ethnic or community identification is strong enough to make people follow religious practice that may be in contradiction with their belief or non-belief in God, as long as it is 'easy' for them to do so - by the recitation of foreign words they do not exactly understand nor carefully analyse. However, when people see certain prayers in their own language and understand the exact meaning of it, they refuse to do this.

It is evident that prayer in a foreign tongue is a more reflexive recitation than reflective pronouncement. The sound of the words are carried out as a chant rather than declared with meaning. Therefore, some atheists pray to God, and well-tempered and reasonable people are able to recite often offensive or extremist prayers and set-declarations without fully realising the substance or implication of their words.

I maintain that if religious people who recite prayers in foreign languages fully understood the nuances of what they were saying, they would be more hesitant in proclaiming a willingness to kill or die for their religions. The promotion of such proclamations would diminish if individuals knew

what they were being encouraged to say. Such extremist proclamations often incite extremist actions or reactions, which may not be fully intended by the individual – who simply repeat set-utterances in unfamiliar languages.

I suggest that a study should be carried out to evaluate how strong the correlation is between offensive prayer and the condoning of such notions when disseminated in a foreign language to the speaker. An understanding of this will assist us in attempting to curb religious extremists - if we let people translate and know exactly the wording of their prayers and what they are saying, they might not rush to profess that they will kill/die for their religions.

NOTES

- 1 I believe also that it occurs more often in prescriptive religious traditions. This is because prescriptive traditions dictate the ways in which adherents conduct their lives: what they eat, how they dress, the social order including the intimate relationship in the family, etc. As being considered part of the particular tradition, one has to follow an extensive web of commandments. It can happen that the philosophical question of the existence of the Divine is but one detail. If the majority of the commandments are acceptable to the person, he or she is prepared to recite the prayers or declaration of belief in God. However, this is another issue, outside of the scope of this discussion.

SPEAKING OUT AGAINST INJUSTICE? RE-EXAMINING THE SA JEWISH BOARD OF DEPUTIES' RESPONSE TO APARTHEID, 1948-1976

*

Daniel Mackintosh

Bernhard Schlink, in his novel *The Reader*, describes how the thousands of students who created the '1968 movement' became heavily invested in understanding Germany's past, resulting in a wave of student protests in which the youth accused their parents' generation of various Shoah-related crimes. Most of the German press saw these students as self-righteous and finger-pointing, yet, while the '1968ers' asked the older generation difficult questions, they did not confront their parents individually.

Sixteen years have passed since the end of Apartheid and the creation of a democratic order in South Africa and, in many ways, the stirring of the same desire to try and uncover the role that various people and organizations played in propping up and supporting Apartheid has begun. This applies equally to the Jewish community, challenging us to attempt an honest reflection on our past.¹

I was particularly taken by Claudia Braude's call, at the end of her paper on South African Rabbinic writing, to:

...interrogate the surface facts that constitute the collective memory of the South African Jewish community. It will require something of an internal Truth and Reconciliation Commission, motivated by the desire for self-insight that comes with truth, knowledge and understanding ... It will be necessary to examine what role the Jewish community played in participating in and benefiting from life under Apartheid, and how Judaism, Jewish history, and Zionist ideology were used to this end.²

By making the comparison between German youth after the Holocaust and the South African Jewish youth of today, I am not drawing a direct moral equivalence between the complicity of Germans in perpetrating the Holocaust and South African Jews. Rather, the comparison is made to recognize that a time has come for the hard questions about our past to be asked by the Jewish youth of today.

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I do not intend to place either myself, or the South African Jewish youth of today, on a moral pedestal, because we will never know what it was like to collectively live through the Holocaust, and then walk directly into an oppressive Apartheid system. In no way am I suggesting that 'we would have been different'. However, neither should this absolve us from probing the role that the Jewish community played during Apartheid.

David Biale, in his influential book *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*, warns all readers of Jewish history to avoid falling into a simplistic Zionist discourse, where the concept of power is equated merely with the sovereign nation-state.³ The Zionist reading of history argues that the Jews have not had political sovereignty since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, which marked their consignment to two thousand years of powerlessness.⁴ Biale defines power as "the ability of a people to control its relations to other peoples as well as its own internal political, cultural, religious, economic and social life."⁵ Under the apartheid system, Jews were classified as white and hence were placed in a privileged position. As Jews, they formed organizations that managed the lives of members of the community from 'birth to grave', and as individuals, Jews became a part of the 'upper crust' of the racially skewed system. Considering that the collective consciousness of the Jewish past is saturated with pogroms and discrimination, living under Apartheid created a significant contradiction for the Jew and required a large degree of selective memory loss as we integrated ourselves into the 'pharonic class.'⁶

This essay will seek to explore the role of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) between 1948 and 1976, and its decisions to avoid taking a stand against Apartheid.⁷ While it is inaccurate to use the 'SAJBD' and 'the community' interchangeably when trying to apportion responsibility, this essay will seek to analyse the actions of the Board only, rather than characterise the community as a whole. It will first seek to understand what the SAJBD is and the role that it has played in the life of the South African Jewish community. Thereafter, it will attempt to account for the SAJBD's statements and actions by dividing the twenty-eight year period (1948-1976) into two parts, 1948-1960 and 1961-1976, attempting to assess the antisemitic threats that existed during the period in

question. Finally, in trying to understand the SAJBD's lack of opposition to Apartheid, three interlinked reasons appear to provide the strongest explanation: the financial success of the Jewish community in the 1950s and 1960s, the 'sojourner myth' and the strength of the Zionist discourse within SA Jewry.

The SAJBD, modelled on the British organization of the same name, grew out of a need to respond to the Immigration Restriction Act of 1902, which threatened to halt much of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe⁸ by barring non-'European' language speakers. The main role that the SAJBD played during this period was the "naturalization of newcomers [Jewish immigrants] ... combating antisemitism and ... safeguarding the interests of Jews."⁹ Amongst the chief goals it set itself was to "watch and take action in all matters affecting the Jews in the southern portion of the continent of Africa."¹⁰

The SAJBD provided the political space for the Jews in South Africa to create institutions and become a prosperous, safe and vibrant community, and it "was recognized, by convention, as the representative organ of South African Jewry."¹¹ It took on the key role of mediating between the community and the ruling powers, challenges which were particularly acute during the 1930s when antisemitism gained a foothold in white political discourse. The National Party was also under suspicion of antisemitism, which came into focus when they opposed the South African entry into World War Two (seen by Jews as a high priority in light of Nazi atrocities). Braude documents a few of the actual incidents of antisemitism prior to the 1948 elections, which created a very tense situation for SA Jewry. This included a meeting at Stellenbosch University, attended by over fifteen hundred people, at which a resolution was put forward to stop Jewish immigration by "legislation and other measures."¹² The Board became the key institution that not only defended the Jewish community, but also set its political culture.

One of the SAJBD's main goals after 1948 was to establish a process of rapprochement between Afrikaners and Jews. It engaged in a number of activities, including publishing statistical evidence to show that Jewish enterprises in light industry opened up new employment opportunities for poor whites.¹³ However, the primary aim of the Jewish community at large, and hence the Board, was to ensure that Jews were included as members of the racially defined privileged white class.¹⁴ In this manner, prior to 1948, "very few Jews showed political concern that transcended the interests of the white group,"¹⁵ and when there was an opportunity to change the Immigration Restriction Act of 1902 to address Indian and Jewish concerns simultaneously, Jewish representatives "were at pains to dissociate their case from that of the Indians."¹⁶ The policies of racial oppression against Black/Coloured/Indian people did not begin under Apartheid, but the SAJBD opted out of fully facing this moral problem by defining its interests as those affecting Jews as Jews, while allowing individual Jews to decide for

themselves on 'matters of conscience' (i.e.: National Party race policy).

Maurice Porter, then SAJBD President, stated in 1972 that the Board was "governed by the principle that it is a non-political body ... except in matters which specifically affected the Jewish community". This policy allowed the Board significant leeway. It did not have to officially account for individual Jews who opposed Apartheid and at the same time, the SAJBD could assuage its conscience by not protesting against Apartheid, because it had identified Apartheid as a political policy, implemented by the National Party, rather than a moral issue. Porter's statement, which Shimoni characterizes as the explicit justification for not issuing a statement on 'political issues',¹⁷ was that "Jewish opinion on politics and racial issues is far from uniform." Hence, a collective political stance did not exist. A previous statement issued by the Board, pointed out that "we pride ourselves that the Board, as a representative body, comprises members representing every shade of political opinion."¹⁸ This stance suggests that due to the fact that many people in the Jewish community supported Apartheid, creating a strongly worded anti-Apartheid statement was not possible, as it would not represent the community as a whole and while this does not justify the Board's actions, it does seem to explain them. Shimoni argues that there is also an implicit reason for this position; that even if a single political stance could be formulated, it would "be *ill-advised* from the point of view of the community's self-interest [my emphasis]."¹⁹ In addition, the implication of this policy was that Judaism, or the Jewish historical experience, did not dictate "any absolute imperative on the question of how a society such as South Africa's ought to be politically and socially ordered."²⁰

However, there are a number of challenges that can be mounted against Porter's contention that the SAJBD was politically neutral. Significantly, in the 1930s, the Board lent its support and took a political stance against the Purified National Party and its murky position on Anti-Jewish immigration legislation. It even went as far as to actively encourage Jews to give financial and other assistance to the United Party.²¹ In addition Gustav Saron, the long-serving director of the Board, gave a speech at the 1945 SAJBD Congress in which he intimated that the Jews were "directly bound up with liberal democratic forces in their struggle with the *Ossewa Brandwag*, the *Nuwe Order* and the *Herenigde National Party*".²² Indeed, in the January 1948 edition of *Jewish Affairs*, there was an editorial which included the following comment: "On racial issues he [the Jew] should take as liberal a view as possible. He should be profoundly sensitive to injustice arising from discrimination based on race or caste. He can and must be progressive."²³

All of the abovementioned points are easily reconciled with a political stance that is only a product of an attempt to protect Jewish interests (under threat in the 1930s and until the 1948 election). Saron himself qualified his previous statement and

suggested finally that the Jew is only bound up with 'liberal, democratic forces' insofar as the fight against antisemitism is concerned. Yet they do show that the Board had the potential to make political statements, if they felt that cause was adequately aligned sufficiently with Jewish interests.

One of the traditional answers to the lack of a decisive response by the SAJBD was that the fear of antisemitism in South Africa made the Board afraid to oppose Apartheid, lest it create the fertile soil for acts of anti-Jewish violence to break out.²⁴ This traditional answer goes further to suggest that SA Jewry acted in accordance with the precedents set by dispersed Jewish communities for centuries; afraid of persecution, they preferred to hunker down and not challenge the status quo, lest pogroms be directed against them.²⁵ In order to interrogate this assertion, it is useful to break the period before 1976 into two: 1948-1960 and 1961-1976. The first period is influenced by the events of the Holocaust, the creation of Apartheid and the question of the National Party's latent antisemitism, while the second is largely concerned with how the Jewish community came under fire for its unwillingness to dissociate itself from Israel's anti-Apartheid position.²⁶

1948-1960

After the election of the Nationalist Party in 1948 and in the light of the Holocaust, the Jewish population felt very uncertain about the extent to which the 'Jewish Question' still influenced the new government's policies.²⁷ These insecurities were exacerbated by the fact that the community still was seen, and saw itself, as an immigrant population. Shimoni also points out that in 1947, Eric Louw, a prominent antisemitic NP politician, quoted an NP Federal Council document which barred new immigrants, called for stricter naturalization laws (directed primarily against Jews), and argued within the NP against changing the antisemitic stance of the party, lest it alienate thousands of Afrikaner nationalists.²⁸

However, once coming into power, the National Party entered into a process of rapprochement with all sectors of the white population to bolster their support in the context of the mounting 'race problem.'²⁹ Dr. D F Malan, then NP leader, held a staged interview with a pro-government newspaper, *Die Burger*, in which he firmly stated that the NP was not antisemitic and saw no difference between Jew and non-Jew.³⁰ Malan's government recognized the fledgling State of Israel in 1948 and Malan himself became the first head of state to visit it in 1953.³¹ Going further, when Malan's party was reunified with the Afrikaner Party in 1951, it ensured that all of the previous bans on Jewish membership of the NP disappeared, expounding a strong "pluralistic conception of [white] South Africanism and the place of the Jews in it."³² Mervyn Smith's speech at the SAJBD 2003 centenary conference, where he criticised the Board and SA Jewish community as a whole for its 'failure' during Apartheid, noted that

by 1953, Jews were safe from serious antisemitism because the *Ossewa Brandwag* faction of the Afrikaner Nationalist movement was "silenced and marginalized".³³ If one adds that there was international sympathy for Jews as a result of the Holocaust and Israel was an established political entity, maintaining an antisemitic policy in South Africa from 1948 was almost inconceivable.

During the first twelve years of Apartheid, the SAJBD focused on its primary task of removing any vestiges of 'the Jewish Question' from the [white] public discourse. The many overtures made by the government to include the Jews in 'white society' meant that Jews faced a steadily decreasing threat of antisemitism. Shimoni, in a response to Smith's speech at the SAJBD conference, argued that not only was there popular support for the SAJBD policy of 'non-involvement', but that challenging Apartheid in the 1950s or 1960s could have led to a split in the Board, possibly creating two Boards of Deputies.³⁴ In order to cement the process of 'white naturalisation', the decision of the SAJBD to refrain from commenting on, or actively opposing Apartheid, although deeply misguided, immoral and short-sighted (since only a system of governance that protects equal rights for all could ever really protect Jews) was, under the historical circumstances, partially justifiable.

1961-1976

Mervyn Smith recalls "that glorious dawn in April 1974 when the [firmly anti-Apartheid] Progressive Party won seven seats throughout South Africa, each constituency matching large pockets of Jewish voters."³⁵ He draws the conclusion that Jewish voters of the time, by and large those that represented 'the community' were, through the ballot box, firmly opposing Apartheid. Smith laments the unwillingness of the Jewish leadership to criticise the Apartheid regime, or at the very least, the racist nature of Apartheid itself, through viewing it as a moral rather than a political issue. By this time, the 'Jewish question' had indeed retreated from white political discussion and Jews were participating equally as beneficiaries of the Apartheid system.

The key feature of this period, rather than overt acts of antisemitism, was the impact of Israel's actions, which had become increasingly anti-Apartheid (in the first few years of the 1960s³⁶) as it followed its own foreign policy by drawing close to the newly independent African states.³⁷ These African countries were stridently opposed to the Apartheid system and NP race policy.

A crisis erupted in 1961 when Eric Louw, the Foreign Minister who had attended the United Nations, was attacked by Liberia, which attempted to get his speech removed from the record. Israel (and Holland), voting differently to the rest of the Western states, supported the Liberian motion. Even though the vote did not pass, Israel's stance resulted in "embarrassment and apprehensiveness [which was] felt by the leaders of both the Jewish Board of

Deputies and the Zionist Federation”³⁸ and demonstrated how NP antisemitism still influenced Jewish institutional thinking. The situation was made all the more difficult when Louw turned his frustration on the local Jewish community.³⁹ When the SAZF and SAJBD finalized their joint statement, it was mildly critical of Israel for censoring international freedom of speech.⁴⁰ The Apartheid government punished Israel (and local Jewry) by withdrawing permission for the SAZF to transfer funds raised for Israel to the Jewish Agency.⁴¹

The two time periods identified above seem to suggest a number of conclusions. Firstly, just prior to the 1948 elections, a significant degree of Jewish fear existed as to the future actions of the National Party as a result of their antisemitic past, and while this fear was partially calmed through Malan’s subsequent actions, the threat still existed in the consciousness of many Jews. Secondly, post-1948 and especially after 1961 as the local economy boomed and Afrikaners became increasingly upwardly mobile, “antisemitism declined rapidly”⁴² in South African society. Third, a new uncomfortable situation was created for local Jewry when Israel appeared to portray itself as ‘anti-Apartheid’, leading to charges of dual loyalty. The literature points to a community that was initially scared of its survival in the late 1940s and 1950s to one that in the 1960s was secure as a white minority, although with a particular challenge regarding the actions of Israel.

But, the moral problem remains. Why did the SAJBD not criticise Apartheid? One way to answer this problem was proposed by Immanuel Suttner in his book *Cutting through the Mountain*, which attempts to understand why so many Jews were a part of the anti-Apartheid struggle. He suggests that:

The Board’s policy was a diaspora Jewish response. It was cautious, prudent, equivocal and tortured, a function of an insecure minority wanting first and foremost to ensure its safety, secondly not to lose its comfortable privileges, and thirdly, not to shorten the rare experience of not being the prime ‘other’⁴³

However, this does not seem to respond to the situation that the SAJBD faced in the 1960s. It had shown that it could potentially be politically active.

It is at this point that Biale’s analysis of Jewish history becomes particularly relevant. He argues that there has been a fundamental shift in the autonomy of Jewish communities worldwide since the twin rise of the United States, with its influential Jewish institutions, and the State of Israel. South African Jews were racially defined as a part of the ruling class, which turned many thousands of years of Jewish history on its head. Hence, the typical ‘Diaspora’ response that Suttner refers to is a reference to the pogrom-filled memory of exile but is not relevant to a South African Jewish community that was significantly more powerful than any of those during the time of the Middle Ages.⁴⁴

The community’s power manifested in its

economic clout and was a key component of the local Apartheid economy. Shimoni alludes to Jewish economic power when he recalls Arthur Suzman’s address to the Board’s conference in mid-1970, in which he said that he could not remember a time that was freer of tension and incident for the Jewish community (i.e. since the mid-1950s). Suzman said that there were many factors other than the “buoyant economic climate”,⁴⁵ yet it was exactly this spectacular growth that played such a significant role in the community’s sense of security and integration into Apartheid South Africa.

Mendelsohn and Shain contend that “although they shared with other middle-class English-speaking whites a distaste for Afrikaner nationalism and its hegemonic agenda, Jews, like their gentile peers, readily accommodated themselves to the new apartheid order and its privileges.”⁴⁶ Jews advanced economically, educationally, socially through the institutions that were created to privilege their ethnicity.

It must be noted that a reoccurring feature of the Western world since the end of the 19th Century is that Jews are often disproportionately successful financially. Marcus Arkin, writing about the Jewish contribution to the South Africa economy in 1984, attributed this financial success to a “Jewish labour force [that] is wholly urbanized, highly educated and centred in the major metropolitan areas”, adding that Jewish economic activity actually played a key role in “transforming the structure of the [domestic] economy.”⁴⁷ While there are additional reasons for this economic success, the phenomenon becomes morally challenging in the context of Apartheid, where Jews benefited from a system of racial oppression while its institutions remained silent.

Just how successful was the local community? The roots of its wealth were laid before Apartheid became official policy, but white economic dominance was still legally enforced. Shain and Mendelsohn refer to a 1935 survey which found that 8% of Jewish males were in ‘the professions’, a rate double that of the ‘general population’.⁴⁸ They also refer to the Jewish owned businesses of the 1930s that would become household names, especially in the clothing, textile and retail industries – Foschini, Truworths, Woolworths, Edgars and Rex Truform. In a survey of the Jewish community in 1977, Dubb refers to the Jewish mean income in 1951, placed at R1432 compared with R882 for Anglicans (which could be used as an indicator to measure English-speaking whites) and R688 for Dutch Reformed adherents (a measure for Afrikaners).⁴⁹

By 1960, 23% of all practising doctors in South Africa were Jewish⁵⁰, while the percentage of the Jewish population that entered the professions had climbed from 9.7% in 1936 to 20% in 1960.⁵¹ Arkin adds that while Jews made up only 3.9% of the white population in 1970, they constituted 10.2% of the total whites in commerce.⁵² In terms of employment in the 1970 census, 85% of Jews involved in agriculture were employers, while in the finance, construction, services and commerce sectors, the

proportion of Jews who were employers was between 38-42%.⁵³

The *South African Jewish Yearbook* of 1965, while celebrating some of the Jewish entrepreneurs in the mining industry (particularly problematic considering what the migrant labour system did to black communities), pays homage to the contribution of Jewish businessmen like B.J. 'Barney' Barnato, Herman Eckstein and Lionel Phillips.⁵⁴ So successful were Jews in South Africa, that the 1965 Yearbook says that there was "hardly a branch of South African industry in which Jewish men of enterprise and initiative have not had some part, and not seldom the part of the pioneer and innovator."⁵⁵ The Yearbook's chapter ends by stating that the "Jewish community can be proud of the part it has played, and will continue to play, in keeping South Africa strong and secure."⁵⁶ In the context of Apartheid, this statement reinforces the extent to which South African Jews felt a part of the system.

One final indicator of the success, and hence sense of security that Jews had in white South Africa, were the extensive capital projects that the community embarked upon. Mendelsohn and Shain note that a building boom took place in the 1950s and 1960s as new synagogues were built in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg. The community also constructed a new range of Jewish day schools, Herzlia in Cape Town and the King David Schools in Johannesburg, which were "sited on expensive suburban campuses and modelled on the prestigious government and private schools with which they competed for the enrolment of Jewish children."⁵⁷

The community justified their beneficial status in the context of Apartheid in two ways: by believing in the myth that South African Jews were 'sojourners' and by allowing the strong Zionist heritage of the local community to dominate the communal discourse. The common feature of these two intellectual factors is that being Jewish in South Africa, even as benefactors of Apartheid, placed no responsibility on the community, since Jews were not a direct part of the machinery that maintained the oppressive system.

Myth is concerned primarily with the story that we tell ourselves, 'the master narrative'. It is "partial and self selective" serving "specific functions in particular periods"⁵⁸. Steven Friedman argues in *Jewish Affairs* that the South African Jewish myth "holds that we were never collectively responsible for Apartheid and its consequences."⁵⁹ He says that the myth originates in the very foundations of the establishment of our community, in that our great grandparents came to South Africa just to escape the ghetto and Eastern European poverty, not to enjoy the fruits of being the benefactors of an exploitative racial system. The myth was extended during Apartheid as we found ourselves in a clash between Afrikaners and Africans. Yet we had kept our moral integrity in tact by "earning an honest living and [hence] cannot possibly be held responsible for the grotesque racial experiment through which we lived".⁶⁰ Yet, as 'sojourners' we became a part of the pharonic class in the first place.⁶¹ External factors added to our self-justification, like Malan's 'reminder' to SA Jewry at the 1940 NP party congress in the Transvaal that "they were guests in South Africa."⁶²

Claudia Braude contends that the SAJBD responded to the Jewish community's sense of self doubt concerning their place in South Africa by "actively discouraging Jews from criticising government policy."⁶³ She argues that the Board referred to its pre-existing policy that "Jews had no right to comment on politics as Jews."⁶⁴ Braude notes that one of the major causes of the Jewish community's lack of opposition to Apartheid was its increasingly close interaction with Afrikaner nationalism, which affected the way that Jews in South Africa saw their religion, history and role in politics.⁶⁵

A key component of the intellectual buttress that the community utilised to avoid its conscience was the impact of Zionism, described as the "civil religion of South African Jewry".⁶⁶ Zionism had a significant influence on all of the institutions in the Jewish community, including the SAJBD. While the Board was not an active promoter of Zionism (like the SAZF), it nonetheless operated within the Zionist



SAJBD Chairman Julius Rosettenstein welcomes Prime Minister and Mrs. Vorster to a banquet in Vorster's honor after his return from Israel, April 1976.

ideological framework, which had as one of its premises that Antisemitism was present in every society, becoming more prevalent when Jews were in high profile positions. While the Zionists took this fact to imply that Jews should move to Israel en masse to avoid Antisemitism flaring up, the corollary of this line of argument holds that if Jews were to remain in the Diaspora, they needed to keep a low profile. Zionism argued that Jewish life in 'exile' was compromised and temporary. The impact that this had was that South African Jewish political activity was "often less about living in Israel than it was about denying a political life in South Africa."⁶⁷

The SAJBD was, and continues to be, the key Jewish community institution in South Africa. Yet its silence during Apartheid will forever be a stain on its historical record. It embodied the implementation of Biale's definition of power, in which the SAJBD mediated between the Jewish community's relations with the Apartheid government, and created the 'atmospheric culture' through its governance and actions, that set the political and social tone of the community. Shimoni's assessment that a more critical attitude towards Apartheid in the 1950s or 1960s by the Board could have lead to a split, is a revealing example of just how deeply supported its 'stance of silence' was. Silence allowed the community to live securely and become incredibly wealthy⁶⁸ without feeling tainted by the brutality of the 'Apartheid government'.

Two lessons can be taken from this period. First, it is time for an honest reassessment of our community's role during Apartheid, both through a Jewish Truth and Reconciliation Commission and also by establishing our own reparations fund, to which Jewish businesses which thrived during Apartheid should see themselves as morally obligated to contribute. Second, when called on in the future to make statements on moral issues, be they about xenophobia in South Africa (where its effort was evident) to an explicit condemnation of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian people (where it has remained deafeningly silent), the Board needs to know that the actions that it takes will be judged by history, not the intellectual currents of today or commitments to the political currents of days gone by.

Privilege, especially that gained by our community in the context of a grotesque system like Apartheid, places a significant challenge on future generations of South African Jews: to be honest about our collective past and use it as a source of inspiration for each one of us to participate in transforming South Africa and creating an equal and just society where all people can live in dignity.

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NOTES

- ¹ See Polakow-Suransky, S, *The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa*, Pantheon Books, New York, 2010.
- ² Braude, C, 'From the Brotherhood of Man to the World to Come: The Denial of the Political in Rabbinic Writing under Apartheid' in Gilman, S, & Shain, M, *Jewries at the Frontier*, University of Illinois Press, 1999 (pp 284 et seq.)
- ³ Biale, D, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*, New York: Schocken Books, 1986, pp 2-6.
- ⁴ Biale contends that Jewish communities, throughout history, have neither been as powerful as they were in the Jewish collective memory (in the case of the kingdoms of Saul, David and Solomon), nor were they as weak and helpless as they have been portrayed during the Middle Ages.
- ⁵ Ibid, p7.
- ⁶ Friedman, S, 'Judaism, Apartheid and the South African Sojourner Myth', *Jewish Affairs*, Autumn 1997.
- ⁷ Aleck Goldberg tracks the statements of the SAJBD, which became progressively more anti-Apartheid (in line with white racial consensus), starting in 1972, calling for a "just and stable relationship between all races and groups in South Africa". Then, in 1976, the chairman David Mann made a speech at the Board's conference, with South African President Vorster in attendance (who had just been to Israel to sign military agreements), where he criticized Apartheid and articulated that "we must move as quickly and effectively as is practicable from discrimination based on race or colour." In 1985, the SAJBD rejected Apartheid altogether, and then, only in 1989, it called for key Apartheid laws to be abolished. Goldberg, A, 'Apartheid and the Board of Deputies', *Jewish Affairs*, Autumn 1997.
- ⁸ Shain, M, *Jewry and Cape Society: The Origins and Activities of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Cape Colony*. Cape Town: Historical Publication Society, 1983 (pp 31-32).
- ⁹ Mendelsohn, R, & Shain, M, 'Litvaks', in *The Jews in South Africa*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2008 (p60).
- ¹⁰ Shimoni, G, 'Introduction' in *Community and Conscience: The Jews in Apartheid South Africa*, David Philip Publishers, 2003, p2.
- ¹¹ Shimoni, G, 'The South African Jews and Apartheid' in *American Jewish Year Book*, 1988.
- ¹² Braude, C, 'Introduction' in *Contemporary Jewish Writing in South Africa*, University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln & London (pp xxxvi), 2001.
- ¹³ Shimoni, G, 'The Response to the Jewish Question' in *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience (1910-1967)*, Oxford University Press, 1980, pp150 et seq.
- ¹⁴ For further discussion, see Krut, R, 'The Making of a South African Jewish Community in Johannesburg, 1886-1914' in Bozzoli, B, (ed), *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives*. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1987.
- ¹⁵ Note 11, p8.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Note 10 (pp 31).
- ¹⁸ Advocate Kuper, explaining the position of the SAJBD in Goldberg, A., 'Apartheid and the Board of Deputies', *Jewish Affairs*, Autumn 1997.
- ¹⁹ Supra note 11 (pp 27).
- ²⁰ Note 11, p31.
- ²¹ Note 13, p152.
- ²² Ibid, p155.

- ²³ Note 10, p16.
- ²⁴ Note 7.
- ²⁵ In fact, Arthur Keppel-Jones's *When Smuts Goes*, written on the eve of Dr Malan's National Party victory in 1948, features a pogrom anticipated as taking place in 1955. See note 10.
- ²⁶ Note: this covers the first period of South Africa and Israel's relationship (up until the mid-1970s). Polakow-Suransky meticulously documents the close relationship built between the Apartheid regime and Israel through arms sales and the exchange of military technology.
- ²⁷ Frankental, S. & Shain, M. 'Accommodation, apathy and activism: Jewish political behaviour in South Africa' in *The Jewish Quarterly*, Spring 1993, p6.
- ²⁸ Note 13, pp 165.
- ²⁹ Hellig, J. 'Antisemitism Then and Now' in *Jewish Affairs*, Autumn 1997.
- ³⁰ Note 13, pp 165-166.
- ³¹ Note 10, p26.
- ³² Ibid., p26.
- ³³ Smith, M. Address at the SAJBD Centenary Conference (7 September 2003).
- ³⁴ Shimoni, G. 2003. Response to Mervyn Smith (taken from an email sent by Doron Isaacs to Shimoni asking for his comments).
- ³⁵ Supra note 33.
- ³⁶ In the later part of the 1960s onwards, Israel traded arms with South Africa, in the context of an international arms embargo, including knowledge that allowed the Apartheid government the technical knowledge to build an atom bomb. See McGreal, C. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/feb/07/southafrica.israel> [accessed 28 August 2008].
- ³⁷ Note 10, p46.
- ³⁸ Ibid, p47.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p50. Prime Minister Verwoed, in a private letter to a South African Jew who expressed regret at Israel's support of African states, threatened the Jewish community through thinly veiled praise, stating that "what might have been worse was relieved to a certain extent by this pro-South African reaction [the SAZF/SAJBD letter]" going further to point out that it had "not passed unnoticed" how many Jews had voted for the Progressive Party, instead of the NP.
- ⁴¹ Jewish students had long called for a moral response from the SAJBD to Apartheid. Shimoni documents student protests on the University of Cape Town and Wits campuses, the newspapers that they created and the confrontations that they had with the Board. An anecdotal example that he picks up on which highlights the unwillingness of the SAJBD to take a stand on Apartheid was in 1972, at the Board's conference, when a resolution condemning all forms of "racial discrimination" (Apartheid was not even mentioned) was defeated, and the students and walked out (Ibid., p182.
- ⁴² Note 9, p135.
- ⁴³ Suttner, I. 'Afterword' in *Cutting through the Mountain*, Viking, 1997.
- ⁴⁴ In addition, since World War Two, the discourse of human rights and international law, the United Nations and the International Declaration of Human Rights have created a world in which racial discrimination is no longer justified and where organizations actively attempt to safe-guard the rights of all human beings. Hence, the analogy of all Diaspora communities being relatively isolated, in large part dependent on their host governments to stay alive (as in the Middle Ages) no longer applies to the global Jewish community, as minority rights have been enshrined in the rights of many countries in the world, especially those in the West.
- ⁴⁵ Note 10, p133.
- ⁴⁶ Note 9, p135.
- ⁴⁷ Arkin, M. (ed), *SA Jewry: A Contemporary Survey*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1984, p75.
- ⁴⁸ Note 9, p113.
- ⁴⁹ Dubb, A. 'Jewish South Africans: A Sociological View of the Johannesburg Community', Occasional Paper No. 23, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1977, p21.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid, p158.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, p157.
- ⁵² Note 47, p66.
- ⁵³ Ibid, p70.
- ⁵⁴ Feldberg, L. 'South African Jewry. 1965. A Survey of the Jewish Community; Its Contributions to South Africa'; *Directory of Communal Institutions; and a Who's Who of leading personalities*. Fieldhill Publishing Co. (Pty) Ltd, Johannesburg, 1965, p55.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, p63.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid, p69.
- ⁵⁷ Note 9, p153.
- ⁵⁸ Frankental, S. & Shain, M. "'Community with a Conscience': Myth or Reality" in Abrahamson, G. *Modern Jewish Mythologies*, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999.
- ⁵⁹ Supra note 6 (pp 60).
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p60.
- ⁶¹ "While South African Jewish historiography consistently presents Jews as white, their belonging within white society was only guaranteed, ironically, with the introduction of apartheid", Braude, C. 'From the Brotherhood of Man to the World to Come....', p268.
- ⁶² Shimoni, G. 'Introduction' in *Community and Conscience*, p16.
- ⁶³ Braude, 'From the Brotherhood of Man to the World to Come...', pp 270 et seq.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Braude specifically looks at Orthodox rabbinical writing and the manner in which it changed since the beginning of Apartheid: "The more Judaism and Jewish life were interpreted as apolitical, devoid of any critical response to racism and social inequality, the more they responded to and were influenced by apartheid. In other words, the less visible their contact with the political realities and ideology of Afrikaans nationalism, the stronger their connection". Ibid., pp 283 et seq.
- ⁶⁶ Mendelsohn, R. & Shain, M. 'Litvaks', in *The Jews in South Africa*.
- ⁶⁷ Braude, 'From the Brotherhood of Man to the World to Come...', p284.
- ⁶⁸ An anecdotal piece of evidence is to at the *Sunday Times* rich list for 2008 (*Sunday Times* 2008, "The Rich List 2007" <http://www.thetimes.co.za/SpecialReports/richlist/Default.aspx?id=305381>). Many of the top two hundred earners (which ignores all of those whose money is not invested in funds available to the public). In the context of wealth redistribution that has been extremely slow, this means that it is possible to deduce that a significant portion of this wealth was generated during/as a result of, Apartheid (see Gumede, W. 'What's Wrong with Being Filthy Rich?' in *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC*. New Holland Publishing: Cape Town, 2007, pp284-290.

A TRIBUTE TO DAVID SUSMAN

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Suzanne Belling

Whenever I had the privilege of interviewing David Susman, ז"ל, - first in the 1970s and in subsequent years for various publications - the phrase that always came to mind was: "an officer and a gentleman". That perception of him never changed.

The gentleman quality is one to which all who crossed his path will attest. The officer part is actually true, for, as a young man, he fought in Israel's War of Independence and reached the rank of second lieutenant and platoon commander.

Of course, these were just two of the attributes of this former chairman of Wooltru and Woolworths, veteran communal leader and philanthropist.

Always dapper and dashing, it was clear in 2009 that David was ailing. It was the last occasion I saw him, taking with me the parting gift of his book *An African Shopkeeper: Memoirs of David Susman*. This reflects on "a life filled with the richest of experiences, many of which feel so remote as to be the part of the life of someone else, and not mine" and which he characterised as "an attempt to record the benign influence of many of my betters as it is a chart of my personal meandering through a life which has treated me with great kindness".

The rich and well-lived days of David Susman's life came to an end in May 2010. His son, Simon, in paying tribute to this model of society, remarked on his "deep humility", his abhorrence of the obsessive pursuit of money and fame and how, having acquired both of these attributes, "wore them humbly and a little shyly". His whole life had been about "challenge, pioneering and seeking the truth".

So full was David's life that it is difficult to extrapolate the highlights. Born in Johannesburg in 1925, he spent his early years in the former colonial Northern Rhodesia, where he retained business interests. He was educated at Kingswood School in Grahamstown and the University of the Witwatersrand. He served in North Africa and Italy during World War II and in the Israel Defence Force in 1948.

Communally, David referred to himself as a 'nogschlepper' and, as in the title of his book, not a businessman of the calibre he was, but a mere 'shopkeeper' - an African shopkeeper. Far from his self-deprecatory title, David Susman in reality had an exemplary communal leadership record. This

included having chaired the boards of trustees of the Cape Jewish Aged Home (Highlands House), United Herzlia Schools, ORT-Tech (he was a former national president of ORT South Africa as well) and the IUA-UCF Welfare Campaign (now the United Jewish Campaign) in the Western Cape. Shortly before his passing, he had just retired from his chairmanship of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre.

David further served as a trustee of the SA Foundation, the Urban Foundation, UNISA and the University of Cape Town Foundation. In addition, he was a member of the SA Ocean Racing Trust.

Then there was Woolworths. This really began for him, as David he termed it, "when the Circus came to town", comprising, inter alia, Sir Simon Marks (later Lord Marks), chairman of Marks and Spencer (M&S), Marcus (later Lord) Sieff and a senior executive of the world famous chain, Michael Sacher, a nephew of Sir Simon, several other M&S executives, and Ann Laski, daughter of Sir Simon's sister, Elaine Blond. As he observes in his memoirs, "Among the shareholders were a British Cabinet Minister, a Maharajah and Chaim Weizmann, later to become the first president of the State of Israel. Never before, or indeed since, has Woolworths enjoyed such distinguished shareholders". Major players in the South African Group, which had entered into an agreement with M&S, were David's father, Elie, resident director of Woolworths in Johannesburg at the time, the former head of Woolworths Max Sonnenberg and his son, Dick.

David and his long-time friend and World War II army buddy, Jeff Perlman, "agreed in our youthful wisdom that Woolworths was appallingly merchandised, overstocked and poorly led". After Sir Simon's outspoken and aggressive attack on the store managers, buyers and on the merchandise, David and Jeff presented the British chain store tycoon with a painstakingly written outline as a basis for the future policy of Woolworths. Wrote David: "I was completely mesmerised by him. He spent an inordinate amount of time with me, explaining, illustrating and asking my opinion about the business. Not even the most sycophantic of Father's employees had ever done [what I had done], let alone Max or Dick, and certainly not Father himself." All this, he continued, "was heady stuff for a callow young student. My mind was whirling with new ideas, values and experiences. Simon Marks' powerful personality, his uncompromising standards and his profound philosophical approach to his business have dominated my life as has no other influence".

And so began David Susman's illustrious career and a life linked and interlinked with family, friends, business and community. His life changed, too,

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through his friendship with Marcus Sieff, Michael Sacher and Michael's wife, Audrey, and other members of the family ("A sense of social responsibility began to appear alongside my more natural self-indulgence").

Then Cecilia Sonnenberg, wife of Dick and famed for her annual Shakespearean open-air theatre productions at Maynardville in Cape Town, stepped in, deciding that "it would be ridiculous for Ann Laski to return to England without even the chance to size me up and reject me". The respective families insisted on David's and Ann's attendance at a huge party at the Sonnenbergs' home.

"Ann was a very pretty, lively English girl, with all the values and beliefs of her privileged background. Her wartime stint in the Fleet Air Arm as a radio artificer had broadened her perceptions... Her quick wit and ready sense of humour enchanted me, as it does to this day," he told me during my last interview with him.

They spent much time together before "the kings and the princes" (together with Ann, the "princess") left South African shores. There was an exchange of letters after David entered his final year at the University of the Witwatersrand. With his newly-acquired social conscience, influenced by the M&S family's Zionist endeavours (Marcus Sieff's mother, Rebecca, founded WIZO, David Ben-Gurion was a personal friend and there were business ties with Chaim Weizmann), David then decided to fight for Israel in what he termed his "second war". In the course of this, he was wounded in a skirmish ("The

only remaining evidence is that my left shoulder hangs down some three centimetres below the other, creating a major challenge for my tailor").

After their marriage in London, David and Ann lived in Israel, where David joined the Foreign Ministry and was appointed second secretary. "After a few months of doing crossword puzzles, I was transferred to the American Desk, under the 'tender' ministrations of Teddy Kollek [later the renowned Mayor of Jerusalem]". Giving up "after much soul-searching" his dreams of diplomatic achievement, he returned to England. It was there that he was offered a job by Simon Marks and familiarised himself with the unique philosophy and ethics of Marks and Spencer, of which he became a director.

On his return to South Africa in 1952, David joined Woolworths, becoming a director, managing director and finally chairman from 1983-1990. He was chairman of Wooltru from 1981-1993. In the tradition of the M&S family, he rose to the heights in Jewish leadership, with chairmanships too numerous to mention. In the year before his passing, he resigned all his major portfolios passing and concentrated on his recreational activities - "angling and interfering" - bringing his ever-ready good humour to the fore.

David leaves his wife, Ann, children, Simon, Jennie and Daphne, and nine grandchildren.

His passing leaves an irreplaceable void in the Jewish community of South Africa. *Jewish Affairs*, which benefited greatly from his unsolicited generosity in recent years, extends heartfelt condolences to his family.



David Susman, 1925 - 2010 (photo: L Hammand)

SOME GENTILE ZIONISTS (Part II)

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Cecil Bloom

The Jewish people have had many Gentile sympathizers in history, men and women with sincere attachments to the Jewish struggle for a National Home in Eretz Israel. Even before the Balfour Declaration of 1917, there were various personalities who favoured the return of Jews to the Land of Israel.

The support for Zionism of **Sir Mark Sykes** (1879-1919), noted primarily in history as one of the authors of the Sykes-Picot Agreement that planned the post-war division of ex-Turkish territories, was primarily based on what he perceived as diplomatic advantages for his country. Later, however, he demonstrated much admiration for Jewish settlement in Palestine.

Sykes became a student of Turkish affairs following Herbert Samuel's writing in 1915 of a paper for the British Cabinet on the future of Palestine. Up until then, he knew little about Zionism and disliked what he did know, but he came to favour Britain's having a firm foothold in Palestine and to that end decided that a Jewish settlement there would provide an answer. *Haham* Moses Gaster, with whom he became friendly before 1914, is credited with winning him over to Zionism.

As an Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet, Sykes played a decisive role in the negotiations that led to the Balfour Declaration. Leopold Amery gives him most credit for drawing up the Declaration, writing that Sykes' "imaginative and receptive mind had at once seized upon all the possibilities of the Zionist movement. He became an enthusiastic Zionist [that] found an entirely new scope when he became a War Cabinet Secretary". The Zionist movement, he added, owed much to Sykes' infectious enthusiasm and indefatigable energy. Harold Nicolson, diplomat and author, who worked for Sykes at this time, claimed that the Declaration may never have been effected without Sykes' persistent pressure on Lloyd George and Balfour.

Leonard Stein devotes much space in his book *The Balfour Declaration* to his involvement. Sykes was so enthusiastic about his Government declaring itself in favour of a national home for Jews in the Holy Land that after Cabinet had approved the final text of the Declaration, he brought the document to Weizmann, who was waiting outside the Cabinet

room, and exclaimed, "Dr Weizmann, it's a boy!"

Weizmann thought very highly of Sykes' advice and he was the only non-Jew present at a key meeting in February 1917 when he spoke at length on the difficulties that the Zionists would be facing. Zionism's appeal to Sykes has much to do with the pride it took in agricultural settlements, contrasting with the traditional urban Jewish way of life. He was a devoted Roman Catholic and, as a Christian, felt that in helping the Zionist adventure to succeed he would be doing something "to make good a great amend". It is a tragedy that he died in 1919, since his influence in Government circles could have been crucial in the difficult years that followed.



Sir Mark Sykes

Orde Wingate (1903-1944) was quite different from our other Gentile Zionists in that, while in Palestine, he participated in military exploits as a leader of Jewish forces in activities relating to the defence of the *Yishuv*. As a British soldier, he served in Palestine for three years until despatched by the authorities back to Britain in 1939. He had no political influence in Government circles, but was a very positive contributor to *Yishuv* life. The Bible was part of his life - it was said of him that he had been born not with a silver spoon in his mouth but with a Bible in his hand - but, unlike his forebears, he had no desire to convert Jews to Christianity. His grandfather had been in charge of a Church of Scotland mission to Hungary for poor Jews and his parents were missionaries, but he saw his mission as being to convert young Palestinian Jews to military action in order to defend themselves.

Before taking Jewish fighters into action, Wingate would read the appropriate passage of the Bible

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relating to the places in which he would be operating. He saw it as a privilege to help Palestinian Jews in their battles against the Arabs and wanted to devote his life to that aim because the very existence of mankind was justified when based on the moral foundation of the Bible.

Wingate first served in the Sudan and in Libya. In 1936, being regarded as an expert on Arab affairs, he was promoted to captain and posted to Palestine to work as an Intelligence Officer in Haifa. Within a few months, he had become a committed Zionist, becoming actively involved in Zionist affairs and identifying himself completely with the *Yishuv*. Wingate, who had a powerful personality, was described by Weizmann as a fanatical Zionist who was idolized by those that fought under his command and who were filled with admiration for his qualities of endurance, courage and originality. Weizmann once referred to him as "my favourite madman". Understandably, he was not very popular with many of his Army colleagues who were not endeared to the Zionist cause. His enthusiasm did, at first, cause some concern within the *Yishuv* leadership, who were suspicious that an Arab-speaking British officer could be so sympathetic to them, but he soon won them over.

Wingate believed that a Jewish Legion similar to the Arab one in Transjordan would provide the best fighting force in the region. One of his duties was to counter terrorist attacks on the oil pipeline from Iraq to Haifa and he created a special motor-cycle squad (comprising mainly *Haganah* Jews but containing some British officers and NCOs as well) to patrol at night the whole length of the pipeline. Initially, his scheme was opposed by his own Head-Quarters staff, but he won over the British Commander-General Wavell to these unorthodox methods. He caused a sensation when he took men into action for the first time since British policy at that time was that Jews could only defend themselves within their own settlements. The squads were small ones, never larger than two hundred in number, but the initiative proved successful in eliminating Arab threats to the line and was a psychological boost for the *Yishuv*. The biggest battle fought by Wingate's Special Night Squads was at Dabburiyah, on the slopes of Mount Tabor close to the Sea of Galilee. Wingate himself was wounded, but one of the most dangerous Arab terrorist groups was completely defeated.

Wingate became a confidant of those in charge of the defence of the *Yishuv* and cooperated a great deal with *Haganah*, at that time a proscribed organisation. He was generally referred to as *Ha-Yadid* (The Friend) and he would sometimes retire to a *kibbutz* where he would speak Hebrew and try to get a better understanding of life there. He was unquestionably a maverick, an unconventional individual who never conformed to traditional British behaviour, and he always aired his views irrespective of his audience. It was no surprise, therefore, when he was sent back to Britain to an anti-aircraft battery. Before he left, however, he spoke in most affectionate terms of the work of his squads and promised to return to the

country in the future, if not in a conventional manner then as a *ma'apil* (illegal refugee). Soon after he left, many of the men who fought with him were arrested and charged with possessing illegal weapons and of being members of the illegal *Haganah* organisation. (Moshe Dayan was one of these). Wingate was then despatched to Abyssinia to help Haile Selassie liberate his people from Mussolini and thereafter, now as a Major-General, to Burma, where he led a special unit, the Chindits, behind Japanese lines. He was killed in an air crash in Burma in 1944, but his body was only found some three years later.

Wingate is credited with being one of the founders of the Israel Defence Force. There is no doubt that he made some very positive contributions to the Zionist cause when he was in *Eretz Israel* and his work cannot be overestimated in training young Jews to fight. Blanche Dugdale (who disliked Wingate) once wrote of him that it was lucky for the Zionist movement that Wingate's fanatical Zionism got the better of his sense of duty as an intelligence officer and that he was "clearly one of the instruments in God's hands". Many of the early military leaders of Israel learnt their trade from Wingate, admiring him immensely, and his influence on *Haganah* and *Palmach* was huge. Moshe Dayan called him a military genius, a wonderful man with a dominating personality who infected all with his fanaticism and faith. Wingate had an ambition to command a future Jewish army and it is worth speculating the role he may have played in the armed struggle against the Arabs at the State's foundation. Shortly before Wingate's death, a Jewish Brigade was eventually formed and Weizmann asked for him to be appointed its commander. This was rejected by the War Office.

Wingate was married to a remarkable woman, Lorna, who was also active in Zionist affairs as a leader of *Youth Aliyah* in Britain. He has certainly been honoured in a very positive manner by Israel.



Major-General Orde Wingate

Yemin Orde, the Wingate College of Physical Education near Netanya is a children's village, and there is a forest on Mount Gilboa bearing his name.

As a boy **David Lloyd George** (1863-1945) was said to know the geography of the Holy Land better than that of his native Wales. He was very familiar with the sayings of the Hebrew prophets, and consequently instinctively associated Palestine with the Jewish nation. Lloyd George's active involvement with Zionism dates back to 1903 when, as a young lawyer, he was engaged to draft an agreement that Theodor Herzl arranged to make with the British Government following the latter's offer of East Africa for Jewish settlement. By 1905, he was describing himself as an ardent believer in the Zionist movement.

Lloyd George put on record that he was proud to have participated in the negotiations that led to the Balfour Declaration. In fact, the Declaration itself would have been entitled the Lloyd George Declaration had he, as Prime Minister, so decided. Early in the Great War, Herbert Samuel's memorandum *The Future of Palestine* was circulated to the British Cabinet. This proposed that Palestine be annexed to the British Empire and that Jewish colonisation and cultural development there be encouraged. This appealed to Lloyd George's "poetic and imaginative as well as to the romantic and religious qualities of his mind". In 1923, he made it clear where he stood on Zionism in his article *Palestine and the Jews*, in which he wrote: "If Palestine is to be restored to a condition even approximating to its ancient prosperity, it must be by settling Jews on its soil...Restoration is only possible by a race that is prepared for sentimental reasons to make and endure sacrifices for this purpose". He added that letting Jews redeem the land from the wilderness to restore it to its ancient glory would be no injustice to any other race.

Statements made by Lloyd George subsequent to the Balfour Declaration (as well as by others, including Jan Smuts and other leading British Cabinet ministers of the time) place beyond dispute that his intention was for Jews to be free to settle in Palestine in the largest numbers that the land could support and that Jews, when they constituted a majority and were firmly settled there, should be able to set up their own autonomous Administration. After he left office in 1922, he spoke on many occasions in favour of Zionism, both in Britain and in America, and always made it clear that subsequent British policies in Palestine were a betrayal of what the Balfour Declaration stood for. Thus, he denounced the 1930 White Paper recommending limits on Jewish immigration and land ownership, predicting that it would result in Britain being viewed throughout the world as "perfidious Albion".

Richard Meinertzhagen (1878-1967) had strong philo-semitic sentiments and for some years was an important member of the British Government's staff in the Middle East. He was also an ornithologist of international repute. A nephew of Beatrice Webb who, like her husband Lord Passfield (drafter of the 1930 White Paper), was no friend of the Zionist

movement, he was an 'out and out' Zionist and vigorously anti-Arab. By some historians, he was seen as a maverick, "an *enfant terrible*...a violent and prejudiced partisan...a lone operator...almost unique among senior officers in Palestine". Despite his name, he had no Jewish blood, being of Danish extraction.

As a professional army officer during World War II, Meinertzhagen was in charge of Allenby's Intelligence Section stationed in Cairo and was involved with Aaron Aaronsohn's Nili operation that provided much information to the British in the war with Turkey. He was a member of the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, later becoming Allenby's Chief Political Officer in Palestine. He wrote that "bringing Jews back to their old Home after nearly two thousand years of dispersal and persecution" was "the most constructive and important outcome of the First World War".

During the Paris conference, Meinertzhagen wrote to Lloyd George telling him that Britain was very wise in allowing Jews to establish a National Home in Palestine. Jewish and Arab sovereignty was bound to clash, but Britain should befriend the Jews, who were virile, brave, determined and intelligent and would be most likely to be loyal friends compared to decadent, stupid and dishonest Arabs. Meinertzhagen came under Chaim Weizmann's spell and developed a close relationship with him. Weizmann saw him as "a man of lion-hearted courage" who would go out of his way to perform a service for the Jews of Palestine whenever he could.

In his book *Middle East Diary*, Meinertzhagen makes clear his deep commitment to the Zionist cause. He saw it as a fundamental religious duty for Jews to develop Palestine as their home, was contemptuous of anti-Zionist Jews, and believed that it was a "monstrous injustice" that the Jewish people did not have a home of their own. When Balfour opened the Hebrew University in 1925, he offered up a "silent prayer" that the University would "sow the seeds of a political and national Zionism which would eventually dominate the Middle East". Years later, in 1933, he observed that Zionism had come to stay and was no longer an experiment; in his dreams, he saw "a contented prosperous Jewish state eventually spreading to Transjordan and Syria".

Meinertzhagen was under no illusion about the attitude of the Arabs and of British officials in Palestine and was constantly outspokenly critical of their motives. After the Arab riots in April 1920, he wrote to Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon pointing out that most of the British officers in the Administration in Palestine were anti-Zionist and were encouraging the Arabs in their activities. He was critical of many in the Colonial Office, where he saw the atmosphere as being 'hebraphobic' and where he believed there were powerful forces working against Zionism, both in Britain and in Palestine. As evident in his writings, he never flagged in his support for the Zionist venture. As a consequence, he was not very popular in some Government circles.

Meinertzhagen was not in favour of terrorism as

carried out by *Irgun Zvei Leumi* but understood the reasons for it. He once said that had he been Jewish, he would have become a violent terrorist who would have “aimed at Whitehall”. It is fair to conclude that he had the future of the *Yishuv* and thereafter of the State of Israel very much at the centre of his beliefs. A measure of this is evident in a letter he sent to *The Times* soon after the 1956 Suez crisis. Here, he wrote that Israel had invaded no-man’s land and that it was a question of “whether we [Britain] or the United Nations have the right to compel her to withdraw from a country which belongs to nobody”.

Is it appropriate for **Leopold Amery** (1873 - 1955) to appear as a subject in this article? Recent research has shown that he was of Jewish birth (through his Hungarian Jewish mother, Elisabeth Johanna Saphir), and he has been described as a ‘secret Jew’. However, since this was unknown throughout the whole course of his political career, he is worth including here. As an Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet Amery, with his colleague Sir Mark Sykes, played a key part in the drafting of the Balfour Declaration and he maintained a keen interest in Zionism throughout his life. He was incensed to find that there were some leading British Jews who opposed the Declaration.

Amery once claimed that, apart from knowing vaguely of Theodor Herzl, he was unaware of the Zionist movement until Sykes spoke to him on the subject, but this is hard to believe given his Jewish roots. He soon became convinced that a prosperous Jewish Palestine would be an asset in the defence of the Suez Canal and would also serve as a station for future air routes. He further believed that a national home for Jews would reduce the influence of antisemitism and that only Jews could build a strong civilisation in Palestine that would help the country to hold its own against German-Turkish oppression.



Leopold Amery

Amery was Colonial Secretary from 1925 to 1929, a period that provided impressive growth for the Jewish economy in Palestine. Later, he fought the anti-Zionist policies of his Government and voted against the notorious 1939 White Paper that further clamped down on Jewish immigration to Palestine. In the House of Commons debate on this, he defended the Balfour Declaration, which he saw as a unique opportunity for a contribution to the solution of baffling and tragic problems relating to the fate of the Jewish people. He said, “I could never hold up my head again if I voted for a Government that was going back upon a pledge given not only to Jews but to the whole civilised world when it assumed the Mandate”. He was certain that the consequences of following the White Paper would be that all the good work that had made Palestine the most prosperous country in the Middle East would be destroyed by an Arab majority. He testified in support of Zionism at the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry on Palestine in 1946 and in 1950 was one of the first non-Jewish (sic) British politicians to visit Israel.

And A Few More

The individuals dealt with above are those whose commitment to Zionism is considered to be foremost, but there were others who showed much sympathy to the movement. **William Ormsby-Gore**, later Lord Harlech, (1885-1964), may not be readily recognised as a sympathiser, probably because he served as Colonial Secretary at a period when the Zionist movement was having much difficulty with the Government, but he faced strong opposition from the Foreign Office. As a member of the Arab Bureau in Cairo, he was active in Palestinian affairs and was an early supporter of Aaron Aaronsohn’s NILI espionage group. He understood Zionist aspirations and told the Foreign Office that “all that the Zionists seek is to give the Jewish people freedom to settle, acquire land and build up industries and schools”. He helped Weizmann in negotiations prior to the Balfour Declaration and followed this up by participating in big demonstrations held to thank the British Government. He saw the Jewish claim to Palestine as overwhelming and said that behind the concept of a return to Palestine to be a Jewish home was “the finger of God”. In 1920 he wrote a scholarly article that was very positive about the future of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. A new chapter of Jewish history was being written and he had no doubt that nothing would now stop the Zionist movement from succeeding. Ormsby-Gore was in favour of Peel’s 1937 partition plan, believing that it would lead to the establishment of an independent state, and called for action to be taken against Arab terrorism.

Blanche Dugdale, a niece of Arthur Balfour, was seen as being the most outstanding non-Jewish supporter of the Zionist movement, identifying herself with it completely. She attended many Zionist Congresses and was a close confidant and one of the most devoted supporters of Weizmann, as well as a much loved friend of both Weizmanns. Her diaries

entitled *Baffy* (by which she was known to her friends) are an important source of the history of the period.

The South African statesman **General Jan Smuts** (1870-1950) is another Zionist friend. Smuts, who came under the influence of the Bible early in his life and who believed that the return of Jews to Palestine was Divinely ordained, was a member of the British Cabinet during the First World War, although he does not appear to have been especially involved in the negotiations that led to the Balfour Declaration. He first became interested in the subject early in 1917 while making a study of the military situation in Turkey, and Jabotinsky's proposal for a Jewish unit in the British Army appealed to him. In the years following the war, more than any other politician, he wanted the Declaration to be properly honoured. In 1921, he said that it was one of the most historic results of the war and followed this up in 1926 by saying that the Balfour Declaration would be seen as one of the great causes and one of the war's principal achievements. With others, he opposed the 1930 White Paper and told the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry that the Balfour Declaration was a "solemn and sacrosanct document". Smuts was a sincere supporter of all that Weizmann stood for and his Government was the first in the British Commonwealth, and one of the first anywhere in the world, to recognise the state of Israel.

C.P. Scott (1846-1932), the legendary editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, could perhaps have claimed to have been the initiator of the National Home for Jews in Palestine since he was responsible for introducing Weizmann to Lloyd George, the event that led up to the Balfour Declaration. Knowing little of Zionism prior to meeting Weizmann in September 1914, he soon became one of Weizmann's greatest admirers, supporting him and his Zionist mission for the rest of his long life. He was one of the founders of the British Palestine Committee, formed in 1915 with a mission "to reset the ancient glories of the Jewish nation in the freedom of a new British Dominion in Palestine". The newspaper of which he was editor faithfully supported Weizmann and all he stood for, and Scott arranged for him to meet many influential figures who would impact on the subject.

Herbert Sidebotham (1872-1940) was a colleague of Scott's on the *Manchester Guardian*, working with him for over twenty years. Convinced that Zionism was the answer to the Jewish problem, he was also a founding member of the British Palestine Committee and regularly contributed to its journal, *Palestine*. He wrote a great deal on Zionism and was responsible for influencing the opinions of many thinking people in Britain on the subject. Sidebotham's books *England and Palestine* (published during World War I) and *Great Britain and Palestine* are full of praise of Zionist achievements. He points out that in less than twenty years the Zionists had brought Palestine from the Middle Ages into the Twentieth Century, transforming the country from a museum of antiquity to a vigorous modern community.

Sidebotham was involved in some of the discussions when the final draft for the Balfour Declaration was being drawn up. Some Zionists wanted to have a more powerful statement than one simply stating that the aim should be a Jewish national home in Palestine, arguing for one specifying that the country should become a Jewish state. Sidebotham proposed a version that referred specifically to a Jewish state as well as to a Jewish home, although he did then concede that this did not mean that such a State would be an exclusively Jewish one.

Lt-Commander **Joseph Montague Kenworthy** (1886-1953) (later Lord Strabolgi) was another convinced Zionist. He became Liberal MP later moving to the Labour Party until his elevation to the House of Lords and he was a strong supporter of the movement. He was a prominent member of the pro-Palestine Committee formed in the House of Commons after World War I and he frequently spoke at Zionist meetings. He visited Palestine in 1926 and saw the "wonderful changes brought about by the energies and money of the Zionist movement". To him the 1930 White Paper was mischievous because it blamed the Jewish settlers for getting killed by murderous Arab mobs. In the Second World War he headed a committee that pressed the Government to form a Jewish fighting force in Palestine.

Colonel Walter Eliot (1888-1958), who served in British Cabinets from 1932-1940, was a supporter of Zionism for many years, dating back to 1927 when he came under Blanche Dugdale's influence. He was a religious man who believed that the Biblical prophecies concerning Zion would inevitably be fulfilled and a personal friend of Weizmann. He visited Palestine three times and was once Weizmann's guest in Israel. Eliot was a lone voice in the Cabinet and was said to be the one there who represented the Jewish point of view. Although a member of the Cabinet Committee on Palestine, many of his colleagues regarded him as being too heavily tainted with Zionism to be trusted with inside information. Nevertheless, he never saw the need to resign from the Government over its Palestinian policies, which hardened as war came nearer. He was not invited to join Churchill's first administration in 1940.

And what of **Thomas Edward Lawrence** (1888-1935)? It seems incredible that the man given the title 'Lawrence of Arabia' could harbour Zionist sympathies, but there is much evidence to support this view. Chaim Weizmann wrote that "his relationship to the Zionist movement was a very positive one ... and he has mistakenly been represented as anti-Zionist". Lawrence, he added, believed that the Jews would be of great help to the Arabs, who stood to gain much from a Jewish National Home in Palestine. In September 1920, in fact, Lawrence wrote that he believed that Jewish immigration would be of benefit to the Arab population in Palestine.

Lawrence and Weizmann were always on friendly terms and in recent years many books have been written from an anti-Zionist standpoint accusing Lawrence of being sympathetic to Zionism. Suleiman

Mousa, a distinguished Arab historian, is highly critical of Lawrence's role in the politics of the Middle East of his time, suggesting he sympathised strongly with the Zionists. The secretary to Emir Feisal, leader of the Arab revolt against Turkey, wrote that Lawrence "played an important part in helping the Zionists since he viewed Zionism with unmistakable favour". Another key contemporary Arab writer has labelled him as a "supporter of Zionist designs in Palestine".

By contrast Aaron Aaronsohn, the NILI leader, thought that Lawrence was "plainly hostile" to Palestinian Jewry. Even so, there are suggestions that 'S.A.', the mysterious dedicatee of Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* whose identity still continues to puzzle scholars, may have been the tragic Sarah Aaronsohn, Aaron's sister, who committed suicide after being tortured unmercilessly by the Turks. Lawrence was an enigma; it is likely that he supported Arab ambitions as well as Jewish ones, believing there to be no contradiction in taking this view.



T E Lawrence

new POETRY

On a best friend's *aliyah*

You did not leave our world
Forever
But for good.
Not our own, not our love,
But the altruism of ascent.
Climbing
From the sandpit,
Where we made castles on the ground
And in the air;
Careering to careers, always together,
Lives interwoven, intertwined.
But you climbed higher,
Leaving me 'neath the bronze of Africa's sun,
While you went for gold -
Yerushalayim...

Suzanne Belling

Women Lib

'Hymie' said the Rabbi
'you do not divorce your wife after 60 years'.
'I have a good reason' said Hymie
adjusting his walker.
'She does not tie my shoe laces any more
and instead of attending to me;
she tends her virtual garden
on face book
and spends hours a day on Skype
with our great-grandchildren
in Israel'.

Azila



A TREASURE

*

Zita Nurok

Brass candlesticks sparkle on the Shabbat table in our dining room. I see my reflection in the rounded part at the bottom, and look up at the glowing light that bursts out like a newly blossomed golden flower when Mama lights the tall white candles. We sing the Friday night prayers together, just as she did with her mother when they were living in South Africa.

"Tell me the story of the candlesticks, Mama," I ask her. The logs in the fireplace crackle, and the white snow quietly drifts past the window. Once again she begins our story with the familiar words....

"More than eighty years ago, my mother arrived in South Africa from Lithuania. Cousins Sam and Joseph had invited her to live with them. 'Life is easier here in South Africa,' they wrote. 'People find gold in gold mines, and we call this the Golden Land. It's easy to find a new life here in Johannesburg. Come. We will send you a ticket.'

And so, when she was just a teenager, my mother, your Grandma Rivke, left the cobbled streets of Riteve in Lithuania where she was born, and the forests with blackberries growing on bushes, where she walked with her best friend Goldie on Shabbat. The forest that was thick with trees was a place where they could let their imaginations be free. She left their small wooden house surrounded by fruit trees and flowerbeds, and the small synagogue where she and her mama and sister prayed with other people from the town on Shabbat. It was only a short distance from her house to the Yureh River. She and her sister would sit on its banks reading books, or they'd watch the women who came from the town to wash their clothes. My mother left behind her cousins, and also her sister and mama, believing that they would one day join her in South Africa.

In a small wooden trunk, Grandma Rivke carried a gift from her mama - these brass candlesticks that you see here on the table, Mandy. They had belonged to her family forever. 'Find a special place for them when you get to your new home in South Africa, my Rivkele,' her mama told her as they sobbed and held each other close. Would they ever be together again? When?

All the roads to the large cities surrounding Riteve were dust tracks, and so when she left, she traveled first by horse and cart to the nearest town, and then by train to a city called Hamburg, where she boarded a ship on her way to the new land. She would be on the seas for three difficult weeks. People became ill on the rough and long journey, but they were comforted by close friendships that were formed as they shared their sadness to leave their homes but also their excitement about the future.

Waves splashed against the South African rocks and rippled onto the white sandy beaches of Cape Town. My mother always told us how she couldn't wait to skip in the soft sand with her bare toes, but at the same time she felt afraid and homesick.

Grandma Rivke and two friends from the boat traveled by train over rivers and mountains, across a desert, through towns and villages, until they reached the bustling city of Johannesburg, where other Jewish people had settled. And there she lived with her cousins, Sam and Joseph.

My mother saw many different faces in Johannesburg. She told me how she just smiled politely when people spoke to her, or she nodded her head and shrugged her shoulders. Then she replied in Lithuanian or Yiddish. Learning English would be a difficult task, and she never lost her Yiddish accent, even while I was growing up.

Grandma Rivke sent letters to her home, telling how she unpacked the brass candlesticks lying between her cotton skirts and lace petticoats, and how she placed them on the sideboard in cousin Sam's home.

And to her sister she wrote 'Every Friday morning I polish our precious candlesticks with a paste made of water and ashes from the coal stove, until I see my reflection between the ashes, just as we did at home.'

Zita Nurok is an elementary school teacher who grew up in South Africa. She immigrated with her husband and two sons in 1976 to the USA, where she continues to teach at the Jewish Day School in Indianapolis. Zita is a member of the National League of American Pen Women, and has served as Vice-President and President of the Indianapolis branch.

It is my wish, beloved sister, that one day both our faces will shine from this treasure as the ashes light up our smiling eyes.'

But her mama and sister never wrote back, and neither did Goldie her best friend. For frightful times had fallen over Europe and the rest of the world. War broke out and she never knew which of her letters reached Riteve. After the war, she found out that her entire family had been killed together with millions of Jewish people. Lithuanian Jewry had been wiped out. All had died in the ashes of the Holocaust.

Now, when she looked at the candlesticks, she knew that this part of her old home would remain with her forever. She wondered about her town. Did horses still clip-clop along the cobbled streets? What about the river where she and her friends splashed and played? Did it still run with fresh, clear water? Did blackberries still grow on the bushes in the forest?

Every Thursday, my mama pedaled her bicycle along the busy streets of Johannesburg to the shops to buy supplies for Shabbat. 'What can I sell you today Missus?' Manuel the Portuguese owner of the fish shop asked with his heavy accent.

'I'll have a pound of kingklip please,' she had learned to say. She paid quickly, placed the package in the basket at the back of her bicycle, said goodbye shyly, and hurried on to the delicatessen down the road.

'Good morning Rivkele,' Mr. Cohen always said with his strong Yiddish accent. 'You came for your herring again, I know.' She felt comfortable in this shop. Perhaps she could even work here one day when she could speak English more easily.

After two years, Grandma Rivke met and married my father, your Grandpa Solomon. He, too, came from Lithuania, but from a bigger town than Grandma's. He was a teacher, a quiet and a gentle man. Together they built a small, simple home. The brass candlesticks stood on the dining room table, on a silver tray with grapes molded in silver around the rim. It had belonged to Grandpa's family almost a hundred years ago. Every Friday morning, Grandma Rivke polished the tray and the candlesticks with one of Grandpa's old socks dipped in a paste made of water and ashes from the coal stove in their kitchen. Slowly through those ashes, her reflection appeared and now she saw the happy face of a new bride in her own home. She placed the tall white candles in the holders, ready for Shabbat.

Your grandma baked *challot*, and she covered them with a *challah* cover she'd made. It was embroidered with the Hebrew letters of the Shabbat and holiday blessings, using silken thread of green, red blue, and gold, that she had brought with her from Lithuania. She told how Grandpa proudly turned the cover to the back. 'See how talented my wife is, you can't tell the front from the back. She has gifted fingers.' And everyone would look in wonder. Then Grandpa said the blessings for the wine and the *challah*. He drank from a silver wine cup with a curled edge, and a round smooth handle that fitted snugly in the palm of his hand. It, too, had belonged to his family many years ago.

As you know Mandy, both your uncles and I were born in South Africa. When I was old enough, my mama showed me how to polish the tray and the silver cup with special silver cleaner, and the candlesticks with brass cleaner now, and a soft cloth. No longer did we use ashes such as those we used from the fires that had died out long ago. Now our stove was electric. 'Shine them until you see your brown curly hair, and your beautiful face, my Sarah,' she said dreamily. Together, we placed the tall white candles in the holders, ready for Shabbat or for a holiday.

My home was especially filled with delicious smells at festive times. For Rosh Hashanah, your grandma baked round, braided *challot* with plump raisins for a round sweet year. 'Mmmm...' Grandpa Solomon would say. 'Surely the smell will go up to heaven!' On Shavuot, cheese blintzes fresh off the hot, buttery pan would melt in our mouths while he reminded us of the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses and the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. And always, the candlesticks sparkled and the lights danced.

Your father and I married, and you and your brother were born in South Africa. We all immigrated to the United States when you, Mandy, were two years old. Yes, we too left behind family and friends, joyful celebrations when babies were born, bar and bat mitzvahs, weddings and anniversaries. We left behind waves splashing against the rocks where the Atlantic and the Indian oceans meet off the coast of Cape Town where your father was born.

In my suitcase, I carried a special gift from my mama, your Grandma Rivke. 'Find a special place for them in your new home in America, my Sarahle,' she said to me just as her mother had told her when she left Riteve. We cried and hugged. 'Don't cry, my child,' your grandma said in Yiddish. 'Your father and I will visit you soon. Yes, we'll travel in a Jumbo Jet that will take a shorter time to get to you than the time it took us to get to this country by boat.'

As my mother once again ends her story, I think about the town where we live now. The streets are not cobbled, and there is no forest to run in with friends. There are no large family celebrations, for our families are scattered in different countries. Many of our cousins and friends who left South Africa, as we did, in search of a different life, now live in Israel, Canada, Australia, and the United States, just as the Jews who could left Lithuania many years ago.

Now I polish the tall brass candlesticks to get them ready for Shabbat or holidays with friends. Our treasure stands on the dining room table, sparkling under dancing candlelight as we sing the Friday night prayers together. I see my happy reflection in the rounded part at the bottom. One day those candlesticks will belong to me.



BOEREJODE: JEWS IN THE BOER ARMED FORCES, 1899-1902

*

Ralph Zulman

The author, David Saks, is a distinguished historian and journalist who writes extensively on South African Jewish political and military history in various local and international publications. He is the Associate Director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and editor of its prestigious journal *Jewish Affairs* and holds a BA Honours Degree in History with distinction and an MA (History) from Rhodes University. His weekly column in the *Jewish Report* - *Barbaric Yawp* – is insightful and a joy to read.

The book is divided into ten chapters. They are headed, respectively, in 'Search of the *Boerejode*', 'Who they Were', 'The Natal Theatre', 'The War in the West', 'The Home Front', 'Turn of the Tide', 'The Guerrilla War: Transvaal and Natal', 'The Guerrilla War: Free State and Cape', 'Prisoners of War' and 'Aftermath'. There is also a useful appendix which contains an annotated Nominal Role of Jews in the Boer Armed Forces. In addition there is/are acknowledgements and a preface.

The work is based on original research conducted largely in the archives of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. It carefully weaves individual narratives of Jewish participants into a broader narrative of the war's best known events. The reminiscences of some of these '*Oudstryders*' (veterans) were subsequently recorded by, amongst others, the late Chief Rabbi Dr L I Rabinowitz, *zichrono l'brocha*, to whose honoured memory the book is in part dedicated. It is further dedicated to the members of the former South African Jewish Sociological and Historical Society, whose pioneering research more than half a century ago, along with that of the Rabbi, made the writing of the book possible.

This fascinating book is the first full history of

Jews who fought on the side of the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. The narratives provide compelling and unique perspectives of the war from Jews who thus devoted themselves to serving the Boer cause.

Individual Jews were involved in nearly all the war's best-known incidents, including the famous battles of Magersfontein, Colenso, Spioenkop and Paardeberg and the sieges of Mafeking, Ladysmith and Kimberley. Many were interned for lengthy periods in POW camps on St. Helena, Bermuda, Ceylon and elsewhere.

Among the exploits of these Jewish Boers that Saks relates is that of one individual whom he describes as 'stubborn'. Falling seriously ill shortly after the war, he found himself on bed in a store owned by an Englishman. Gathering all his strength, he raised himself up and declared:

"I refuse to die in an Englishman's bed. Put me on the floor." And there, indeed, he died.

Another personality was one of three guards who watched over Winston Churchill following his capture by the Boer forces. Churchill, of course, subsequently escaped. Decades later, this former guard wrote to Churchill on his eightieth birthday, saying that had he not been off duty the night of his escape, the history of England would have been very different. Churchill replied humorously, saying that this Jew had "inflicted him on England".

'Jakkals' Segall was one of the best known of the estimated 300 Jews who fought on the Boer side. He was born in Latvia and enlisted in the Free State commandos while still in his mid-teens and served with distinction under Generals JBM Herzog and Christiaan de Wet. He felt that it was an obligation for him to fight, and if necessary give his life, for "*die ou Vrystaat*".

I have no hesitation in commending this thoroughly researched and entertaining book to anyone interested in not only in the Jewish history of South Africa, but the South African history of the time.

Mr. Justice Ralph Zulman is a long-serving member of the editorial board of and regular contributor to Jewish Affairs.

- The book can be obtained through the Kollel Bookshop, Norwood, or directly through the author at david@beyachad.co.za.

Boerejode, Jews in the Boer Armed Forces, 1899-1902
by David Saks, Charlie Fine Printing, Johannesburg, with
the support of the Christa Maria Will Trust, 2010, 165pp

TRIALS OF THE DIASPORA - A HISTORY OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN ENGLAND

*

Chuck Volpe

Anthony Julius first entered the public arena as Princess Diana's lawyer, testimony in itself to his professional acumen and his ability to transcend royal social constraints. But it was his representation of Deborah Lipstadt in the landmark David Irving case involving Holocaust denial that first saw him melding together his fierce commitment to Jewish causes and his legal skills.

His latest book is a further example of this amalgam. This ground-breaking project - *Trials of the Diaspora - a History of anti-Semitism in England* - is the first ever comprehensive history of antisemitism in England. In the introduction Julius makes the point that England is unique in being continuously innovative in developing the various tropes and forms that antisemitism has taken over the centuries. England, he says, always arrived first.

Julius breaks English antisemitism into four distinct variants, each of which he investigates in detail. The first is the antisemitism of mediaeval England up to 1290, which was the year in which Edward I expelled the Jews from England and which was the first expulsion of an entire Jewish population in history. In the years prior to this, the legal status of Jews was an odd one - they were both legal persons and also the negotiable property of the Crown. "The Jew can have nothing that is his own, for whatever he acquires, he acquires not for himself, but for the king" explained the 13th Century English jurist, Henry de Bracton.

The economic benefits accruing to the Crown afforded some royal protection, but by 1270 these had largely disappeared. No longer was there anything to trump the radical Jew-hating tendencies of defamation, expropriation, and murder. Julius' account of Jewish life in the years leading up to the expulsion is heartrending. In the final twenty years, over half of all adult male Jews in England were murdered. The remnant, no longer able to support themselves, were expelled.

Chuck Volpe is a Port Elizabeth-based businessman and Jewish communal leader. He is currently chairman of the Eastern Cape Council of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

The second major strand is literary antisemitism. This developed and thrived in the 400 years following the expulsion, a period during which Jews were entirely absent from England. During this time, the real Jew was replaced by the fantasy Jew, whose 'crimes' - "ritual murder, usury, child abuse, avarice, misanthropy, and hatred of Christians and the Church" - became the standard fare of English literary antisemitism. The natural and appropriate punishments for these 'crimes' were humiliation, expropriation, forced conversion and death.

This negative image of the Jew, Jewish history and Judaism, as depicted in the works of Chaucer, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Dickens, TS Eliot and others, has established a permanent place for itself in the English literary canon, the body of literature which is formative of national self-understanding and which is taught in schools and universities. This infusion of negative stereotypes is even more harmful on account of it being subconscious.

The third strain Julius addresses is modern antisemitism, which covers the period from the 'readmission' of England's Jews in the mid-17th Century through to the late 20th Century. This antisemitism is one of condescension, insult and partial exclusion; pervasive but contained. It is an antisemitism reluctant to be recognised for what it is, both on the part of the perpetrator and the victim. However, it places constraints on Jews encouraging an anxious conformance - a "don't make waves" mentality.

Finally, Julius deals with contemporary antisemitism, which emerged after the Six-Day War, and which treats Zionism and the State of Israel as illegitimate enterprises. This 'New Antisemitism' is distinguishable from the 'old antisemitism' in a number of respects - it is adopted by people who profess deep hostility to antisemitism, many of its advocates are self-identifying Jews, and it comes from the Left rather than the Right. To overcome the belief amongst anti-Zionists that they can't possibly be antisemites, he draws an analogy between the fellow travellers of the Soviet Union (FTSU) and the fellow travellers of antisemitism (FTAS).

Julius describes current antisemitism/anti-

Zionism through the lens of a powerful historical imagination. In order to understand anti-Zionism, he argues, one has to understand antisemitism. He draws attention to the fact that the massive presence of the Holocaust has occluded the earlier history of antisemitism, with the result that Jews living today are unfamiliar with antisemitism in its pre-Holocaust form. This lack of familiarity stands in the way of understanding the specific antisemitic forms which today take the form of anti-Zionism.

Throughout the book Julius' legal mind is evident in the lucid, incisive and logical stream of thought that characterises his writing. He assumes nothing, leaves nothing unsaid - at times, taking the reader through meticulously-reasoned steps on the way to his conclusion.

But he has no illusions about what he is likely to accomplish, in spite of the book's encyclopaedic reach. On the flyleaf, he presents us with a quotation from Theodore Herzl: "[...] Everything rational and everything sentimental that can possibly be said in their [the Jews] defence has been said already". Julius ends by saying that while the book is unlikely to change the minds of antisemites - for hatred cannot be dissolved by rational means - it does show how ideas can become effective forces in history.

For me, the value of the book lies elsewhere. Through its unravelling of the complex processes

behind antisemitism, which Julius describes as "the noises and gestures of the person who has embraced that tangled bundle of sentiments and beliefs about Jews", it serves as an aid to understanding this vile prejudice, and consequently, to challenge it.

Trials of the Diaspora is a book to be read by ordinary people; by those endowed with natural fellow-feeling, a sense of justice, and a belief in a better future. It is a book for gentiles but, especially, it is a book for Jews. This is so because antisemitism affects Jews more than anyone else. They are the objects of its hatred and they are the ones to suffer from it. It affects them psychologically and sometimes it affects them physically. It affects them by moulding their self-image as people and as Jews. The only antidote for this poison is to understand its nature and Julius helps us do this.

Finally, the book lays bare the sheer depravity of antisemitism, together with the negativity it engenders and its consequences not only Jews but for society in general.

This is a big volume (800 pages) but it covers vast ground and is engaging throughout. It is guaranteed to occupy a place of honour on many a bookshelf.

Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England by Anthony Julius, Oxford University Press, 2009, 854pp

UNITED IN HATE: THE LEFT'S ROMANCE WITH TYRANNY AND TERROR

*

Gary Selikow

In this book Jamie Glazov, managing editor of Front Page magazine, deals with the strong support for totalitarian states and terrorist organizations by left wing radicals from the 1920s until today. The author would know a lot about totalitarianism from first hand as his father was a leading Soviet dissident.

It has always been galling to witness how little humanity left wing radicals have displayed towards victims of those totalitarian regimes or bloodthirsty terrorist movements they have supported over the last century. A shameful death cult odyssey has lead these radicals of the intellectual elite - academics, lawyers, writers, entertainers and others - to continually identify with some of the most evil regimes and leaders on the planet and to turn a blind

eye to the death and destruction they have sowed. This is what Glazov explores in this analytical, penetrating book, one that is scholarly yet truly elicits anger and horror, especially when it confirms the tip of the iceberg that we have seen before reading it. As Glazov argues, the Leftist wishes to punish the West for their rejection of Marxism and so has found in the Islamist terror new heroes to venerate as those who are able to defeat the West and the individual freedom it represents.

At the roots of this phenomenon would seem to be a nihilistic death impulse rooted in the resentment by Western Leftists of their own societies, one that leads them to identify with anything that is adversarial to the Western culture they so despise, no matter how murderous and destructive. Referred to by the author as "the adversarial culture of negative identification", this erases any empathy for the victims of these regimes and terror networks.

The central issue that this boils down to, Glazov

Gary Selikow is a researcher and media activist. His reviews of books of Jewish and Middle East interest appear regularly online and elsewhere.

believes, is that Leftists have not found satisfaction or meaningful relations in their own life, despite their accumulation of wealth and luxury (the Western Left is almost always drawn from the ranks of the well off, and not of from working classes). This is what fuels their rage against their own societies, leading them to look to Utopian but non-Spiritual solutions. He writes:

...the believer is utterly indifferent to the real life suffering of the actual human beings victimized by the regimes that he glorifies. The victims of the adversarial ideology do not fit into the believer's agenda, and so they do not matter, and they are not, ultimately even human in his eyes. Because they are not human for him, the believer sees them as enemies and therefore supports their extermination. Once again, in the mutated Judeo-Christian imagery, blood cleanses the world of its injustices and then redeems it - transforming it into a place where the believer will eventually find a comfortable home.

Thus the author illustrates how the Leftists who venerated Lenin and Stalin would not feel any sympathy for the victims of their purges, dekulakization and forced famine. The admirers of Mao would not feel anything for the millions of victims of the Cultural Revolution or the tens of millions of Chinese who starved to death during the Great Leap Forward.

Similar callousness would be shown towards the victims of the Khmer Rouge - a third of Cambodia's population - or towards the many thousands tortured and murdered by the Castro regime in Cuba or the Sandinistas in Nicaragua (who engaged in ethnic cleansing of that nation's Miskito Indians - Revolutionary regimes often pursue genocidal policies against minorities).

The Left's unholy death cult worship of Arab and Islamic terror is no different. For the Leftist, Christians killed by the PLO in Lebanon, the myriad victims of the 1979 Islamist revolution of 1979 (in which 20 000 were killed within the first two weeks), Israeli women and children massacred by Arab terrorist groups like Hamas, Hezbollah and the PLO and the victims of the 9/11 terrorist destruction by Al Qaeda of the World Trade Centre were either deserving of their fate or expendable.

Thus, one sees the likes of Ward Churchill blessing the 9/11 attacks and describing the victims as 'little Eichmanns' and Noam Chomsky saying after the attacks that America had got what it deserved. One sees Michael Moore in April, 2004, describing Al Qaeda terrorists, who have killed thousands of Iraqi women and children, in the following terms: "The Iraqis who have risen up against the occupation are not 'insurgents' or 'terrorists' or 'the enemy'. They are the REVOLUTION, the Minutemen, and their numbers will go up and they will win!"

Chomsky similarly paid a pilgrimage to the murderous Hezbollah in May 2006, marking the latest in his long tradition of making pilgrimages to such bloodthirsty tyrannies as Red China under Mao,

to North Vietnam and to the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Meeting with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, Chomsky echoed his view that President Bush was the "top terrorist" and that the United States was "one of the leading terrorist nations". One recalls here as well the passionate declarations of support for Hamas and Hezbollah by Chomsky's ardent disciple Norman Finkelstein, and the various visits he has made to these Arab-Islamist equivalents of the Nazi Party.

In light of all this, one sees how when Jimmy Carter met with the radical Islamist Hamas movement and embraced their leaders, he was fulfilling the long tradition of the Left's romance with America's totalitarian adversaries. All indications are that the USA's current pro-Islamist and radical-left President Obama is following in exactly the same path, a phenomenon that is both frightening and depressing.

The author dissects the hypocrisy of the Left's lust for death and destruction. A striking example is the venomous hatred of Leftist homosexuals for Israel, despite its being the only nation in the Middle East where homosexuals are not persecuted. Similarly, their are Western (often Jewish- born) feminists, such as Naomi Klein and Andrea Dworkin, who are virulently anti-Israel and anti-West, while engaging in some of the most appalling apologetics for the Islamic oppression of women. Part of this might stem from their hatred of feminine sexuality, hence their covert approval of the Islamists' brutal suppression of this, regardless of the suffering of the Muslim women involved.

It follows, of course, that an important unifying factor between Islamo-Fascists and the Radical Left is their common hatred of Israel and mainstream Jewry, largely because of the individual freedom and value of human life that Israel and Judaism affirms. During the ruthless 'Al Aqsa Intifada' - the five-year terror war waged from 2000 against the Israeli people by a collective of Palestinian terror networks - the international Left became increasingly enamored of Palestinian terror and hateful of Israel the greater the carnage the terrorists carried out. This, too, forms part of a distinct pattern over the last century; Leftist support for tyrannical regimes such as Communist Russia, Mao's China, Castro's Cuba and Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam, has always been greatest when the carnage and terror carried out by these regimes has been at their peak.

Regarding Israel, the fact that Israelis are seen as insufficiently egalitarian means that in the eyes of the International Left, they must die en masse. This is what would indeed happen if ever Israel was ever erased. Iranian dictator Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's vows to 'wipe Israel off the map' greatly boosted his stature within the Left, and he was welcomed to American university campuses in the wake of them.

It is indeed tragic that others must pay for the psychological need of radical leftists to purify an imperfect Earth with blood and fire.

United In Hate: The Left's Romance with Tyranny and Terror by Jamie Glazov, WND Books, 2009, 264 pp.

INSIGHTS INTO THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

*

David Saks

Most people will have heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls, will be aware that they constitute ancient Biblical and quasi-Biblical texts and that they are of the most important scholarly-archaeological discoveries ever made, but in the great majority of cases, that would constitute the limit of their knowledge. Such ignorance is understandable. Dead Sea Scroll research, in all its philological, theological, historiographical and other scholarly disciplinary manifestations, is enormously complex, not to mention controversial. How can non-specialists acquire a firm grasp of so difficult and far-reaching a subject, especially when so much of it remains a matter of ongoing dispute even amongst the experts?

As the title of Simon Berg's recently published book *Insights into the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Beginner's Guide* indicates, the aim is to make this fascinating subject accessible to the interested layman. It is a formidable challenge, particularly for one who falls into the interested lay category himself, but the author has risen to it impressively. By profession a sales manager with a multinational pharmaceutical company based in Johannesburg, Berg has pursued his private interest in the Scrolls since the early 1990s. He has lectured extensively on the subject to both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences and written several monographs on the subject, including for this journal.

In no small part, *Insights into the Dead Sea Scrolls* succeeds because it is consistently readable. Berg's succeeds in writing in a clear, concise style that is reader friendly without ever becoming patronising and that even more importantly manages to convey his own evident passion and enthusiasm for the subject. In terms of content, he skilfully summarizes a vast body of information, not just on the most important features of the Scrolls themselves, but of the political and religious environment prevailing at their time of composition and of some of the most theories and debates around them that have taken place since their discovery.

In broad terms, the Scrolls have contributed immeasurably to our knowledge and understanding of a crucial period in the genesis of human thought. Roughly covering the period 200 BCE-300 CE, it was a time when a myriad of religious teaching and traditions were coalescing into Judaism as we know it. Evidently, many streams of practice and belief co-existed within the Jewish population at the time, much of which was destined to be forgotten for

nearly two millennia and which is even now imperfectly understood. Just as importantly, it can be seen from many of those traditions how much the emergence of the Christian faith had its roots in the teachings and beliefs of Jewish sects. How much, how little, in which specific aspects – all this remains a fertile area for academic debate, and it is precisely this unfolding scholarly dialogue (replete, inevitably, with controversies, factionalism and even conspiracy theories) that makes Dead Sea Scroll research such a perennial source of fascination.

As Berg shows, Scrolls scholarship invariably means that every putative answer invariably raises a host of additional questions. No theory, however well established and generally accepted it might at one time be, can be taken as absolutely established. Hence even the consensus over the Essene phenomenon, concerning what is believed to have been a pre-Christian Judaic sect and which is amongst the best-known aspects of the Scroll material, is today being challenged. One also learns that extensive as the Scroll findings were, they remain essentially fragments of what must have been a much greater whole. Inevitably, hypotheses and conjecture must often be called upon to try to fill the gaps.

Insights into the Dead Sea Scrolls provides an admirable vehicle through which those interested in the subject can acquire a sound foothold in understanding the basic features of the whole phenomenon that in turn can act as a springboard for further, in-depth exploration. Simon Berg is to be commended for taking on this daunting project and successfully pursuing it to its conclusion.

- The book is obtainable through the author at siroberg@icon.co.za.

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Bonfires

Bonfire flames
Fly high
Smoke drifting
Into a starlit sky

There he lies
Guy Fawkes bound
Yet no-one cries.
His old hat sparks
Catherine wheels whiz
Turning round and round.

The shadow
Of a gabled shop
Stands behind
The flapping blinds.

Torn pine trees weep
Chopped branches
On the ground
Smoulder and crash

The match girl
Lights the match
Setting it on fire
She sings a song
Dreaming of desire.

So, too, her voice
Sparks memories fire
Which burns so long
As she sings her song.

Norwegian wood
Is set alight
While the cellos play.
When it ends
Memories splutter, hiss
And float away.

The Past

Night reaches down with the weight of blood.
Naked, the orchard rocks in the wind.
The last apple lies mouldering into dust.
Somewhere a cat cries in the dark.
I turn off the nightlight
and dream of oil lamps, wood stoves,
and outhouses. The past crawls
under the door and through the window cracks.
Missed opportunities become reality at night.

John Yarbrough



Ant

I watched him fascinated
Against all odds
He had made it to the top
Hauling with him
A piece of long-grained rice
Three times his size

Over and over
He slipped back
Or dropped the rice
And returned to retrieve it
Again and again
He pushed his way forward
Undaunted
Persevering
Battling on
Till finally he made it!
Suddenly disappearing
With his burdensome backpack
Between the tiles
Into the crevice of a crack.

I marveled at this morsel of life
So dedicated; so determined.
I wondered whether this tiny hero
Would be welcomed home and rewarded

Right there before me
I had witnessed
The most extraordinary tenacity
One could illogically even imagine.
Driven by a reason more far-reaching
Than the human mind could ever fathom.

When I feel disheartened, I think about that ant.
When I am overwhelmed, I remember that little
soldier:
Such a small speck of life
Propelled solely
By paramount purpose
That indefatigable ant
Impels my senses
And stirs my soul

.... So many incredible sparks
Snuffed out by unseeing, uncomprehending
Degenerate giants.

Charlotte Cohen